

“We Have Faith to Endure It”: The Role of Rural Amazonian Christianity in Shaping Social Cohesion and Hazard Resilience in Ucayali, Peru

by

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Department of Geography and Planning
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Abstract

This thesis examines hazard resilience and its relationship to rural Amazonian Christianity by documenting the social dynamics of two rural floodplain communities in Ucayali, Peru. It examines community-level environmental and social challenges, as well as the role of lived religion and beliefs in shaping cohesion and fragmentation. A mixed methods approach is used, incorporating qualitative interviews (n=42), participant observation, and ethno-case studies based on fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon. Findings suggest that rural Amazonian Christianity simultaneously weakens and strengthens community cohesion, with potential implications for social life, development, and resilience. It finds that fragmentation arises from denominational differences, social tensions, and distrust. However, meaning making through lived religion also provides comfort and hope in the face of various challenges as an ‘affective therapeutic.’ Overall, this thesis finds that rural Amazonian Christianity both constrains and builds resilience to a variety of challenges, including hazards, with implications for research and policy.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AEMINPU	Evangelical Association of the Israelite Mission of the New Universal Covenant; a syncretic Jewish-Adventist political and religious movement
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EX	Éxito [community name]
LP	Leoncio Prado [community name]
PARLAP	Peruvian Amazon Rural Livelihoods and Poverty project (www.parlap.geog.mcgill.ca)
SES	Socioecological system

Glossary of Regional Terms

Term	Definition
<i>Bodega/bodeguita</i>	Stores (of varying sizes) selling food and a variety of household items
<i>Bote turístico</i>	Boats used for tourism; common in Lake Yarinacocha
<i>Campesino</i>	Country person or peasant; generic term for people of mixed Iberian and Indigenous ancestry
<i>Católico/a</i>	Catholic
<i>Chacra</i>	Agricultural field or orchard; the countryside; swidden in shifting cultivation
<i>Colectivo</i>	Fixed route commuter boat or river bus
<i>Comedor popular</i>	Soup kitchen; communal dining room
<i>Evangélico/a</i>	Evangelical; used as an umbrella term for various Protestant Christian denominations
<i>Faena</i>	Community (or inter-community) public work event
<i>Hermano/a(s)</i>	Brother/sister/brethren; used among Evangelicals to identify each other
<i>Israelita</i>	Israelite; used to identify members of the AEMINPU
<i>Minga</i>	Agricultural labour party where the host often provides food and drinks in exchange for work; variants exist by length of time and reward
<i>Qali Warma</i>	A government-funded school lunch program; stands for “vigorous child” in Quechua, an Indigenous language spoken in Andean Peru
<i>Rápido</i>	Fixed route fast boat for long distance travel
<i>Soles</i>	Peruvian currency; PEN
<i>Vaso de Leche</i>	A government-funded nutrition program for children ages 0-13 fighting food insecurity; stands for “glass of milk” in Spanish
<i>Víveres</i>	Provisions or supplies consisting of food and/or household items

*I am sure that God is the only faithful friend that exists. That's right, hermana Joycelin.
God does not lie.*

Alex (Éxito)

Chapter 1: Conceptualizing Social Cohesion, Hazards, and Religion

1.1 Introduction

When I didn't know the Word of God, I was just a person. I was living... but for what? Back then, I complained, said things that I should not say, and looked at the *hermanos* like they were strange. I was occupied by the things of the world. I drank, started fights, and did improper things; yes, I did things that God does not like. Once I learned the Word of God, I saw that the things of God are much different from the things of the world, and it changed me. [My life] is no longer like it was before. [I see] that it is God who gives me everything. I have seen big changes in my family, and well, even my mother and brothers see a difference in me. Now, knowing the things of God, we are good sheep. [Us Evangelicals] meet in the afternoons, the mornings, and sometimes we share breakfast together. We have a shared vision, and a united way of living. Because of my faith, I also believe that life's trials and struggles are going to pass. I know that all things are [worked] for our good here [paraphrasing Romans 8:28]. (Abel, EX)

As the sun was setting during my first evening in Éxito, I was approached by Abel and Julia, a married couple who had moved to Éxito only three years prior. They spared no time in inviting me to attend the Evangelical church meeting the following evening, which I agreed to. At the church, I found out that without an Evangelical pastor living in Éxito, Abel had been leading weeknight church meetings by himself, with Julia leading most of the praise songs. I soon also discovered that Abel and Julia had founded the Evangelical church in Éxito, despite being new converts and residents themselves. After other encounters and visits with them, I noticed that Abel and Julia's roles in Éxito were fascinatingly small apart from their religious leadership. In many regards, Abel and Julia were 'outsiders' in Éxito, choosing to work and live on the outskirts, yet transforming the community's religious landscape from because of their zeal. When faced with difficulties in his life, the "shared vision" and "united way of living" Abel experienced in the Evangelical community inspires him to develop personal resilience.

Abel and Julia's story in Éxito points to a complex and intertwined social dynamic, where three levels of social cohesion (institutional, community, and individual) are distinct, yet interdependent (Fonseca et al., 2019). Understanding the three levels of social cohesion and their interconnectedness provides a basis for studying resilience within disaster and hazard contexts (Sobhaninia, 2024; Fan et al., 2020; Ludin et al., 2018). Abel's faith testimony also points to a deeper connection between religiosity and social cohesion, which may have implications for

resilience. For example, Abel's personal Evangelical practices (abstaining from alcohol, fights, etc.) inform individual social cohesion from Fonseca et al. (2019) yet also trickle down to the community and institutional levels through Abel's demonstrated leadership in the church and involvement of his family unit in church activities. Abel and Julia's story therefore demonstrates how religion may have a more profound impact on social cohesion than previously noted, which warrants further study.

This thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of the extent to which religion and social cohesion may contribute to resilience to hazards among rural populations in the Peruvian Amazon. By examining how and through what means individuals and communities are (or are not) socially cohesive, this thesis seeks to understand how various expressions of rural Amazonian Christianity create both opportunities and challenges for development and effective disaster risk reduction. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways does rural Amazonian Christianity support or degrade social cohesion in small rural communities?
2. What are some of the major environmental hazards and social challenges faced by rural people in the Peruvian Amazon and what opportunities and barriers exist for community development?
3. To what extent does an individual's religious beliefs impact their perception of hazards and rural life?

1.2 Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

Since the foundation of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in 1999, global interest in disaster management has been growing. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies were created to reduce vulnerabilities, manage residual risk, and build adaptive capacities to environmental hazards—ultimately to reduce the number of significant disasters and to lessen the number of vulnerable communities (UNDRR, 2023). Under management frameworks like DRR, disasters (floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.) are no longer understood as natural, but instead begin as hazards that become disastrous due to the vulnerability and exposure of human populations

(UNDRR, 2023). The goal of DRR is thus to carefully plan for, build, research, and invest in solutions to curb the destruction that disasters create (UNDRR, 2023). This work involves strategic frameworks focused around reducing risk and building resilience to specific hazards, planning for worst-case scenarios, and predicting future environmental changes (UNDRR, 2023). One of such frameworks is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), the first major United Nations framework linking a variety of 2030 Agenda agreements, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNDRR, 2015; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015).

Resilience, as formally defined by the Sendai Framework, is “the ability of a system, community, or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management” (UNDRR, 2015, p.9). Developing and strengthening resilience also forms Priority 3 in the Sendai Framework and connects to several SDGs (UNDRR, 2015; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015). Resilience is also cited as a general outcome of successful DRR, where community (a group of individuals) is adaptable and self-sustaining through the integration of previous hazard (or disaster) experiences with new knowledge to build adaptive capacities and reduce vulnerability (Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 2015; UNDRR, 2015, 2023).

The concept of resilience was first used to describe socioecological systems (SES) and eventually became a common descriptor within community development and disaster studies (Townshend et al., 2015). Eventually, resilience became well-integrated into DRR policies and frameworks (Townshend et al., 2015; UNDRR, 2023). However, resilience acts to supplement ‘traditional’ DRR and cannot replace discussions of vulnerability and adaptive capacities. Resilience has also historically been challenging to measure, describe and define, as scholars continue to understand its relationship with the social, economic, and cultural factors that influence a community’s predisposed vulnerability or level of risk (Bronfman et al., 2024; Townshend et al., 2015; Manyena, 2006, 2014). One example of this challenge is made clear by Maclean et al. (2014), who define the multifaceted (and complicated) nature of social resilience through exploring its core attributes: 1) knowledge, skills, and learning; 2) community networks, 3) people-place connections, 4) community infrastructure, 5) diverse and innovative economies, and 6) engaged governance. Manyena (2006, 2014) and Proag (2014) further note the need for deepening our

understanding of resilience and vulnerability instead of simply focusing on one or the other (the latter of which had once dominated the literature). By focusing on understanding resilience and vulnerability's co-dependencies and key differences, DRR is ultimately made more effective and the variations of resilience, such as institutional resilience, are better understood (Proag, 2014; Manyena, 2006, 2014). To continue, a focus on resilience (over vulnerability studies) relates more directly to the post-disaster context, by placing greater emphasis on coping and recovery without external assistance (Manyena, 2006, 2014). So, instead of focusing on the susceptibility of a system to hazards alone, resilience studies look at the recovery and reorganization of a system after the disaster has occurred (Bronfman et al., 2024; Manyena, 2006). Within the disaster cycle (preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation), resilience plays a role in building adaptive capacities during the mitigation and preparation stages and strengthens the response and recovery stages (Bronfman et al., 2024; Manyena, 2006; Proag, 2014). Nonetheless, considering vulnerability and predisposed community inequalities should not be completely ignored in the name of resilience, because these forces still contribute to a community's adaptive capacity, or the speed and efficiency of hazard recovery (Manyena, 2006, 2014; Proag, 2014).

Another complication with defining and understanding resilience conceptually is the interchangeable use of frameworks among disaster management professionals and researchers, which results in little consensus on best practices (Townshend et al., 2015). An interesting take on resilience (that may lead to conceptual murkiness) is the notion that resilience is not a framework at all, but rather a transformative process, directly impacting social sustainability (Magis, 2010). This view of resilience is dynamic (subjecting itself to change), whereas others are more rigid or calculated. Resilience, to Magis (2010), is not limited to the strength of an SES to sustain and renew itself but to the system's occasional transformation through absorbing and adapting to outside shocks. This framework also emphasizes that SES resources are used strategically by community members to cope with the changes caused by shocks (Magis, 2010). For example, when an environmental hazard brings changes to livelihoods, a diversity of community resources can be drawn upon to maintain self-sustainability (Magis, 2010). Communities in this framework thus have "active agency" over their own resilience, showing a shift in the way resilience was traditionally viewed (Magis, 2010, p.404). Since the introduction of process-based (transformative) resilience, others have adopted it, focusing more heavily on collective and active agency (Ross & Berkes, 2013; Koliou et al., 2018; Thompson & Lopez Barrera, 2022). Community

resilience is also observed and defined in various ways throughout the literature. For example, several authors note that members of highly resilient communities share a ‘sense of community’ through common spaces, values, goals, and beliefs as well as shared demonstrations of trust, empathy, reciprocity, solidarity, mutual aid, and collective efficacy (Koliou et al., 2018; Kwok et al., 2016; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021; Kimani, 2024; Patel & Gleason, 2018). This range of commonalities is sometimes also framed as unity (Patel & Gleason, 2018; Bergstrand & Mayer, 2020).

1.3 Social Cohesion and Fragmentation

Within hazards literature, social cohesion is commonly cited as an explicit or implicit link to community resilience (Townshend et al., 2015; Sobhaninia, 2023, 2024; Fan et al., 2020; Fonseca et al., 2019). Studies to date show that resilience and social cohesion are either moderately to strongly correlated, suggesting that individual and community-based social and behavioural factors are generally large predictors of community resilience (Townshend et al., 2015). Social cohesion can be defined as “the glue that bonds people to one another, in families, groups, organizations, and communities” (Rodin, 2015, pp.61-62). It increases community cooperation after hazards and reduces disparities among community members by advocating for shared collective values (Calo-Blanco et al., 2017). Social cohesion can also be defined as an ongoing, or ever-changing process, where well-being and a sense of belonging are fostered through the voluntary social participation of community members (Fonseca et al., 2019, Jeannotte, 2003). It has also been shown to promote well-being in times of distress and crisis (Fan et al., 2020). Other definitions are similar yet tend to focus more broadly on the tangible benefits of cohesion for community members, emphasizing shared values, challenges, and equal opportunities based on reciprocity and feelings of trust and hope (Jeannotte, 2003). These definitions can be applied to studies where communities and people are initially disrupted by a shock but then employ social cohesion to help jumpstart their emotional and social recovery process (Fan et al., 2020).

High levels of social cohesion are not only useful in building resilient communities but have also been shown to provide communities with faster recovery times from environmental hazards (Sobhaninia, 2023). Furthermore, cohesiveness provides emotional benefits for those adversely affected and encourages demonstrations of solidarity and instances of mutual aid during the

recovery period (Fan et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2018; Hikichi et al., 2016; Ludin et al., 2019). Beyond the recovery period, communities with high levels of social cohesion are better equipped for future hardships and have greater capacities to work through other relevant challenges and low-level disturbances (Sobhaninia, 2023; Ludin et al., 2019). Social cohesion can also be observed as a form of social capital, which is highly important for “facilitating rural peoples' access to other forms of capital” (Bebbington & Perreault, 1999, p.395; Ostrom & Ahn, 2007). Others also note that social cohesion can serve as a tool for studying the Global South, where economic and social constraints can create cyclical poverty and issues in human development (insecurities, exclusion, powerlessness, lack of access to essential social services, etc.) (Fuseini et al., 2024). This relates back to Bebbington & Perreault’s (1999) depiction of social capital as a tool for accessing other forms of capital.

Social cohesion can also be important for concerns beyond poverty and development. As Hikichi et al. (2016) show, mental health and well-being is also intricately linked to social cohesion and recovery from hazards. The psychological challenges created by hazards and disasters in and beyond the Global South are many—from generalized anxiety to complex trauma disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Hikichi et al., 2016; Milstein, 2019). Hikichi et al. (2016) examine differential levels of PTSD symptoms in Japanese adults following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami based on community social cohesion. The results indicated that PTSD symptoms were significantly lower in communities with higher social cohesion, even after including adjustments for baseline levels of depression (Hikichi et al., 2016). This study is one of many demonstrating how the post-disaster (or hazard) context sees individuals and communities with heightened vulnerabilities paired with vivid collective memory of hazards—both of which can be useful for evaluating social cohesion (Hikichi et al., 2016; Joakim & Wismer, 2015; Monteil et al., 2020a). In these observed examples of human fragility, it becomes clearer that the post-disaster context can serve to uncover deeper findings on culture, human belief, and behaviour that may otherwise be obscured during and before hazards (Monteil et al., 2020a; Fan et al., 2020; Milstein, 2019). Furthermore, by considering human responses and behaviours through both psychological and cultural lenses, the extent to which solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual aid contribute to social cohesion and resilience are made clearer (Fan et al., 2020; Bergstrand & Mayer, 2020; Monteil et al., 2020a; Ludin et al., 2019; Potoroacă, 2023).

Communities can also face barriers to social cohesion through differences in social determinants, like gender, ethnicity, and class. This is often referred to as social fragmentation. Whether through community schism, tensions, conflict, weak governance, segregation, disunity, or economic challenges, plenty of factors can degrade the social fabric of communities (Kimani, 2024; Samson & Warganegara, 2021; Liu, 2012; Gandy, 2008). Disunity specifically has many implications for social fragmentation. For example, small individual disagreements on the construction of a park or community building can easily compound into a larger disagreement, especially when community governance or leadership is weak or nonexistent (Gandy, 2008; Liu, 2012; Maclean et al., 2014). Liu (2012) describes China's "fragmented" rural society as an example (p.115). Without strong self-governance and "insufficient" public leadership, rural China was historically highly scattered (fragmented) which affected development (Liu, 2012, p.115). This also allowed "grey forces" [informal or semi-legal power structures, like local elites and underground non-state networks] to operate over organizational forms of governance (Liu, 2012, p.115). Similarly, without strong governance or leadership in urban Mumbai, Gandy (2008) explains how metropolitan spaces have become increasingly polarized and fragmented, especially when faced with challenges related to water and sanitation infrastructure. Scholars working in Latin America have also noted that weak governance in rural areas is often created by specific mechanisms, such as social exclusion and centralized political and economic powers, also noting that this not only impacts the upkeep of social values within a system, but sustainable development more broadly (Eufemia et al., 2020). This example further emphasizes that weak governance not only creates social fragmentation, but that related aspects like social exclusion can also contribute to weak governance across a variety of geographic contexts. Gandy (2008) demonstrates that hazards and development challenges can also exacerbate fragmentation and social polarization.

Apart from weak governance, disunity or difference in opinion can also contribute to hazard amplification through various pathways (institutional, temporal, etc.), including an increase in social tension, accelerating conflict development (Peters, 2021). Specifically, Peters (2021) notes that social conflicts can create long-lasting instability in a community and contribute to heightened vulnerabilities. This then lowers capacities for coping with future conflicts and hazards, and contributes to further fragmentation (Peters, 2021). She also notes that social conflicts encourage inconsistencies in governance and external aid, leading to dysfunctional systems of power and influence (Peters, 2021). Therefore, lines of difference (such as disagreements) may lead to

multifaceted instances of social instability, which ultimately impacts DRR (Peters, 2021). Another common driver of tension within communities are “identity and lifestyle driven transformations” (Froese et al., 2022, p.11). For example, Froese et al. (2022) explain how the construction of the interoceanic highway through the Madre de Dios region of the Peruvian Amazon consequently enhanced identity-based conflict among rural peoples as mining has expanded in the region. They also note that a twofold increase in the region’s population has severely affected livelihood identities, creating two opposing parties—miners and farmers (Froese et al., 2022). This conflict (and its complexities) has created a “shift in identity and culture” away from traditional farming activities into large-scale monoculture and cattle ranching (Froese et al., 2022, p.15). Overall, the authors note that responses to this shift have been negative, where the effects of tensions over land use and livelihoods have slowly led to larger conflicts over agricultural productivity, environmental sustainability, and extractivism (Froese et al., 2022). Later, Froese (2023) writes about social cohesion as a “crucial feature” within an SES. She writes that a lack of social cohesion can easily degrade an SES through “driving forces” (Froese, 2023, p.51). One of these driving forces is a lack of commitment to general norms and values, which are governed by preferred lifestyle, satisfaction, well-being, and level of trust, to name a few (Froese, 2023). Overall, social cohesion and fragmentation can be used as comparative illustrations towards understanding the larger forces acting upon hazard amplification and capacities for resilience.

1.4 Religion and Relief

The current Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) focuses on achieving greater overall inclusivity, yet scholars note that knowledge gaps exist between disaster management and the consideration of social determinants beyond gender, class, and ethnicity (Kimani, 2024; Reale, 2010; Milstein, 2019). One factor, religion, is particularly disconnected from disaster management; not only in the literature, but also in policy and practice (Cvetković et al., 2023; Kimani, 2024; Reale, 2010). Reale (2010) explains that religion, although a rich piece of the human experience, is often ignored in disaster management frameworks and strategies, even though most of the non-western world is deeply religious. With many traditional societies formed directly along the lines of religion (especially in the Global South), Reale (2010) argues that it is crucial to better understand religion’s influence on human behaviour within disaster management

contexts. With this, western hazards scholars are called to put secular biases aside and to consider the opinions and voices of the religious on disaster-relevant matters. Similarly, Sheikhi et al. (2021) emphasize that religious organizations and the narratives of adherents are essential for building communities and thus may provide some of the greatest contributions towards community-based DRR. Authors thus have pushed for the inclusion and cooperation of religious organizations, actors, and networks with DRR practitioners to promote inclusivity and share best practices (Marshall, 2019; Sheikhi et al., 2021). Faith-based organizations, such as Samaritan's Purse, Caritas, Islamic Relief, and Tzu Chi serve as examples of how faith-based actors have the connections, knowledge, and capacities to enhance DRR in several ways (Marshall, 2019). However, beyond the roles and capacities of faith-based organizations in the disaster management sphere, there remains the need to better understand religion as a factor contributing to individual vulnerabilities and resilience building.

Religiosity (or, an individual's level of religious practice) is found to be important in each phase of the disaster cycle, bringing further merit to the inclusion of religion in DRR, as proposed by Kimani (2024), Reale (2010) and others. Extending across religious traditions, we see in the literature that religiosity influences an individual's decision-making during hazard events. For example, McGeehan & Baker (2017) find that across western and non-western contexts, an individual's religious beliefs contribute to their recovery through disaster interpretation, mitigation, and risk management. Disaster interpretation—or the way individuals perceive and understand disasters—is a common focus within the disciplinary nexus of disasters and religion (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2019; Schipper, 2010; O'Connell et al., 2017a; Milstein, 2019). One way from which to frame disaster interpretation is through the question of theodicy, or, how a loving and merciful God could allow evil and suffering to exist in the world (Chester & Duncan, 2009; Chester, 1998). Although discussions of theodicy are most common in studies from Judeo-Christian contexts, they can also be helpful for understanding disaster interpretations by exploring the question of how affected individuals reason and respond to disasters from their religious lenses (Chester & Duncan, 2009; O'Connell et al., 2017a). However, while theodicies and faith-based responses shape the religious practices (lived religion) of Judeo-Christian individuals, Gregersen (2015) notes that they cannot fully answer the deeper moral questions of suffering—such as 'Why me?' Schipper (2010) also notes that while disaster interpretation had historically been a key topic at the disaster-religion nexus, future studies ought to focus more on risk reduction due to the nature

by which belief systems influence behaviour and vulnerability. This claim echoes Gaillard's (2007) work on the resilience of traditional societies which identified that context shapes social fabrics and people's capacities to face disasters, including religious predispositions and ways of being. So, whether disaster interpretation or risk reduction serve as the foci of the literature, several studies make it clear that individual levels of vulnerability and resilience are influenced by religious beliefs (O'Connell et al., 2017a; Sun et al., 2018).

Durkheim's theory on the function of religion explains that its sociological function is to serve as a source of solidarity for members of a religious community (Durkheim, 2011; Potoroacă, 2023). Potoroacă (2023) further explains that for religious individuals, collective beliefs and systems of understanding form the basis of solidarity. Solidarity, if able to transcend individualism, fosters connections with others, leading to cohesion (Potoroacă, 2023). Potoroacă (2023) also notes that within the Christian tradition, the terms "communion" and "fellowship" (in Greek, *koinonia*) denote solidarity. Some scholars also choose to connect solidarity to a personal sense of confidence through shared religious practices (De Blij, 2008; Milstein, 2019). Shared practices and beliefs are some of the most pervasive influences towards positive correlations between religiosity and social cohesion (Milstein, 2019; Tausch et al., 2011; Jeserich et al., 2023; Lalani et al., 2021; Aten et al., 2019; Kimani, 2024). Religious communities provide individuals with a sense of belonging through shared mission, vision, and goals—which also fosters feelings of gratitude and hope in difficult times, such as during or after hazards (Aten et al., 2019; Oppong, 2013; Lalani et al., 2021; Tausch et al., 2011; Milstein, 2019). It is also noted that communities with deeper religious embeddedness are more likely to see higher rates of social cohesion (Jeserich et al., 2023). Additionally, scholars have found that members of a shared religious community are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of reciprocity, trust, and mutual aid with one another, all of which are positive affect-related traits of social cohesion (Barrios & Gandelman, 2015; Lalani et al., 2021). Religion also acts as a mutual insurance and moral foundation for coping and decision-making after hazards (Bentzen, 2019; Milstein, 2019).

Furthermore, religion is shown to foster generosity towards those suffering most through bolstering restorative narratives, rebuilding efforts, and collective vision (Joakim & White, 2015; Tomalin, 2018; Schweiger, 2019; Beyers, 2014). Religion, kinship, and friendship have also been shown to influence livelihood decisions. For example, deciding to adopt a new crop type or choosing to conserve specific resources has been linked to religious and kinship networks

(Bandiera & Rasul, 2006; Matouš et al., 2012). In some ways, these elements (religion, kinship, etc.) may also enable or disable individuals from participating in specific livelihoods (Tomalin, 2022; Senadjki et al., 2017). In some cases, religion has also been shown to provide people with social networks that transcend the lines of gender and ethnicity, demonstrating the potential for interfaith cooperation during hazards and in the recovery stage (Tausch et al., 2011; O’Connell et al., 2017b; Rockenbach & Sakdapolrak, 2017; Offutt et al., 2016; Joakim & White, 2015). However, despite the apparent transcendence of religion, the cultural context and people’s identities must still be carefully considered when studying religion-based networks, to avoid generalizations (Offutt et al., 2016; O’Connell et al., 2017b; Rockenbach & Sakdapolrak, 2017). For example, social determinants such as age, place of origin, gender, and kin also positively contribute to social capital, belonging, inclusion, and cooperation during and after hazards (Milstein, 2019; Townshend et al., 2015; Offutt et al., 2016; Drolet et al., 2015; Monteil et al., 2020b; Sobhaninia, 2024).

Religion can also contribute towards social fragmentation. For one, differences in lived religion (one’s everyday, individual religious practices) and religiosity (one’s level of religious belief) have the potential to disrupt the social fabric of a community (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). McGuire (2008) provides an example of this within the abstract of *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Here, we are prompted to imagine a Latina schoolteacher who considers herself a good Catholic woman yet does not often attend Mass (McGuire, 2008). Instead, she opts to pray at her home’s altar, which features a mixture of crystals, Catholic iconography, and photographs of celebrities (McGuire, 2008). This woman’s lived religion (i.e. her way of practicing Catholicism) distances her from Catholics who advocate for weekly Mass attendance and may disagree with her use of crystals (often associated with New Age spirituality). However, her lived religion also draws her nearer to family members who pray with her at home. The dichotomy between social exclusion (fragmentation) with her Catholic community and inclusion with her own family members (kin) creates complexities within her social life because of her lived religion. This example also points to a wide variety of potential social outcomes stemming from a community’s religious diversity. It also shows the importance of context; that differences in lived religion (and their impacts on cohesion or fragmentation) are multidimensional.

Social fragmentation is also connected to religion in other literature. For example, Gow (2009) and Luzar & Fragoso (2013) both write about how mainline Christianity has transformed the social

dynamics of Indigenous Christians in the Peruvian Amazon, leading to fragmentation over a debate on whether it is appropriate for Indigenous Christians to consult with shamans. Similarly, Olson (2006) writes on fragmentation within the Evangelical denominations of Cusco, Peru, explaining how rural-urban divides have contributed to the ‘othering’ of each other and disagreements on development practices. Other studies emphasize the need for social balance and moderation, especially among pre-existing divided communities to mitigate for further fragmentation (Minh Pham et al., 2020). In another study, the effects of Protestant missions on cohesion in the Amazon are examined, ultimately finding that missionized communities have lower levels of cohesion than those left untouched (Hager, 2022). It is clear from examples like these that lived religion and religiosity can both promote cohesion and fragmentation, which sometimes have implications for resilience. It is important to note, however, that linking religion and cohesion is never simple due to persistent methodological gaps (Kimani, 2024). It is for this reason that deeper inquiry into these findings is recommended by almost every author cited in this section.

1.5 Geography and Religion—On What Basis?

The geography of religion is often defined as an emerging subfield of human and cultural geography yet is poised as distinct from the study of religion (Strauss, 2015; Levine, 1986; Park, 1994). When describing the history of geography, Levine (1986) writes that geographers have been interested in religion for decades but have lacked a consistent and reliable theoretical foundation. Levine (1986) thus argues for a materialist approach in the geography of religion to tackle the questions geographers seek to answer but may struggle to achieve through their spatial approaches. For a long time, geographic depictions of religion differed from depictions found within religious studies. The emphases placed on concepts of space and place within geography provide one explanation for this, where ritual or material approaches akin to religious studies were set aside (Park, 2005a). However, some also argue the sociological approaches of affect and how people engage with the world are not as useful as strong cultural approaches (Wilford, 2015). Park (2005a) nonetheless emphasizes that spatial studies should not be misconstrued as ‘too geographic’ for religion, as they can also successfully deepen our understanding of the processes behind religious phenomena. Ethnographic approaches can also aid or supplement the geography of religion where investigations may naturally lack detail on identity, the human experience, and culture (Murchison

& Coats, 2015; Saliba, 1974; Wilford, 2015). Ethnographic approaches can also be applied to the geographic study of religion by investigating ‘third spaces’—where religious phenomena may or may not typically exist; yet may occupy the multiplicities of space, or the spaces “in-between” (Murchison & Coats, 2015, p.988; Massey, 2005). Ultimately, if “religion is the key to identity,” I argue that religion should be considered seriously within any discipline seeking to better understand culture, humanity, or society (like geography), whether traditionally appropriate or not (De Blij, 2008, p.52).

Chapter 2: Theory, Context, Methods

2.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This thesis focuses on exploring how social cohesion and fragmentation are linked to Christianity in the Peruvian Amazon. Specifically, it is concerned with community resilience to floods and droughts—and in what ways this resilience is influenced by rural Amazonian Christianity.

This work is borne from the ideas presented in Chapter 1, where it was made clear that studies in resilience, social cohesion, and hazards have not paid sufficient attention to religion, despite evidence of its importance. It also provides an opportunity to better understand local expressions of Christianity in the Peruvian Amazon, which have been scarcely discussed. By exploring the potential convergences between religion and cohesion or fragmentation in the Peruvian Amazon, this study provides insight into the current state of community development, accounting also for opportunities and challenges. To continue, despite the rapid expansion of Evangelicalism as a movement within Latin American Christianity over the past few decades—which some suggest may create fragmentation—few studies have documented some of the ways that Evangelicalism (as a religious and cultural movement) has influenced rural life and livelihoods in mixed-denominational rural communities, like those outlined in this thesis.

This research draws upon Henri Tajfel & John Turner's (1979) social identity theory as a framework, which describes how a person's belonging to a group or affinity (race, gender, religion, etc.) influences their decision-making and relationship with their own circumstances (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ysseldyk et al., 2010). The analysis within this thesis recognizes that group religious identities (primarily Evangelical and Catholic) are alike as variations within rural Amazonian Christianity, yet distinct in ritual and practice. Social identity theory and identity process theory have been proven useful in describing what some deem as 'place-identity,' or the relationship between place, space, and identity (Breakwell, 2015; Hauge, 2007). The discussions featured in this thesis also (indirectly) acknowledge possible conformities and parallels within its qualitative interview excerpts and other findings. This is due to the small and somewhat insular community dynamics at hand.

Instead of solely considering social identities or affinities, this study understands that religiosity measures how religious an individual is (McGuire, 2008). Moreover, it considers that religiosity

itself can be gauged by an individual's lived religion, expressions of individuality, and the diversity of opinion (McGuire, 2008). This approach avoids funnelling individuals into rigid denominational categories and acts as a method for decolonization by recognizing that each interlocutor has a unique experience with rural Amazonian Christianity, rather than assuming similarity with Western Christian expressions and practices (McGuire, 2008). Finally, to frame social cohesion, this thesis is guided by Fonseca et al. (2019), whose work draws upon decades of social cohesion literature to create a novel, comprehensive framework. This framework suggests that social cohesion can be broken down into three broad categories: individual, community, and institutions (Fig. 1). These three categories help quantify social cohesion as a dynamic concept made up of multiple levels marked by "connections and interdependencies" (Fonseca et al., 2019, p.247).

The individual category defined by Fonseca et al. (2019) includes the sub-categories of: self-motivation, perceptions, norms and values, and participation and performance. These describe the reasons why an individual seeks belonging to a group and the roots (shared norms, values) of that belief (Fonseca et al., 2019). Secondly, the community category of social cohesion includes discussions of environment, relationships and ties, and "process performance and goal attainment" (Fonseca et al., 2019, p.247). This category shows how an individual's surroundings influence their perceptions of belonging and cohesion (Fonseca et al., 2019). Finally, the institutions category "defines the factors of conflict management and decision making, human rights, and environment (structures, norms and values)" (Fonseca et al, 2019, p.247). These factors connect to how individuals become motivated to remain involved in cohesive activities, assuming support, representation, values, and regulations make it possible to do so (Fonseca et al., 2019). The authors also highlight that "deep-seated conflicts" diminish one's likelihood to remain involved in a group, for example (Fonseca et al., 2019, p.247). It is also important to note that when one factor changes (a change in environment, for example), factors in other categories are likely to also be affected (Fonseca et al., 2019).

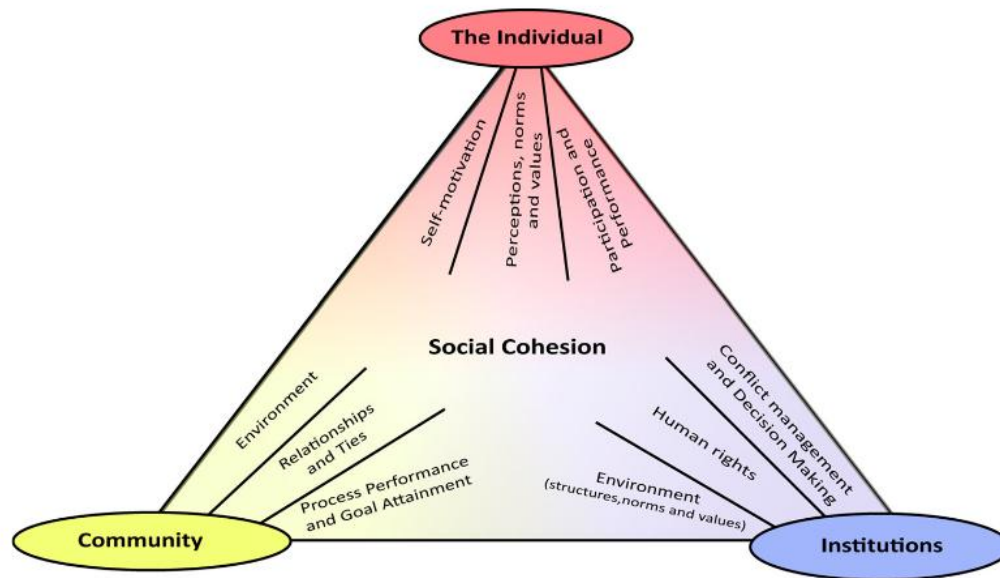


Figure 1: Framework to characterize and define social cohesion. (Fonseca et al., 2019, p. 246)

From the individual level of social cohesion above, I draw upon the notions of the inner self in this thesis. Specifically, I am interested in the reason individuals find themselves adhering to a religious group, what or who motivates their sense of belonging within that group, and how their participation and behaviour may stem from that belonging. From the community level, I acknowledge the social and physical environments (or ‘communities’) that a person finds themselves in, understanding that these likewise affect belonging and group adherence. Relationships (kin, friendships, etc.) within the communities are of special interest to me, as well as shared norms, values, and objectives across community groups, like religious groups. This level of social cohesion can be easily linked to concepts of social capital, trust, solidarity, and reciprocity (Fonseca et al., 2019). Finally, from the institutions category, this study is most interested in conflict management and decision making, which Fonseca et al. (2019) consider “the governance of formal institutions in society,” relating to “social disorganization or conflict” (p.247). Other institutional factors (environment and human rights) can be connected to group/community and individual agency (Fonseca et al., 2019). This thesis later connects these to Magis (2010), who described the active agency communities have over their own resilience.

2.2 Geographic Context

The Peruvian Amazon is a unique environmental setting and religious landscape to draw upon for this work. The Peruvian Amazon makes up approximately 11% of the total area of the Amazon, spanning over 16 million hectares (IIAP, 2024; Abizaid et al., 2022; Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022). The region covers around 60% of Peru and is one of the most biodiverse regions of the world, with tens of thousands of unique flora and fauna species, lush vegetation, wetlands, and peatlands (IIAP, 2024; Abizaid et al., 2022; Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022). The climate of this region is characterized by high levels of rainfall, with seasonal dry periods during the summer months (Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022). Because of these trends and the transport of glacial meltwaters from the Andes, the Ucayali River (a tributary of the Amazon River) rises and falls around 10 metres each year (Fig. 2) (Lamotte, 1990; Espinoza et al., 2024). Global climatic forces (*El Niño* and *La Niña*) also influence these water level fluctuations, leading to a distinct low water (dry) and high water (wet) season (Langill & Abizaid, 2020; Espinoza et al., 2024). This flood-drought cycle influences species migration patterns, contributes to erosional hazards, has implications for livelihoods and food security, and impacts transportation networks in various ways (Abizaid et al., 2022; Langill & Abizaid, 2020; Coomes et al., 2010; Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022; Espinoza et al., 2024).

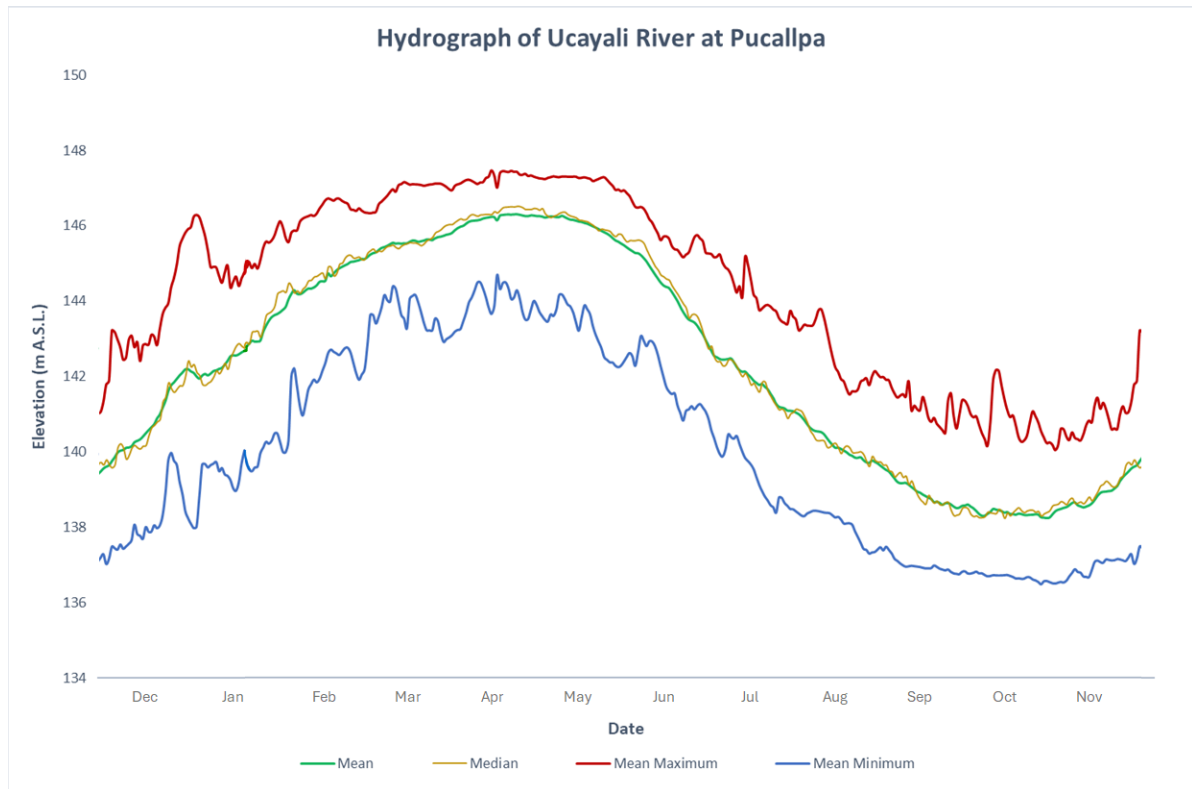


Figure 2: Hydrograph of the Ucayali River at Pucallpa (1988-2017).

Note: Data supplied by MTC (2025) from the Pucallpa measuring station.

Rural economies in the Peruvian Amazon are complex and rely heavily on interconnected river networks for trade, transportation, and to maintain social connections (Schillinger & Lycett, 2019; Abizaid et al., 2018, 2022). As previously mentioned, alluvial rivers meander and are dynamic due to annual climatic cycles (Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022; Abizaid et al., 2022). Rural communities located along these large, ever-evolving floodplains face various socioeconomic challenges and barriers, especially when it comes to transportation and mobility (IIAP, 2024; Abizaid et al., 2018, 2022). Rural livelihoods are also affected directly by the unpredictable nature of life on a floodplain due to the seasonal flooding affecting crops, farmland, and agricultural productivity (Langill & Abizaid, 2020; Abizaid et al., 2022; Coomes et al., 2010). These challenges unfortunately contribute to widespread poverty, which is worsened by pre-existing systemic inequalities, food insecurity, and economic and political marginalization—all of which are factors increasing the risk of hazards becoming disastrous (Quispe-Mamani et al., 2022; Sherman et al., 2015, 2016; Young & León, 2009; Langill & Abizaid, 2020; IIAP, 2024; Sanjurjo-Vilchez & Bendayán-Acosta, 2024). While seasonal floods and droughts are common within Amazonia,

unpredictable or severe hazard events inevitably worsen losses, which in addition to pre-existing hardships and uncertainties also contribute to worsening vulnerability (Sanjurjo-Vilchez & Bendayán-Acosta, 2024; Langill & Abizaid, 2020).

Rural livelihoods in the Peruvian Amazon are largely dependent on natural resources, where the majority of households rely on small scale agriculture (Porro et al., 2014, 2015; Lojka et al., 2011). Rural peoples farm in both the floodplains and uplands where available (Sears et al., 2018; Marquardt et al., 2019; Hiraoka, 1985, 1989). Small-scale farming techniques include shifting cultivation (swidden), flood recession farming, timber harvesting, and trapping/hunting (Lojka et al., 2011; Porro et al., 2014; Figueiredo et al., 2020; Marquardt et al., 2019). However, most households engage in multifaceted livelihoods (Porro et al., 2014, 2015; Abizaid et al., 2018). In one study, it was found that roughly 65% of all riverine and non-riverine household annual incomes are either agriculture (25%) or forest-based (40%) (Porro et al., 2015). It also found that wage labour (17%) and livestock (11%) were important secondary livelihood strategies but failed to acknowledge fishing as a key strategy (Porro et al., 2015). Across other studies, fishing appears to be one of the most common livelihoods, especially in communities disconnected from roads. Engaging in regular fishing alleviates high local demand, generates income for more sought-after species in urban markets, and contributes to an economic safety net (Chibnik, 1994; Abizaid et al., 2018; 2022; Coomes et al., 2010, 2020). Alongside these benefits, artisanal fisheries act as a form of natural insurance, which contributes to community resilience and may also yield economically valuable species to boost local incomes (Coomes et al., 2010; Da Costa Doria et al., 2020).

The Peruvian Amazon is sparsely populated. Most inhabitants live in the vicinity of two major cities: Pucallpa, in the Ucayali department, and Iquitos, in the Loreto department (Hernández-Vásquez et al., 2022). According to the 2017 census, the population of Ucayali was roughly 500,000 inhabitants, with over 80% of that population living in urban areas (INEI, 2018). The census also indicated that Ucayali's urban population continues to grow, and rural population is in decline (INEI, 2018). While Pucallpa's poverty rate had decreased from 70.5% in 2001 to 20.3% in 2010, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic brought further strain to urban and rural populations alike—in 2020, the poverty rate had increased to 28% (Porro et al., 2015; Quispe-Mamani et al., 2022; Carhuavilca Bonett, 2021). Ethnicity-wise, around 10.4% of Ucayali's population self-identifies with an Amazonian Indigenous group, and 75.2% claim mixed (*mestizo*) ancestry (INEI, 2018).

2.3 Religious Context

In 1541, Francisco de Orellana led the first European expedition along the Amazon River with the goals of conquering land and finding the mythical city of El Dorado with the assistance of Dominican friar Gaspar de Carvajal (Hsia, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2024; Medina, 1934). Shortly after this initial expedition, Jesuit missions began in Amazonia, leading to widespread enslavement, conflict, and deforestation (Nascimento et al., 2024; Hsia, 2018). In 1554, the first European colonizers arrived in the region with the Franciscans to continue Christianization projects (Hsia, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2024). The influence of the Franciscan order was far smaller than that of the Jesuits, particularly considering the infamously harsh and numerous Jesuit *Maynas* missions in the northern reaches of the Peruvian Amazon (Loreto) and parts of Ecuador (Hsia, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2024). These expeditions and missions completely transformed the cultural and religious landscape of the region. The arrival of Europeans also brought disease and warfare, ultimately causing the premature death of 90–95% of the Indigenous population (Black, 1992; Sá Carvalho, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2024). By the time the Jesuits were expelled from South America in 1767, they had become the most influential religious order in Latin America (Nascimento et al., 2024). After their expulsion, Christianization activities continued to be carried out in Amazonia under the Franciscans (Hsia, 2018; Nascimento et al., 2024). By that time, nearly all pre-Columbian cosmologies, culture, and belief systems had already been extirpated, and Catholicism has dominated the politics and culture of the region ever since (Nascimento et al., 2024; Sá Carvalho, 2018; Hsia, 2018; Valderrama Adriansén, 2015).

Today, Peru is ranked high on the scale of religiosity and religious commitment within various studies, with very high commitment to daily prayer, attending religious services, and tithing (Pew Research Center [hereafter PRC], 2014; Ortmann, 2002; Caycho-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Olson, 2006; Alarcón, 2002). Like most countries in Latin America, Peru is predominantly Catholic (Ortmann, 2002; PRC, 2014). However, the popularity of Protestantism has increased steadily over the past decade (PRC, 2014; Blanton, 2022). Protestants in much of Latin America refer to themselves as *evangélicos* [Evangelicals] (PRC, 2014; Blanton, 2022). These Evangelicals vary along a spectrum of belief and practice, where some adhere to a specific Protestant denomination (Adventism, Pentecostalism, etc.), while others have beliefs based on a variety of denominational influences, some charismatic, moderate, or fundamentalist (PRC, 2014). When also accounting for

the possibility of religious syncretism, there is a considerable diversity of belief and practice under the *evangélico* umbrella (PRC, 2014).

Within Peru's Evangelical population, 52% self-identify as denominationally Pentecostal, characterized by a charismatic worship style emphasizing the Holy Spirit and prosperity teachings (PRC, 2014). Prosperity teachings have been linked to high levels of tithing and other financial "expressions of devotion," particularly within Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal settings (Premawardhana, 2012, p.85). To understand where high levels of religiosity in Peru come from, some argue that the politicization of religion itself is the cause, or that nationalized religions—like Peru's Andean-Catholic syncretism—provides the country with ontological value, expressing that it is "difficult for the Peruvian state to exist" without it (Valderrama Adriansén, 2015, p.529; Pérez Guadalupe & Carranza, 2021). Rural variants of religion in Peru have also been tied to specific epistemologies of development that vary from the western 'normal' and may increase levels of religiosity (Olson, 2006). For example, the Peruvian Evangelical Church (*Iglesia Evangelica Peruana*), teaches adherents that a family or individual's "economic, political, and personal success[es]" are direct measures of "how well they are following God's word" (Olson, 2006, p.897). Apart from encouraging religious adherence, faith-based narratives like these may also impact perceptions around hazards and disasters through theodicies. Rural Peruvian Christians may also create narratives or debates over orthopraxis (righteous practice) and orthodoxy (correct doctrine) due to the presence and history of religious syncretism, which could lead to fragmentation or social tensions (Opas, 2017, 2022).

Religious syncretism is crucial to understand, as it is prevalent in Peru and contributes to the diversity of religious belief and practice previously discussed. Syncretism refers to when a person, church, or community blends two religious or cosmological traditions together to form a new, distinct belief system (DeMarinis, 2014). In Peru, it is very common for individuals to uphold both a Christian and Indigenous belief system, which contributes to a complex religious landscape (Opas, 2017; Butler, 2022; PRC, 2014). This is mainly due to the region's history, where over five centuries of strong Christian influence in a "stateless" culture has been paired with several resurgences and re-imaginings of Indigenous cosmologies, or "cultural phases" (Opas, 2017; Butler, 2022, pp.1-5). To assume that every Peruvian fits into a singular religious category would therefore be fallacious (Opas, 2017; Butler, 2022). Though the means for the cultural development of syncretism is evident, syncretism is too often clouded by portrayals of Indigenous Amazonians

as deeply cosmological and seemingly disconnected from all external Christian influences (Opas, 2017). While it is true that some individuals and populations may have little to no current Christian influence or histories of contact, the patterns present in the survey results and other studies reflect the importance of having a holistic understanding of the role of syncretism and polytheisms in Amazonia (PRC, 2014; Opas, 2017, Butler, 2022). The reality today is that many Amazonian Christians consider it their *costumbre* [custom] to self-identify with a Christian denomination (Catholicism, Evangelicalism, Adventism, Pentecostalism, etc.), while also relying on and understanding their Indigenous “social cosmos” as the means to form their own “worlds” (Opas, 2017, p.122). The term, ‘rural Amazonian Christianity’ can thus serve to define this potentially syncretic variant of Christianity found in rural Amazonian communities.

Syncretism comes in a variety of forms. To start, apart from the obvious differences between Indigenous cosmologies (not fitting within any theism) and Christianity (monotheism) is the nature by which these belief systems situate themselves within the universe (Arias, 2017). “Cosmovision” in Indigenous belief systems emphasizes the “articulation of ontological knowledge in relation to stellar patterns and celestial phenomena,” whereas Christianity situates a human’s relationship to the universe as divinely appointed in servitude to God (Arias, 2017, p.5). Similarly, Indigenous belief systems employ multi-naturalism, which directly oppose typical Western understandings of nature (Viveiros de Castro, 2012). By suggesting that different beings—humans, animals, spirits—share the same “culture,” but have different “natures,” multi-naturalism contradicts the typical Christian social order, where humanity is responsible for stewarding and having dominion over nature [Genesis 1:26; 2:15] (Viveiros de Castro, 2012). While some scholars admit that Amazonian cosmologies are seemingly mutually incompatible with Abrahamic religions (like Christianity), others write at length about the various forms of Amazonian Christian syncretisms (Arias, 2017, Opas, 2017; 2022). Rural Amazonian Christians may also alter their worship styles to suit local preferences, where music, prayer, and sharing testimonies often relate directly to people’s lived worlds (Opas, 2021). However, pieces of western Christianity often remain implanted in the tradition. For example, some popular *coros* [choral hymns] and *alabanzas* [praise songs] within rural Evangelical churches are simply Spanish translations of popular Methodist hymns and choruses. At times, congregants may also choose to alter the lyrics to suit their situations or concerns. Urban churches, by comparison, may have more access to resources and the Internet, allowing congregations to sing a greater variety of songs, including contemporary North American

Christian music translated into Spanish. Similarly, while Catholic churches may follow a liturgical worship style in urban settings, churches in rural settings may create variants or lack the resources to carry out a full liturgical service. Urban churches also sometimes adhere more strictly to Western Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis—leading to debates and tensions with more rural, Indigenous churches over authenticity and what it means to be a “real Christian” (Opas, 2021, 2017, p.120). Inter-denominational tensions have also been documented over concerns about orthodoxy and orthopraxis; leading to deeper discussions surrounding a community’s stability/instability and continuity/rupture (Opas, 2017, 2021, 2022). Religious syncretism may also create tensions towards environmental conservation efforts being carried out in the Peruvian Amazon through the relational aspects of human beings and spirits under the multi-naturalism framework previously discussed (Fabiano et al., 2021).

Spatially, Catholic, Evangelical, and mixed denomination communities are distributed in clusters around urbanized areas in the Peruvian Amazon. According to a report on religious affinities in the Peruvian Amazon conducted using community survey data (n=55) from the Peruvian Amazon Rural Livelihoods and Poverty (PARLAP) project, there is a high concentration of Evangelical communities around the city of Pucallpa in Ucayali (Fig. 3) (Van Caulart, 2024). These findings point to a long-standing history of foreign Evangelical missions in the region. The presence of Evangelical missions in Ucayali dates to the late 19th century. The first Evangelical influences were the Bible Societies, followed by several other Evangelical and Protestant missions between 1896 and 1933 (SAM, 2024). In 1926, the South America Mission (SAM) became active in Peru, focusing their projects largely on the evangelization of Indigenous communities. SAM was also responsible for beginning to form local-international church networks and ‘planting’ new Christian churches (SAM, 2024). Today, SAM is still active with a very large presence in Ucayali alongside other missions, including Indicamino,¹ RiverWind, and Youth with a Mission (YWAM). Several Pucallpa-based independent Evangelical churches also engage in missionary activities in rural Amazonian communities along the Ucayali River. Beyond SAM, one of the most influential Evangelical missions in the Peruvian Amazon was the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), signed into existence by the Peruvian Minister of Education, Dr. Enrique Larosa, and Dr. William Townsend in 1945 (SIL Global, 2024). The SIL started in Aguaytía and eventually moved their

¹ Also known as *Misión Suiza* [the Swiss Mission]. This organization shares the Cashibo missions base on Lake Cashibococha with SAM.

mission base to Yarinacocha (just north of Pucallpa) in 1949 and remained active in the region until 2004 (SIL Global, 2024). During its active years, the SIL was responsible for translating the New Testament into 26 Indigenous Amazonian languages (García, 2004). They also were responsible for advancing bilingual education in Peru, especially in rural regions like the Amazon (García, 2004). Today, the SIL base in Yarinacocha is home to the National Intercultural University of the Amazon (UNIA), but SIL Global still partners with locally based missions like SAM to continue developing their Bible translation initiatives (SIL Global, 2024).

Concentration of Evangelical communities in Ucayali and Loreto

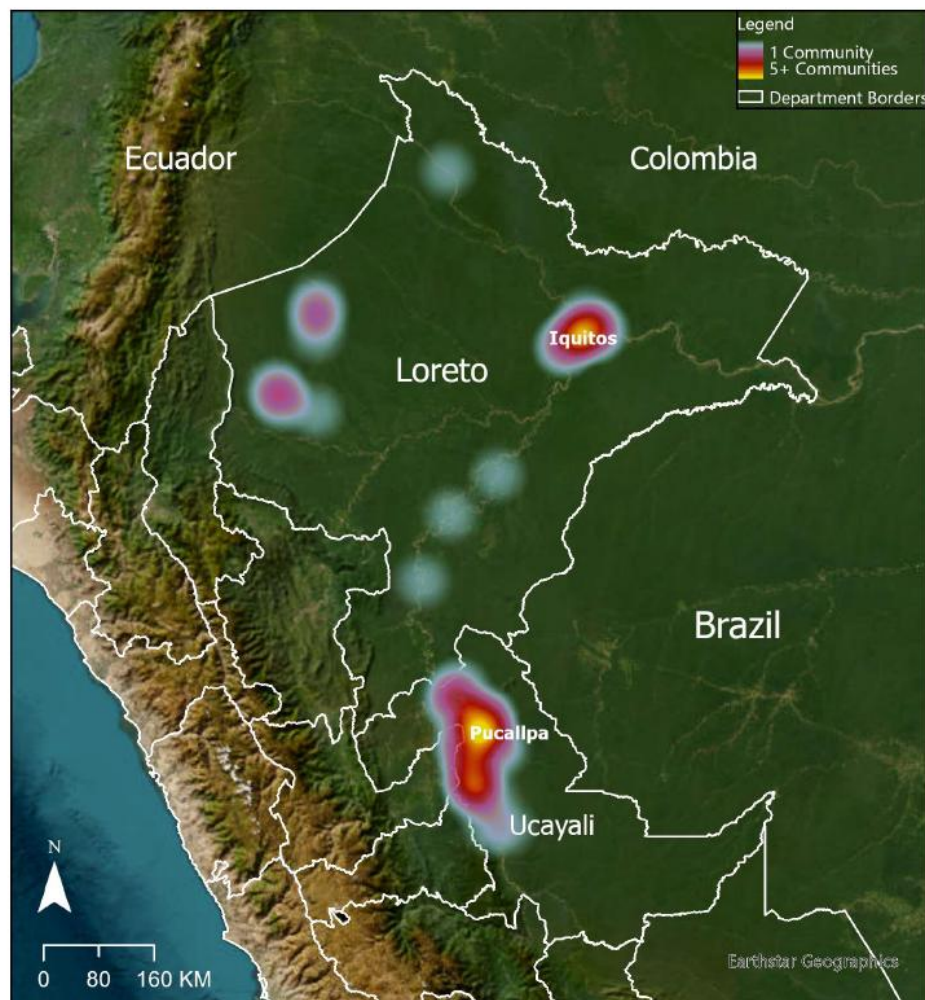


Figure 3: Evangelical community spatial distributions based on community survey datapoints (n=55) from the PARLAP project in 2015-16. (Van Caulart, 2024)

Note: Concentrations marked in yellow indicate 5+ communities, whereas concentrations marked in blue indicate an individual community.

2.4 Study Sites

Two rural, floodplain, mixed-denominational (Catholic and Evangelical) communities in the department of Ucayali were selected for this study (Fig. 4).

The first community, Leoncio Prado, is located around 10 km north from the city of Pucallpa on the shore of Lake Yarinacocha. Pucallpa is the largest urban area in Ucayali, making Leoncio Prado a peri-urban community. However, for the sake of this study, I consider Leoncio Prado a rural community because its residents practice rural livelihoods despite its proximity to Pucallpa.

The second community, Éxito, is located approximately 14 km east of Pucallpa on the Mashangay Creek, which connects directly to the Ucayali River upriver from Pucallpa. Éxito is a fully rural community with less accessibility to the city of Pucallpa than Leoncio Prado. As this chapter later reveals, Éxito and Leoncio Prado share many features as rural floodplain communities.

Study Sites



Figure 4: Leoncio Prado (A) and Éxito (B) in relation to Pucallpa.

Éxito and Leoncio Prado are also similar in size. According to village authorities, Éxito is made up of ~60 houses (roughly 200 inhabitants) and Leoncio Prado contains ~90 houses (roughly 250 inhabitants). While Leoncio Prado is seemingly larger than Éxito by number of houses, many of them appeared vacant. Éxito is also an older community, founded around 1897. Leoncio Prado was founded in 1958 by around eight people from the Nuñez Calderon family, who were originally Brazilians. At least three members of the Nuñez Calderon family still live in the community and participated in interviews for this thesis.

Agriculture is the primary livelihood activity carried out by residents in both communities. Almost everyone (88% in Éxito and 93% in Leoncio Prado) work primarily in agriculture and all individuals self-identified as *campesinos* (rural peoples) and *mestizos* (people of mixed Iberian and Indigenous ancestry) (Chibnik, 2008). In both communities, commonly grown crops include maize, cowpeas, and yuca (manioc) (Fig. 5). Melons, cucumbers, plantains, bananas, and squash were also mentioned frequently in interviews. Other crops included rice, onions, cacao, bell peppers, cilantro, tomatoes, citrus fruits, and camu camu². Though planted in small amounts, these crops are economically significant. It is further important to note that not all of these plants are produced as cash crops; some (maize, yuca, plantains) are produced mostly as food crops. Households in Éxito and Leoncio Prado also raise livestock, including pigs, hens, and roosters.

² *Myrciaria dubia*, a cherry-like fruit.

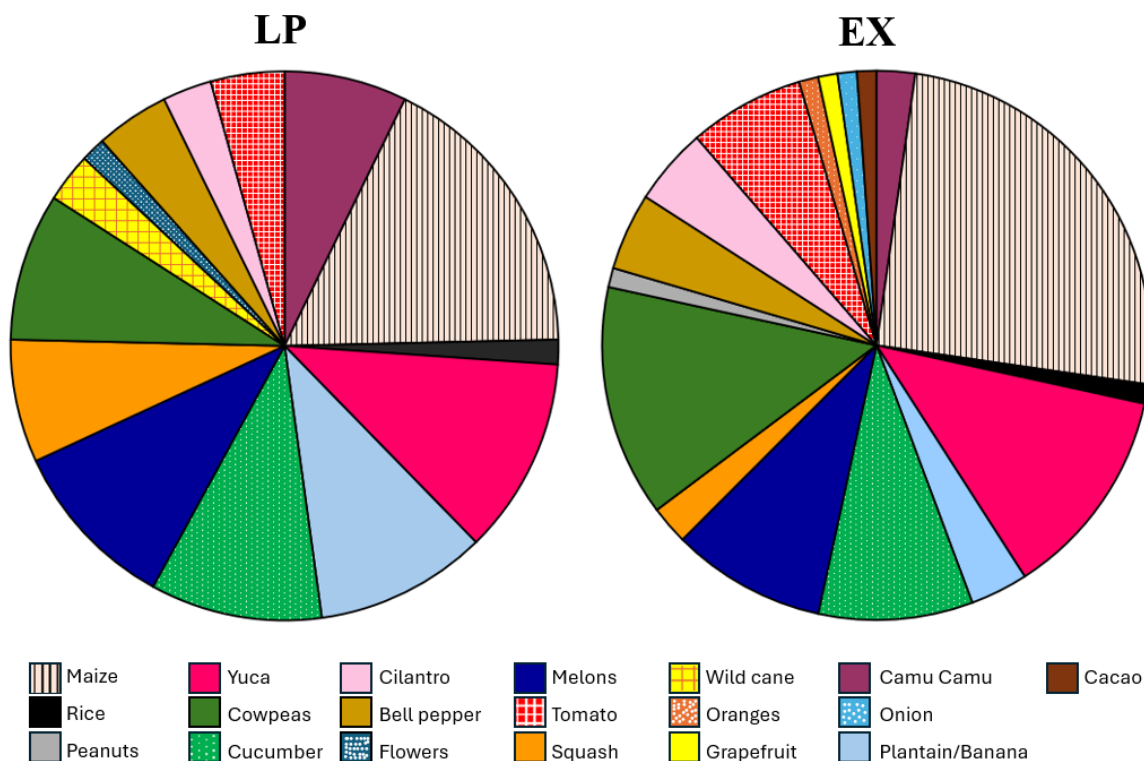


Figure 5: Agricultural diversity in Leoncio Prado (LP) and Éxito (EX).

Note: These charts represent the proportion of households that produce each crop by community. Sample: LP=15; EX=25.

As in other parts of the Peruvian Amazon, households in Éxito and Leoncio Prado rely on “multifaceted livelihood systems” to meet their needs (Porro et al., 2015, p.47). Although agriculture is critical in both communities, artisanal fishing is also common, especially during the high-water season as a means of subsistence and income. Other livelihood activities in these communities include hunting and timber extraction.

Apart from livelihoods, Éxito and Leoncio Prado share other similarities (Table 1). Both communities have a kindergarten, a primary school, and a secondary school, access to a well, a health clinic (equipped for basic medical care), and government-funded nutrition programs for children, such as the *Vaso de Leche* program. Both communities have also previously received non-governmental aid from faith-based organizations and have several sports teams within their respective districts and regions.

Community Characteristics								
Buildings	EX	LP	Infrastructure	EX	LP	Services & More	EX	LP
Kindergarten	1	1	Full-service latrines	No	No	<i>Colectivo</i> route	Yes	No
Primary School	1	1	Well (with manual pump)	No	Yes	Seasonal road	Yes	No
Secondary School	1	1	Well (no pump)	Yes	No	Sports clubs	Yes, 3	Yes, 2
Evangelical church	1	2	Water tank/tower (not including pump)	Yes	Yes	NGO presence	Yes	Yes
Catholic church	1	0	24/7 electricity	No	No	<i>Comedor popular</i>	Yes	No
Health clinic	1	1	Limited electricity	Yes	Yes	<i>Vaso de Leche</i>	Yes	Yes
Jailhouse	1	0	Household water filters	No	Yes	Guesthouse/hotel	Yes	No
Multi-use community space	1	0	Household running water	No	No	Cellphone service	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Buildings, infrastructure, and services in Éxito (EX) and Leoncio Prado (LP).

Note that the 'Buildings' category numbers represent the number of buildings present from each category.

However, differences also exist across the communities. For one, there is no Catholic church in Leoncio Prado but there are two Evangelical churches. The larger and newer Evangelical church in Leoncio Prado was built by the *Misión Emanuel Iglesia Jangjae*, a South Korean Evangelical organization (Fig. 6).



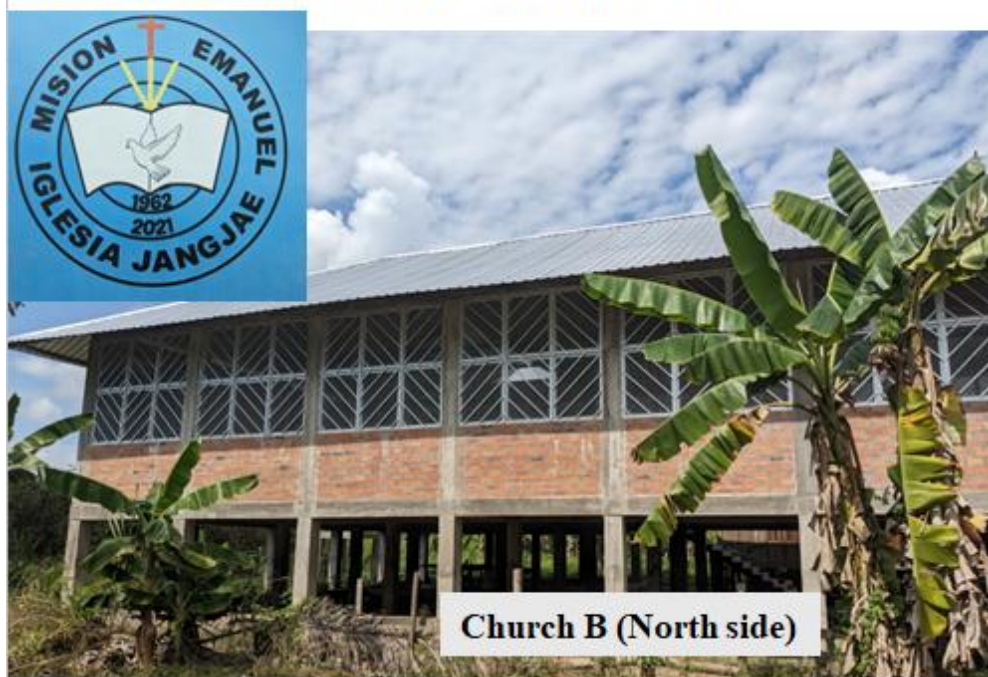
**Church B
(South side)**

Church A

Church A: Original (smaller) Evangelical church

Church B: New (larger) Evangelical church*

*Built by Misión Emanuel Iglesia Jangjae in 2021



Church B (North side)

*Figure 6: Churches in Leoncio Prado.
(Photos by author)*

In Éxito, both churches (Evangelical and Catholic) are located within the northwest boundary of the community, which I deem the ‘Evangelical Quarter’ (Fig. 7). Households in this zone mainly consist of Evangelical families, and the Evangelical church sits on the western corner. The Evangelical Quarter otherwise consists of a large overgrown field that had once been a *chacra* [agricultural field]. According to residents, the community collectively purchased this parcel of land from a community member to allocate for building homes for newcomers, many of which happened to be Evangelicals. During fieldwork in the summer of 2024, two new houses had been built in the Evangelical Quarter for incoming families. Éxito’s multi-use community centre is also located within the Evangelical Quarter (Fig. 7, inset). The Evangelical church was built during the COVID-19 pandemic without external support (unlike Leoncio Prado), and at the time of data collection, a Catholic church was under construction nearby in the Evangelical Quarter (Fig. 8).

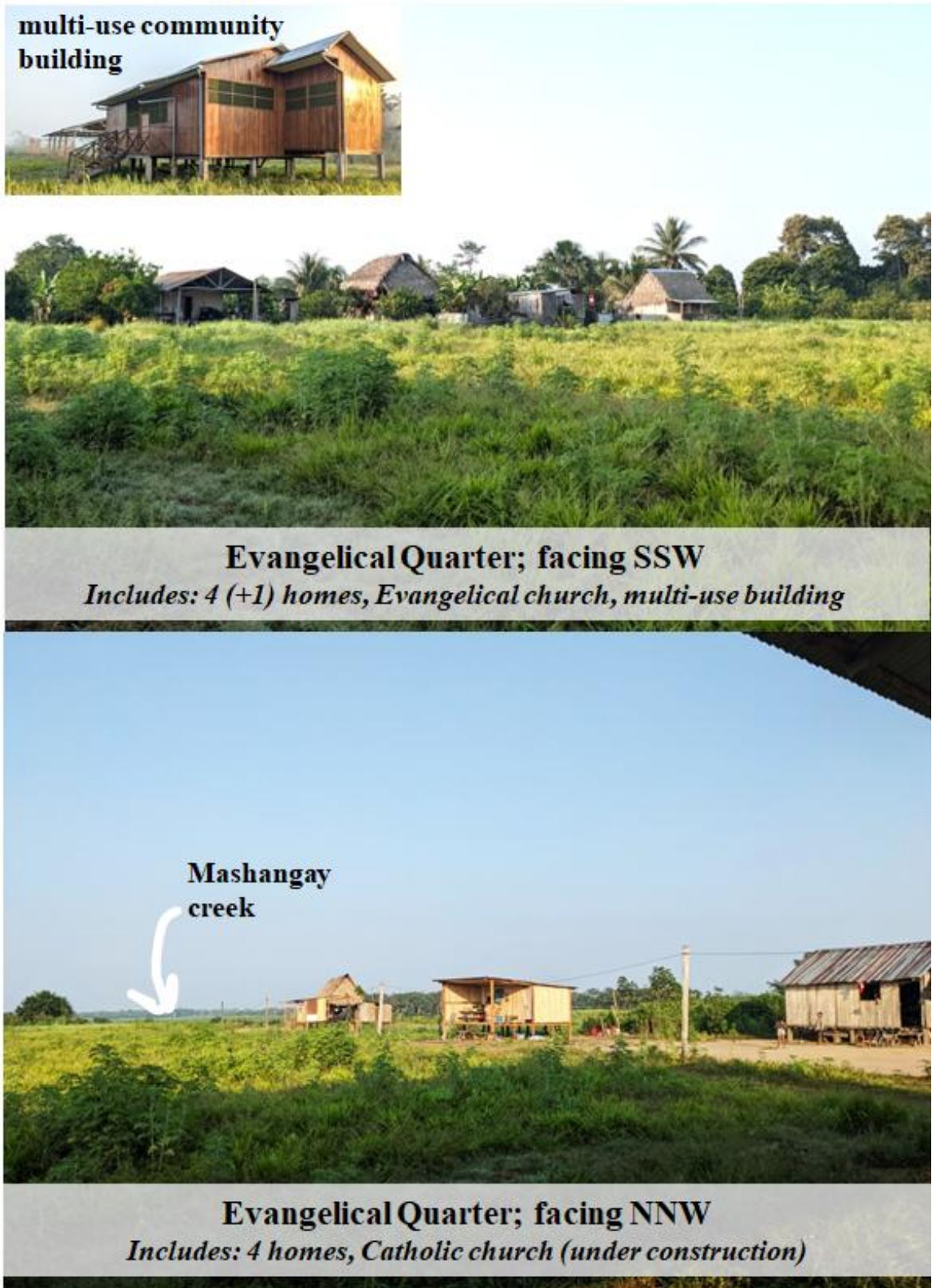


Figure 7: Evangelical Quarter and multi-use community centre (inset) in Éxito.
(Photos by author)



'Iglesia Aposento Alto' (Evangelical church)
In easternmost corner of Evangelical Quarter



Catholic Church (under construction)
In northernmost corner of Evangelical Quarter

*Figure 8: Churches in Éxito.
(Photos by author)*

To continue, both communities have access to a well for drinking and other household needs. Leoncio Prado's well is serviced by a manual pump, which was built as a partnership between two Christian charities (Living Water International and LIFE Outreach International). In Éxito, the well is serviced by a bucket and rope. Both communities also have water tanks built by non-governmental organizations. These tanks are on large metal towers that were meant to supply households with running water, but both were not in use at the time of fieldwork. Sanitation-wise, households in neither community had access to full latrines except for in school buildings (Fig. 9).



*Figure 9: Water and sanitation infrastructure in Éxito (EX) and Leoncio Prado (LP).
(Photos by author)*

Both communities also lacked consistent electricity at the time of fieldwork. In Éxito, community members operate a diesel-powered generator between 6:00 and 9:30 PM to supply community members with electricity for various purposes. Apart from lighting streets and homes, electricity is widely used for charging electronic devices, listening to music, and watching television. In Éxito, community members make monthly contributions towards purchasing the fuel required for the generator, but in Leoncio Prado, electricity in the evening is not always available due to a lack of consistent community contributions.

In terms of accessibility, both communities are accessible by road or river. Leoncio Prado is located along the inner shore of Lake Yarinacocha, meaning it is accessible year-round by boat and inaccessible by road from Pucallpa. However, Leoncio Prado is connected to upland communities on *la isla* [the island] by dirt road, which is wide and serviced mostly by *motokar*³ or bicycle. Conversely, travel to and from Éxito looks different depending on the season. During the high water (flood) season, Éxito is located on a *colectivo* [river bus] route which provides regular service between communities in the Mashangay basin and Pucallpa. However, during the low water (drought) season, the Mashangay basin's waterways dry up, greatly limiting river accessibility. To continue accessing the Ucayali River during the summer months, communities along the Mashangay creek gather to maintain a dirt road through the *chacras* and jungle to a port on the edge of the river. During this season, individuals travel by *motokar*, motorcycle, truck, or by foot along this road to reach the port and access *colectivos*. Leoncio Prado by comparison is not serviced by any *colectivo* and thus boat travel is relatively more expensive, as boats in Lake Yarinacocha are mostly the *botes turísticos* [tourist boats]. For comparative purposes, where a regular *colectivo* trip to Éxito costs five soles per person and lasts roughly 45 minutes, travel to and from Leoncio Prado via *bote turístico* costs roughly 35 soles and lasts 15 minutes. Consequently, people in Leoncio Prado are more isolated from Pucallpa, and may choose to not engage in as much trade and sales in the city markets as those from Éxito do. By travelling to Pucallpa, members of rural communities can also access *rápidos* [fast boats] at the port if they desire to travel to towns and cities along the Ucayali River that are otherwise inaccessible. Access to *rápidos* increases the geographic regions and market hubs that people can access, provided they have the funds to do so.

³ A *motokar* (short for *motocarro*) is a three-wheeled motorized vehicle, synonymous to *tuk tuk* vehicles in Southeast Asia. They are generally used for transporting people and lightweight goods.

Spatially, Éxito and Leoncio Prado are also different, with Éxito's homes concentrated around one main road and Leoncio Prado's homes laid out in a grid-like pattern (Fig. 10).

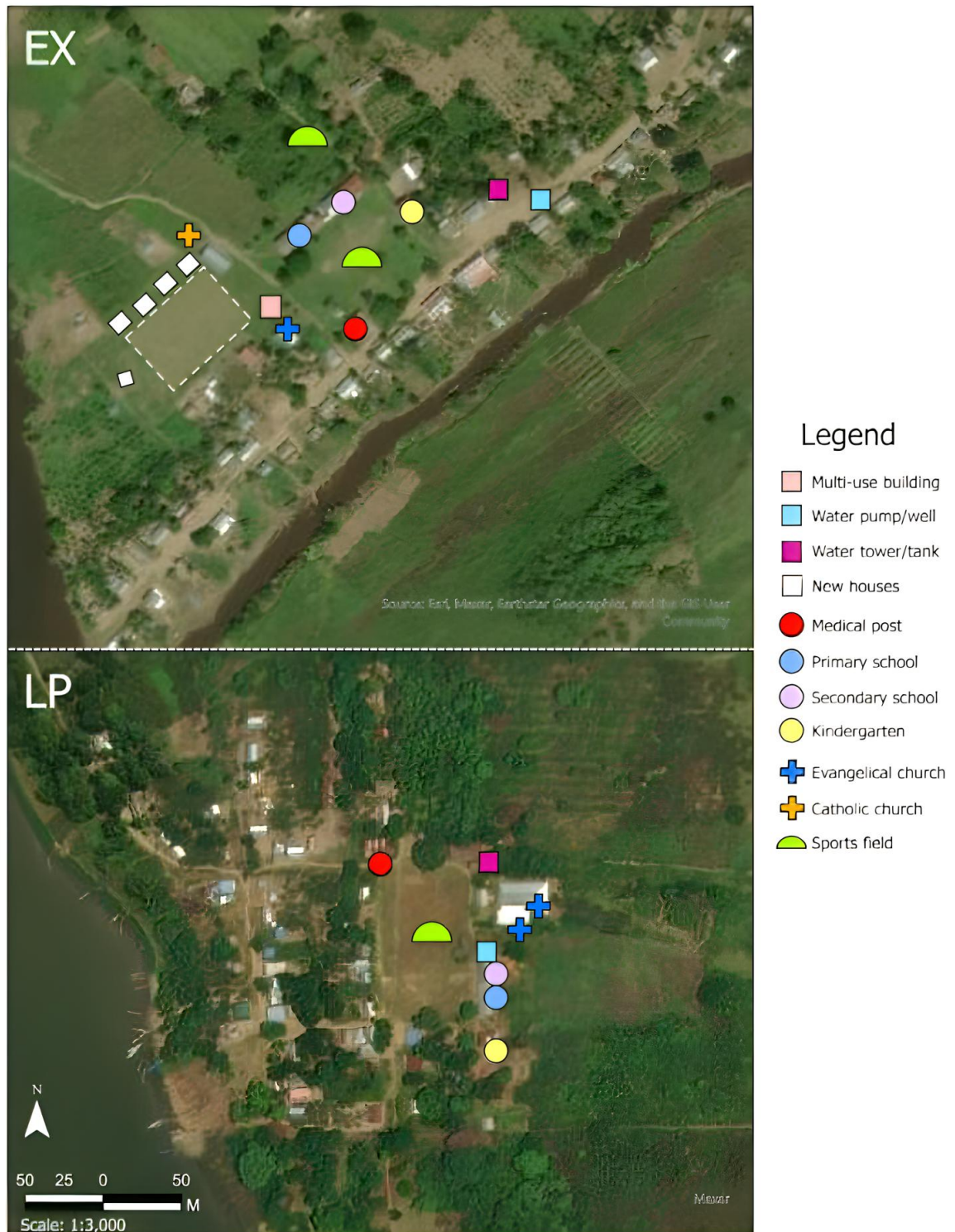


Figure 10: Key locations in Éxito (EX) and Leoncio Prado (LP).

As previously mentioned, the *Vaso de Leche* program also exists in both communities. *Vaso de Leche* is a large social transfer program administered by the Peruvian government with a focus on nutrition for malnourished children aged 0-13 in rural regions where food insecurity is more prevalent (Stifel & Alderman, 2003). In both communities, the *Vaso de Leche* program operates on a volunteer basis, often by mothers who prepare lunch for the community's children while they are in the first half of their school day. Éxito also has another similar nutrition program, *Qali Warma*, and a government-sponsored *comedor popular* [soup kitchen], where meals can be purchased for low prices.

2.5 Methods

This research draws on fieldwork conducted in Ucayali, Peru from June to August 2024. I worked primarily in Éxito and Leoncio Prado with the help of a local field assistant to liaise between myself and my interlocutors. I chose my study sites through scouting trips, with the goal of examining community size (to ensure there was an ample pool of potential interlocutors) and accounting for denominational diversity (Catholic and Evangelical) to make sure the diversity of rural Amazonian Christianity would be well-represented. I also chose communities based on overall accessibility, and whether I could travel there with ease from Pucallpa. Once Éxito and Leoncio Prado were selected as study sites, I proceeded to conduct fieldwork in the communities in stages, with Leoncio Prado first. During my first visit to Leoncio Prado, the community president invited me to return later to speak in front of the entire community about my research and to give myself a chance to begin recruiting interlocutors. During that meeting, my first four interlocutors volunteered to participate in interviews, and I was set to return to the community on a scheduled basis to continue my work. Recruitment was somewhat challenging in Leoncio Prado, especially compared to Éxito, as my field assistant had lived in Éxito for years prior and was able to relay my research with ease to the community members he already knew personally. Regardless of recruitment, I took eight separate day trips to Leoncio Prado throughout late June to early July and was more successful in securing interlocutors in each subsequent visit. Conversely, trips to Éxito were longer (three days each) and more intensive (sometimes completing as many as seven interviews per day). I made four visits to Éxito from mid July to mid August.

My interlocutors across both communities consisted of 21 males and 19 females between the ages of 19 and 72. An effort was made within each community to choose interlocutors representing a variety of voices and stories. To do this, I aimed to distribute Catholic (n=21) and Evangelical (n=18) interlocutors evenly across both study sites. I additionally chose to include the responses of one additional interlocutor who is a member of the Evangelical Association of the Israelite Mission of the New Universal Covenant (AEMINPU), a syncretic Judeo-Christian religious movement found across Peru. This interlocutor considered himself a Christian, and his inclusion in the interviews adds an additional layer of interest and representation of the diversity within rural Amazonian Christianity. During my time in Peru, I also travelled for ten days to a community named Nueva Italia in the upper Ucayali basin (10-12 hours via *rápido* from Pucallpa) with the Evangelical organization RiverWind. This trip provided me with valuable contextual information on the state of development, education, and the role of Christian NGOs and partnerships in different reaches of the Ucayali basin. My experiences on this trip inform my analysis of rural Amazonian Christianity in Chapters 4 and 5 but are not explicitly mentioned. I also spent one month studying Spanish in Arequipa, Peru prior to arriving in Ucayali which allowed me to become comfortable having Spanish conversations and more familiar with Peruvian culture.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this project, I chose to incorporate a variety of lenses to frame my work. My fieldwork in Peru consisted of a mixed methods approach, where I employed two semi-structured questionnaires: First, a quantitative community leader survey (n=2 responses) and second, a qualitative personal interview (n=40 responses). By using both quantitative (survey) data and qualitative (interview) data, this thesis works with both contextual and generalized knowledge of my setting and interlocutors, while also providing my subsequent analysis with a mix of rich and reliable data (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Before involving my interlocutors in the community leader survey or personal interview, a consent process was undertaken. First, interlocutors received a Spanish language information sheet to review as I explained the interview process, estimated interview length, audio recording consent, and the potential use and publication of their responses. Once explained, interlocutors were asked whether they would be willing to participate in an interview with me. Upon agreement, I re-iterated the audio recording process and details on potential publications. To confirm their understanding, I proceeded to ask them to give their consent towards an audio recording (to remain unpublished) and the use of their name, information, and responses in my thesis. Although almost every interlocutor consented to their real names being

used, I later decided to simply create pseudonyms for everyone to account for any privacy concerns, as some interviews dealt with difficult topics. I used Sonix AI for the first stage of interview transcription in Spanish following each community visit. This was then followed by proofreading and interview translation from Spanish to English on my own.

The community leader survey was used to collect information about community demographics, history, and the community's past experiences with hazards. One leader from each community was consulted (n=2 total). In combination with portions of the PARLAP community-level surveys, I later used these data to assess the state of development in my field sites and as a foundational tool for the qualitative portion of my work. My second tool, the personal interviews, consisted of a longer semi-structured questionnaire which prompted my interlocutors (n=40) to comment on a variety of relevant topics, including: livelihoods, sense of belonging and unity (to frame and gauge for social cohesion), social and environmental challenges (to understand potential rifts and causes of fragmentation), experiences with mutual aid (again, for social cohesion), experiences in past floods and droughts, and religious beliefs (to better understand rural Amazonian Christianity). Choosing to use semi-structured interviews allowed my interlocutors to express the fullness of their opinions and points of view, while maintaining some sense of form to later validate their responses (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is their ability to provide deeper meaning for topics otherwise obscured by rigidity, especially when topics are highly subjective (Evans & Jones, 2011; Bryman & Bell, 2016). This was especially relevant for the sections of my work on religious beliefs, personal accounts of disaster aid, livelihood challenges, and more. Furthermore, interviews conducted within the geographic settings they discuss are especially useful for pulling apart nuance in deeper data—evidenced by findings on ‘walking interviews’—which I drew upon during my fieldwork by sitting within and outside of people's homes and workplaces as we spoke (Evans & Jones, 2011).

I also used participant observation, ethnography, and auto-ethnography as methods of inquiry and reflection during my fieldwork. Ethnographic participant observation allowed me to understand my interlocutors in greater depth. These approaches also informed the analysis and discussion found in my substantive chapters to better humanize my interlocutors, characterize their narratives, and settle my readers in the field with me (Bryman & Bell, 2016; Parker-Jenkins, 2018). In the anthropology of religion, ethnography is employed to allow the researcher to document the social and practical aspects of religiosity, or lived religion, beyond what textual approaches can provide,

which are often too idealized (McGuire, 2008; Murchison & Coats, 2015). Likewise, Saliba's (1974) 'new ethnography' explains that ethnographic approaches seek to unearth the principles underlying culture. Saliba (1974) informs my fieldwork particularly through his description of "empathy training" for ethnographers of religion (p.145). Geographic ('space-focused') approaches to fieldwork on religion also allow for phenomenological (personal experiences) and social constructivism (social and political dynamics) approaches to be better connected, which I aimed to do with this thesis (Knott, 2010).

I also tap into small autoethnographic reflections within my analysis to help me to wrestle with (and within) my own 'embodied' narratives on the cross-cultural experience of fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon (Ross, 2024; Amoroso, 2021; Spry, 2001). During my fieldwork I collected these reflections with the use of a field journal. I also used this journal to take notes about other observations, such as notes about Evangelical church services, local travel experiences, sports games, agricultural labour parties (*mingas*), cooking, and seed preparation. At times, I also sketched what I found interesting or unusual and created mental maps as a mode of discovery and to engage my memory of key places and names, inspired by Taussig's (2011) book, *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Overall, my written reflections and observations served several purposes: 1) to remind me of any interesting information or findings that were not captured in audio recordings; 2) to provide me with a space for self-reflection (Spry, 2001; Amoroso, 2021); and 3) to note down the names of any key interlocutors whose life stories or responses I found compelling. The latter point about key interlocutors was later crucial for writing my ethno-case studies (Parker-Jenkins, 2018). After my fieldwork tasks were complete, I returned to Canada and incorporated my ethnographic findings and reflections into my interview coding and data analysis to form the basis for my substantive chapters.

2.6 Positionality

This research acknowledges my position as a Canadian graduate student conducting fieldwork among rural Peruvians, seeking to observe and learn about their lives and culture. Cross-cultural research, including writing my ethno-case studies, inevitably operates within assumptions and a limited understanding of cultural phenomena. I recognize these limitations, as well as the privilege associated with my identity as a white, Canadian woman. Throughout my fieldwork, I frequently

encountered moments where my interlocutors highlighted our differences, often centering casual discussions on my appearance. This dynamic was particularly noticeable in conversations with other women, where I sensed a degree of ‘othering’ that at times positioned me in a place of ‘preference.’ In response, I sought to navigate and soften this divide through informal conversations and repeated site visits, allowing friendships to develop. While racial distinctions remained evident, these shared moments—especially through conversations and communal meals—fostered meaningful connections between us.

My research also explores themes of faith and lived religion, which are deeply personal to me and my interlocutors. My background within Protestantism provided me with a foundation for engaging in religious discussions with ease. When speaking with Catholic interlocutors, I made a conscious effort to set aside preconceived notions about denominational differences. This approach allowed me to recognize the distinct nature of Peruvian Christianity—particularly rural Amazonian expressions—as fundamentally different from my North American experiences. Embracing this unfamiliarity enabled me to observe the practices and rituals of both Catholic and Protestant communities with a more neutral perspective than I had initially anticipated, ultimately enhancing my understanding even in the bounds of being an ‘outsider.’ Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my identity, religious background, and personal convictions shape my worldview and inevitably influence my interpretations within this thesis. Recognizing my positionality allows for a more reflexive engagement with the research, ensuring that the findings presented here are situated within the contexts of both my life and the cultural realities of my interlocutors.

Chapter 3: Challenges in Environment, Social Life, and Accessibility

By the time August arrived, Éxito had somehow begun to feel emptier. One morning, Ada and I walked to the *bodeguita* to buy ingredients to make lunch. The moment we stepped out from the shade, the sun bore down on us with an unrelenting heat. As we made our way down the road, a gust of wind sent a thick cloud of dust into our eyes, forcing me to squint. It struck me then that I had not seen rain since June.

Inside the shop, the woman behind the counter looked at us excitedly while her young daughter soothed a crying baby on the couch. Scattered across the shop tables were handfuls of wilted vegetables, two salted fish, and a few tin cans of preserved milk and yogurt. The once-abundant bread, sweets, eggs, and fresh produce that had filled the shop just two months ago were gone.

“Do you have chicken and oil?” I asked.

The woman shook her head. There was only half a litre of oil left, and no more chicken.

This chapter investigates the most common environmental and social challenges faced by the community members of Éxito and Leoncio Prado. It also explores problems associated with community accessibility and how these challenges and problems may impact social cohesion and therefore resilience. This chapter thus contextualizes Éxito and Leoncio Prado and evaluates the state of social cohesion and fragmentation, informing itself on Fonseca et al. (2019). This chapter helps later frame discussions of rural Amazonian Christianity in Chapters 4 and 5.

To begin, 39 out of 42 interviewed individuals cited facing one or more environmental challenges in their respective communities. Social challenges proved to be more difficult for people to connect with, where 18 individuals claimed no social challenges whatsoever. Table 2 below demonstrates a host of diverse challenges from both communities, split into two distinct categories—environmental and social.

Environmental challenges	Interview excerpts⁴
Flooding	The crops die when there is a big flood, and there is no money. We suffer a lot here during floods because there is no more yuca. (Steffani, LP ⁵)
Drought/hot weather	The sun is heating up the plants a lot and they are not producing as well as they could be. (Jose, LP)
Pollution (garbage, solid waste, chemicals, etc.)	The water we drink comes from the well, but when it runs dry, we use river water. [But] when it rains, a lot of the waste from the toilets drains into the river too... (Julio, EX)
Deforestation/logging	Some people here kill the trees as they work and take the wood. But they don't plant again, and the trees cannot plant themselves. (Roberto, LP)
Forest fires/smoke season	The smoke (from what we burn as farmers) and the garbage pollutes everything. (Julio, EX)
Quality and number of fish and fishing opportunities	There were all kinds of fish here before. Now there are fewer... So, fishing is no longer enough to eat. (Diego, LP)
Strong winds	The wind knocks down our plants in the fields because it is so strong... (Elissa, EX)
Social challenges	Interview excerpts
Low/unstable economy; financial struggles	Sometimes corn costs a lot more and sometimes less. Sometimes [our corn] produces well and sometimes it doesn't. (Leo, EX)
Disputes/fights/conflicts in community	There are arguments here, sometimes fights too. (Janeth, EX)
Lack of consensus among community members	Some people wanted to improve our drinking water with the [water] tank, but others did not. So, we haven't improved our water, and we don't have it yet in our homes. If we were united, we would have a better Éxito. (Carmen, EX)
Lack of support and relief [governmental]	We hardly have support from the government. As you may have noticed, we don't always have water, we don't have basic services... (Brayan, EX)
Lack of basic services	We don't have 24-hour electricity here. We are stressed by our poverty. (Diego, LP)
Gossip	People make others feel very bad because they gossip. (Luis, EX)
Lack of year-round accessibility	We have the road right now, but that road is not a real road, it is temporary. (Abel, EX)
Health troubles	It is a challenge here to stay healthy. (Julio, EX)

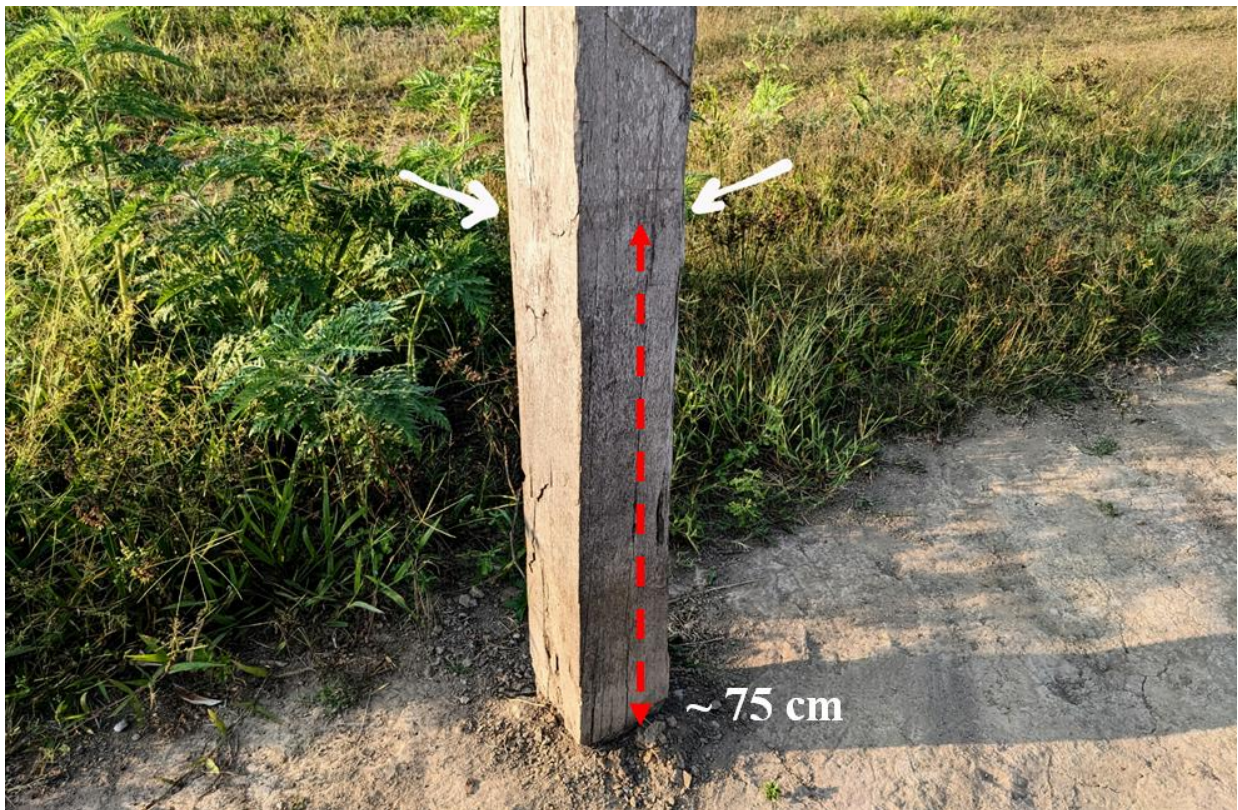
Table 2: Environmental and social challenges with illustrative interview excerpts.

⁴ All interview excerpts have been transcribed and translated by the author.

⁵ All interlocutors were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Gendered pseudonyms align with interlocutor genders. The titles 'EX' and 'LP' designate community (EX=Éxito; LP=Leoncio Prado). A list of all interlocutor pseudonyms (with true ages and religion/denominations) can be found in Appendix I.

3.1 Environmental Challenges

Annual flooding was by far the most prominent environmental challenge to 18 people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado. The 2023-24 flood season was also cited to be a particularly difficult one by people in both communities. Some cited that the flood line reached to around 75 cm high (Fig. 11). Considering the community's collective memory of this flood, people were able to quickly and specifically identify how floods created a variety of challenges for individuals and the community at large.



*Figure 11: High-water mark from 2024 flood season in Éxito.
(Photo by author)*

People often explained that flooding was an agricultural challenge. People were particularly concerned with their *chacras* being destroyed by the flood, which many went on to link to economic difficulties, such as not having enough produce to sell and subsist on. Furthermore, without a stable source of starchy foods like plantains and yuca, community members mentioned

that they rely on food provisions and other external aid during bad floods, expressing varying levels of food insecurity:

I understand that we need floods, but sometimes there's nothing to eat and nothing to drink because the water covers everything. When the plantains die, we have to look for something else to eat. (Manuel, EX)

Manuel's excerpt highlights how the flood season can create challenges for food security when the *chacras* are covered with water and crops are damaged or unproductive. Without growing as much food to sell at the market, households also suffer from lower incomes during this season. However, many explained that *viveres* [provisions] were distributed to rural communities by the regional government during large floods to alleviate food insecurities. According to residents and local news broadcasts of the *viveres* distributions in Éxito, residents received oil, rice, sugar, corn flour, and noodles. However, during a less intense ('normal') flood, residents may not receive any provisions, and in those cases, people explained that transitioning to a fish-heavy diet can help. Fish is also consumed regularly throughout the year but was most common during the high-water season. Some people in Éxito also happily explained that floods brought the community an abundance of fish. Some described this abundance of fish as a blessing from God.

The second most prominent environmental challenges are droughts and hot weather, representing 9 responses. Like flooding, droughts and very high temperatures were cited as challenges due to their impact on agriculture. During the low-water (dry) season, the lack of consistent rainfall means that *chacras* fail to produce quality crops, or may fail to produce crops at all, again affecting the economic situations of rural households. Starting around the end of June, Éxito and Leoncio Prado were both incredibly dry. Much of the Amazon basin had entered a drought by July 2024, and it lasted until around November 2024, with large impacts on transportation, food security, education, and health, especially in disconnected rural communities (Gabay, 2024). Many people in both communities claimed that the 2024 drought had been one of the worst in years. Residents also often complained in passing about the lack of rainfall, with some not being able to recall the last time they had seen or felt rain. These findings align with what headlines had written about the intensity of the September 2024 Amazon wildfires, which were linked to drought conditions, rural farming practices, and climate change (Kahn, 2024; Hoey, 2024). Because of this drought, the

maize crop that managed to survive in Éxito was harvested early, promptly dried out in the streets, and replanted to hopefully glean a better second harvest (Fig. 12).



*Figure 12: Maize drying in the sun on a tarp.
(Photo by author)*

Note: Kernels are later removed and replanted.

During the drought, I also noticed that people attempted to save their crops by carrying buckets of water to their *chacras* to pour on their plants, for example. Droughts occurring out of line with regular seasonality cycles may force individuals to change or adapt their livelihoods. Most floodplain communities like Éxito and Leoncio Prado follow an annual agricultural cycle following several climatic phases. Agricultural activities, such as when to sow, cultivate, harvest, and perform field clearing (swidden) all depend on the consistency and predictability of hydrological and climatological phenomena (Fig. 13).

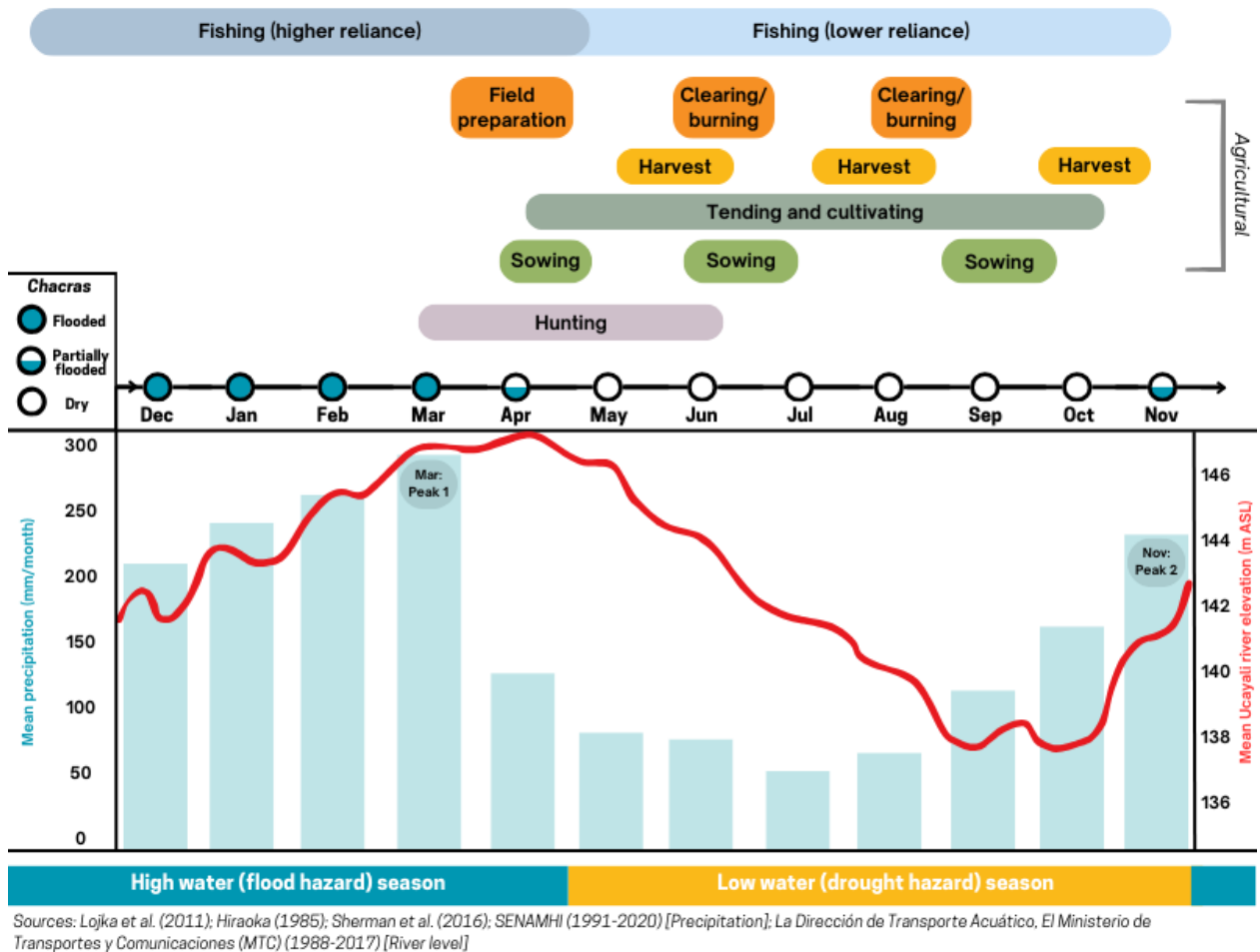


Figure 13: Floodplain agricultural-seasonality cycle and livelihood activities.

Note: In the middle Ucayali basin, timber extraction (not pictured here) also occurs as a regular annual livelihood activity but vary more drastically community-to-community. During field preparation season, plots of land at the highest elevation are prepared first for sowing. Fields found at lower elevations are prepared later in the year once floodwaters fully recede.

During extended or severe bouts of dry weather, rural people are faced with a precarious and unpredictable seasonality cycle. If a field is unable to be cleared in time due to weather constraints, for example, people may face additional livelihood challenges or feel that their harvests are unreliable. Apart from various agricultural challenges associated with droughts, some respondents also explained that extremely hot weather impacted their ability to work efficiently during the day:

It is hot here and just getting hotter. As of 10:00 or 11:00 AM, it is no longer possible to work because of the heat. If the leaves shiver [from the wind], I know I can work. People here can only work for around four hours and then they must rest... (Isabel, LP)

Isabel made it clear that extreme heat affects agricultural productivity, but also human health and well-being. Interestingly, Isabel also linked hot weather back to water sources like the lagoon near her house. She explained that the lagoon recently dried up completely and that it had dried up the previous year too. She then explained that the lagoon is a source of fish for food, which adds complexity to the water scarcity issue:

Before, the fish didn't dry up and die, but now they do. The longer I live, I realize that the lagoons and fish here didn't dry up [like this] many years ago... Right now, all the fish have died, but even the herons need food! (Isabel, LP)

Isabel's quote demonstrates an understanding of interconnected environmental systems by mentioning how herons have their own dietary requirements that are unmet if all the fish continue to "dry up." Isabel's understanding of interconnected systems also extended to the topic of deforestation later in her interview, which echoes Lojka et al. (2011) who found that forest cover had been decreasing significantly since 2000 in the region. Three other respondents also mentioned that deforestation was an environmental challenge, yet their reasons for concern varied. Often, people were concerned about deforestation over personal issues, rather than worrying about environmental preservation, habitat conservation, or climate change mitigation. For example, people were concerned about how they could manage working outdoors in the heat if trees continued to be cut down. Having sufficient shade around one's house, for example, was also important, as it helps them stay cool while working around the home. When prompted about what solutions or actions could be taken to solve deforestation, people stated simply that "when we cut [trees], we need to replant [them]." All in all, droughts and hot weather created multi-dimensional personal impacts towards livelihoods and were often associated with other environmental systems.

Not far behind droughts and hot weather was pollution, with eight responses. Some people cited solid waste contamination being a problem, as the lack of pit (contained) latrines contaminate drinking and bathing water during the flood season. Others were concerned with pesticides and herbicides ending up in their drinking and bathing water because excess chemicals are regularly disposed of directly into nearby bodies of water. In Éxito, pollution is a more pressing issue to

residents than those in Leoncio Prado. This is likely due to Éxito's reliance on untreated surface water for drinking and bathing, especially when water levels from the dug well become low. Conversely, last year, Leoncio Prado received household water filters from the Peruvian Ministry of Health, allowing people to have potable drinking water (Fig. 14). The pump well in Leoncio Prado (or surface water from Lake Yarinacocha) is used for laundry and bathing.



*Figure 14: In-home water filter (left) and a typical home in Leoncio Prado (right).
(Photos by author)*

Environmental challenges and systems are often interconnected. This is made evident in Éxito and Leoncio Prado where the challenges of flooding, droughts, extreme heat, and pollution are almost always associated with agriculture and rural livelihoods. Because of this, some respondents explained that their community needed to develop better environmental capacities and target barriers to development barriers:

This year it flooded a lot, and many of us told the municipalities and the regional government that we needed help, but they didn't come. They don't support our town because the floods come every year and [always] wash away everything. Our farms are left as good as new once the flood is over. [The municipalities] don't give us importance so people mostly see to themselves... That is the difficulty that this town faces. But if we had a lot of [governmental] support, life would be very different... We would have more development. (Óscar, LP)

Like Óscar, others also explained that the municipal government's willingness to provide aid is inconsistent, unclear, and limited. Óscar's views also suggest a dependency on the state for development and humanitarian aid. However, most interviews suggested that people should be resourceful and able to plan for their futures themselves:

I've seen kitchens [here] with no food to eat. It made me decide to save my own food until May. During the flood we dedicate our time to fishing. Thank God I still have my son here with me [to help me]. Fishing is the only solution. We have lots of fish [during the flood], but each person must find salt, sugar, noodles, and rice for themselves. (Manuel, EX)

Manuel's example suggests that households and individuals face the challenge of food security during the flood season with minimal collaboration or aid. The emphasis on self-reliance in both his quote may indicate that there are barriers to collaboration between community members, which speaks to the capacity for the larger community to build resilience. Social cohesion may be weakened because of individualistic mindsets (Fonseca et al., 2019). Like Manuel's perspective, others cited that people in their communities "work on their own," or "don't share," or "are petty," which may indicate some level of disunity. These examples continue to suggest a general lack of cohesiveness in Éxito and Leoncio Prado when it comes to agricultural work and sharing goods. The chief cause for this is unclear, but may be due to preconceived notions, cultural reasons, or environmental conditions suggesting a need for independence and lack of reciprocity (Fonseca et al., 2019). However, my experience interacting with individuals in both communities (and beyond) suggest differently—that individuals are also quite generous with their belongings and time.

Again, the environmental challenges described in both communities were interrelated and shared a commonality in their link to agriculture. This again emphasizes the importance and relevance of agriculture in the communities, and how hazards are more than just simple inconveniences. Although not evidently disastrous in this thesis, floods and droughts have the potential to both devastate and transform the communities, especially through agricultural impacts.

3.2 Social Challenges

When it came to social challenges, ten respondents spoke at length about financial struggles. A “low” or unstable economic situation often formed part of this challenge, referring to a lack of economic activity through sales, trades, and exchanges in the rural-urban marketplace:

The economy is low. There is no work here. Right now [this challenge] is the worst because the majority do not have work [to do]. In September or October, the harvest will begin and there will be a bit more economic movement. There are seasons here when you work and seasons when you don't. (Rosa, EX)

The periods of “low” and “high” economy in Éxito and Leoncio Prado appear to be related to growing seasons, and ultimately to the annual flood-drought cycle. Rosa explained that during the summer months when the maize and other cash crops are growing but are not yet ready for harvest, that there is less “economic movement” than when the harvest season comes, and products are sold in markets. The seasonality of some agricultural output also contributes to the low economy. For example, during June 2024, countless large bags of citrus fruits were being shipped to Pucallpa on the *colectivos*, but once mid-July arrived, they were no more. From mid-July into mid-August, the sole product I observed being shipped to Pucallpa from the Mashangay region (near Éxito) were watermelons. This was due to variable fruit seasonality.

Two community members also explained that a lack of year-round accessibility (due to the high and low water seasons) creates financial challenges because of varied costs throughout the year. For rural people, a low and unstable economy also means that there are less opportunities for making money and may require higher reliance on credit and loans. However, individuals may not always have access to agrarian loans and other forms of governmental support for financial relief. For example, during the low economy, Jorge⁶ from Éxito explained: “The only thing we can do is to try to make our own capital and stand up for ourselves.” Jorge also explained that *campesinos* like him sometimes require loans so that they can afford to take their produce to markets in the city (Pucallpa).

One option to relieve these challenges is livelihood and crop diversification—planting “in more fields” (Jorge, EX). When asked why the government could not provide agrarian loans, Jorge

⁶ Jorge (from Éxito) is the only AEMINPU member interviewed as part of this study. His opinions and responses are included throughout this thesis, but nuance is required to differentiate his beliefs from those of his Catholic and Evangelical counterparts, as the AEMINPU beliefs and practices are more distinct.

explained that the municipality was simply unwilling to provide them. He later continued, “Our reality is difficult. We spend money on education, food, and clothing every year, and sometimes our fields suffer due to [hazards], and we are left without resources, all isolated.”

Like Jorge, four others also cited a lack of government support and financial aid as a social challenge during the flood season, when *viveres* are few and far between. Many also explained that the municipality never provides *viveres* during the dry season or droughts despite the challenges of those seasons. Related to this, some respondents also expressed how food security is a challenge for families:

Sometimes this low economy means we don’t have enough to feed our children. I feel sorry for my little ones. Sometimes I don’t eat so they can [eat], because they are growing and need food. Each day, my first thoughts are about them. Once they are older, of legal age, they can work, and they can see what it is like. (Rosa, EX)

Alongside these challenges, respondents also mentioned difficulties staying physically healthy in their communities, which they explained was connected to a lack of high-quality food. According to Juan, Éxito’s medical agent, anemia is common among children he sees in the clinic. During our interview, he explained that children under five years old suffer from anemia across much of rural Peru, but some of the highest rates are found in Ucayali. Apart from anemia, gastrointestinal illnesses and respiratory infections were common health challenges in Éxito, which Juan correlated to, again, a lack of nutritionally rich food, poor sanitation, and air quality. Four others also commented on the lack of full sanitation services (running water, latrines) contributing to gastrointestinal health challenges in Éxito. However, Juan self-reported that approximately 20% of Éxito’s health challenges have improved since his arrival as the medical agent. At the time of fieldwork, the clinic was active and engaged in different initiatives, including teaching young women about family planning, and making contraception more accessible.

Beyond health, five people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado also mentioned disputes, fights, and conflicts among community members as social challenges. For example, in Leoncio Prado “people sometimes get into fights when they drink liquor.” (Antonio, LP)

Some also mentioned a lack of community consensus and felt that gossip was a social challenge:

I have problems with the closed-mindedness of people here... That mentality... They also gossip about me, about whether I fit in [here]. But I am a professional, so I treat everyone professionally. (Juan, EX)

People gossip badly about one another here. They make others feel very bad because they talk about them [behind their back]. (Luis, EX)

These social challenges (lack of consensus, gossiping, arguments, etc.) deal more broadly with interpersonal conflict and point to a deeper-seated lack of cooperation and reciprocity, which do not fit clearly into cohesion frameworks (Fonseca et al., 2019). As expressed by Juan, Antonio, and Luis above, these conflicts contribute to emotionally driven responses which sometimes limit further social interaction. In some cases, gossip led to social tensions and fracture among religious groups, which are examined in further detail in Chapter 4. For example, people in Leoncio Prado expressed that church services, although a driver of community cohesion through shared breakfasts and events, can separate people through an ‘us and them’ mentality:

There are some religious people [in Leoncio Prado] and others who aren’t. The church in Leoncio Prado isn’t Catholic, but it is Korean [Evangelical], and nobody here understands them. (Roger, LP)

The *Israelitas* all meet in the storage building [for church]. They meet there and tell us that if we don’t bring anything [to the meeting], we can’t come. I saw it happen. Everyone was there for church, the [Evangelical] Korean church members too, but if you don’t bring a gift, you cannot attend. (Isabel, LP)

Roger and Isabel’s examples highlight how religious difference in Leoncio Prado can be seen as social challenges. Since the Evangelical churches in Leoncio Prado were built by a South Korean Evangelical missionary organization, community members explained how they could not relate to them socially. Klever, the community president, also explained that the newest (larger) church is rarely used, because the Koreans are no longer residing in Leoncio Prado among them as they apparently once had. Additionally, AEMINPU members in Leoncio Prado apparently exclude other Christians from their meetings, which again promotes fragmentation. Limited interactions and a reduced social atmosphere in the communities could lead to less collaboration and expressions of mutual aid, which otherwise were cited as very common. For example, Karen in

Éxito explained that her neighbours are like family members to her: “We share fish and rice with each other.”

As indicated by Juan earlier, community members gossip about his lack of integration into the social fabric because he does not farm a *chacra* for himself. Juan, however, still considers himself a community member. The gossip Juan faced also made him feel like an outsider. He expressed frustration towards the rest of Éxito because they benefitted from his healthcare but failed to fully accept him as a member. Since Éxito’s “preferred lifestyle” is agricultural work, Juan’s non-agricultural role could be unintentionally acting as a “driving force” degrading social cohesion (Froese, 2023, p.51). If true, Juan’s lifestyle differences could create greater tensions within the community, inhibiting the ability for Éxito to function sustainably as an SES.

The social challenges presented in this section demonstrate potential small-scale instances of social fragmentation. Knowing that disagreements and social tensions can create barriers for resilience and development, the challenges outlined here may serve as significant influences for changing hazard and livelihood trends in the Peruvian Amazon. All in all, this section illustrates a variety of social challenges in both communities and demonstrates the significance of understanding financial and economic challenges as interrelated yet distinct from interpersonal challenges. These sections also point to how physical and social environments influence the development of social challenges (Fonseca et al., 2019).

3.3 Distance and Accessibility

A man calls out, “Mashangay! Mashangay!” as we approach the *colectivo* in Pucallpa. A makeshift bridge out of wooden planks guides us from the muddy riverbank to the bow, where we board and find a place to sit. “*Buen día*,” a younger man greets us as he loads crates of live chickens and barrels of gasoline onto the boat. Navigating through the crowded front of the boat, I weave past heaps of luggage and clusters of passengers. My field assistant Sergio and I settle into an open seat toward the back, facing a few fellow travelers who appear eager for departure. Nearby, the boat driver sits beside his twin motors, cigarette in hand, shouting something I could not understand. At last, the boat begins to move. I take a moment to observe the other passengers. A man quietly reads a newspaper. A woman in a teacher’s uniform scrolls on her cellphone. Another man sells

*aguaje*⁷ in small plastic bags to a woman. Another man sprawls across the bench, eyes closed—recovering, I learn, from an appendectomy. Two children chat with their grandmother, who smiles warmly.

Though the *colectivo* is not completely full, the diversity of its passengers reflects its essential role in rural life. For many, the *colectivo* is not just a convenience, but a lifeline, linking remote communities to urban markets, services, and opportunities. Without them, city access would be nearly impossible. After an hour's journey, Sergio and I disembark at a shoreline port where the Ucayali River meets the Mashangay creek. Before leaving the boat, I hand one of the boat owners our fare—ten *soles* (around \$3.50) for 45-minutes.

The challenges associated with accessibility are evident in both communities, but community members rarely acknowledge them explicitly. However, accessibility as a topic appeared enough times that it is worth mentioning. Accessibility was also linked to economic situations and the proximity of rural communities to a variety of networks.

The challenge of accessibility encompassed both environmental and social factors. In the Peruvian Amazon and similar regions, access to agricultural markets and credit are crucial for generating meaningful income, building assets, and managing financial and economic risks (Cardozo, 2013; Linh et al., 2019). While the ability to access financial services (money transfers, credit, and savings) is important, this type of access involves geographic determinants, such as distance. For example, a community's accessibility may be rooted in the geographies of health (proximity to hospitals and clinics), education (proximity to schools, universities, etc.), and to markets, which is most relevant to individuals in Éxito and Leoncio Prado. Overland access to markets has also shown to improve livelihood specialization in the Peruvian Amazon, despite their differential nature (Cohalan, 2007; Cardozo, 2013). Furthermore, cross-community (rural-rural) access to markets and social networks can influence household livelihood strategies, especially in highly isolated regions (Cohalan, 2007; Cardozo, 2013).

Respondents commented on the challenges of keeping multi-sited livelihoods and accessing markets in both communities. For example, Victoria from Éxito noted that “some people [in Éxito]

⁷ Moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*) fruit.

don't have *motokars* or canoes to leave.” Other residents further expressed a shared need for better accessibility to services in Pucallpa and beyond. Concerns with market access and mobility were differential due to each community's unique geographical constraints. Both communities are seasonally more accessible. During the high-water season, access to the city and other communities is generally easier because of greater access to waterways. However, some express that floods make Éxito difficult to leave:

We have access issues. We do not live in a normal paradise that you can leave when the water comes in the winter. We have the road right now, but that road is not a real road, it is temporary. (Abel, EX)

During the high-water season, boat travel also becomes more convenient for those in Éxito because the *colectivos* can travel closer to the community. Conversely, during the low-water season boat travel requires extra time, planning, and money. It is also generally less convenient as residents must first travel to the port via dirt road to access *colectivos*. Carmen explains this challenge:

When the water is high, we can easily transport our goods to the center or to Pucallpa, but it is expensive when there is no water because we must go by road. So, water is really important here. (Carmen, EX)

The implications of differential community accessibility vary. Most prominently, households receive substantial benefits by being connected to markets via rural roads—but seeing as the roads in Éxito and Leoncio Prado are seasonal and require regular maintenance by volunteers, these benefits may not apply (Cardozo, 2013; Linh et al., 2019; Jacoby, 2000). Without community (and inter-community) cohesion to organize regular road work, accessibility challenges could persist into the low-water season, and the community would have no access to urban markets or Pucallpa. A lack of access for half the year could also have implications for health and education. Residents like Carmen expressed appreciation for the *colectivos* connecting Pucallpa and Éxito. As a young (19-year-old) farmer and mother herself, the *colectivos* provide Carmen and her partner with a relatively affordable way to access markets and important services for her family in Pucallpa.

Access to transportation also provides strong social networks and connectivity across regional waterways, especially between and among more remote rural communities. This connectivity is somewhat evident from Carmen's comment on transporting her products to the center, which refers

to communities located further up the Mashangay creek, such as Santo Domingo, Santa Carmela, and Santa Teresa. This connectivity was also clear from examples of mutual aid. Several respondents mentioned selling products to people in nearby communities. It also shows a strong informal marketplace in Éxito and nearby communities. For example, Jorge spoke at length about his experience sharing cilantro seeds with his family and fellow *Israelitas* in Santa Carmela:

There is a community nearby. It is called Santa Carmela de Mashangay. Three years ago, when I was planting a lot of cilantro, I used to take my products to the wholesale market. When I met and spoke with [those from Santa Carmela], I encouraged them to sow cilantro so that they can also sell it to the market and have some more money. I said this because corn grows in 4-5 months, but cilantro grows very fast. With cilantro, I make enough money to pay for my needs in only a month and a half. First, I gave them around two kilos of seeds. Then, I gave them a foliar fertilizer to help the leaves. I supported my neighbours, my friends, in Santa Carmela, so that they also could provide for their families by planting cilantro, free of cost. I didn't sell them the seeds; I gave them from my own supply. I gave them seed so that they can plant it too. (Jorge, EX)

Jorge's excerpt points to the social determinants of religion and kin influencing the informal market. In Leoncio Prado, residents spoke about their appreciation for inter-community collaboration and informal markets as well, however these were not tied to kin or religion:

Sometimes when we work with other communities, like 11 de Agosto and Los Angeles, they support us with drinks, encouragement, and strength. (Antonio, LP)

In Leoncio Prado, partners Sofia and Roger also spoke about selling *caña brava*⁸ to artisans in 11 de Agosto, a neighbouring community focused on eco-tourism. They proudly explained that their *caña brava* would be made into handicrafts by local women for tourists to purchase. This example of inter-community collaboration is only possible because the communities are connected by road. Instead of only farming cash crops (which they also do), Sofia and Roger generate additional income by selling *caña brava* to a lucrative tourism industry despite living in a community disconnected from tourism. Finally, people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado also spoke about agricultural labour parties (*mingas*) and community public work events (*faenas*). These gatherings have been shown to influence inter and intra-community social networks and contribute to food and product exchanges in various forms (Sosnowska et al., 2015; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008).

⁸ Wildcane, also known as 'arrow cane' (*Gynerium sagittatum*).

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that access to roads and varied scales of urban and rural markets confront the geographic challenges of accessibility and distance. These markets also provide individuals with the means for livelihood diversification, which supports resilience building and financial security. Inter-community cohesion was also shown to relieve seasonal accessibility challenges through informal markets. In Éxito and Leoncio Prado, nearly all residents collectively recognize floods, droughts and pollution as environmental challenges, especially towards agriculture and health. Responses to environmental challenges seemingly drive fragmentation, however, as most people choose to tackle challenges on their own or rely on external aid rather than forming interpersonal support networks. Social fragmentation appeared through a variety of social challenges, including gossip, social tension, and disagreements. These examples of fragmentation may be either exacerbated or alleviated through each community's baseline level of cohesion and vulnerability. Religion may also play a significant role in cohesion and fragmentation, which the following two chapters explore in greater depth.

Chapter 4: Christian Disunity and Micro-Conflicts

The environmental and social challenges outlined in Chapter 3 demonstrate various levels of small-scale fragmentation. This chapter continues the discussion of social fragmentation by examining how religion, namely rural Amazonian Christianity, may contribute. It finds that denominational disagreements and a lack of unity can lead to distrust and the formation of micro-conflicts in Éxito and Leoncio Prado. It also notes that cultural attitudes—specifically threads of self-criticism—may contribute to enhancing the intensity of social fragmentation in the communities.

4.1 Hazard Theodicies

As shown in Chapter 3, difference of opinion can create tension in the communities. Investigating theodicy can be helpful for distinguishing differences in opinions, which may have implications for coping and community cohesion post-hazard or disaster. Theodicy concerns the question of how an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God could allow evil and suffering to exist in the world and coexist with it (Chester, 1998).

Disaster and hazard theodicies can be categorized into three major themes: Retributive, Free Will, and Best of all Possible Worlds (Chester, 1998). Retributive theodicy takes a fundamentalist-like approach, understanding that God sends suffering (through disasters) to humanity as a punishment for their sins, where human suffering is seen as a sign of God's anger or wrath (Chester, 1998). Individuals who employ this theodicy will often use vivid imagery from the Old Testament as evidence (Chester, 1998). The second theodicy in Chester (1998) is Free Will (or Augustinian). In this view, humanity's free will enables people to make good or bad decisions (Chester, 1998). This means that suffering (through hazards and disasters) occurs due to humanity's sinfulness and are the result of human activity (self-inflicted), rather than God's retributive actions (Chester, 1998). Disasters are also seen as contrary to God's divine purpose in this view (Chester, 1998). The third and final theodicy from Chester (1998) is called the Best of all Possible Worlds (or Irenaean). In this approach, people understand that the world is governed by the laws of physics but was still created by God (Chester, 1998). This view also understands that by suffering and enduring through difficulties (like hazards and disasters), the "greater good" is achieved—including spiritual growth and maturity (Chester, 1998, p.43).

To garner examples of how people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado adopt these three theodicy perspectives across the denominational spectrum of rural Amazonian Christianity, respondents were asked about God’s control over the environment (floods and droughts), and to provide an explanation for why they believe hazards affect them (Table 3).

Theodicy	Interview excerpts
Retributive	We pay for the delinquency of men. We pay for it through God's rage. (Lesli, EX) The Scriptures say, "I will rain showers of blessing" and in another part, "I will rain showers of curses." That's what's happening today. God says it is for our disobedience. Men will perish if we don't obey God's holy commandments. (Jorge, EX)
Free Will	Every year [the flood] does not get better and I think it is God's punishment, because people do stupid things. People [in the world] kill each other, they assault their own children, they rape women... (Isabel, LP) I know and believe that God created everything, and He brings us blessings through nature, but I think it is also partly humanity's fault. Sometimes mankind destroys nature; by cutting the forests or the trees for example. I think the drought is stronger than before because of men and women doing those things. (Jeyson, EX)
Best of all Possible Worlds	God gives you good things to think about. We remember His plans to [one day] make us dry again. You can't ally yourself with the Lord while asking Him why things [like floods] are happening. You must have patience and be calm about what the Lord gives you. (Lili, LP) [Floods] happen, not because of us, but because of Him. It is not that He does not want us to have control, but because we must focus more on Him. If something bad happens to me, instead of asking, "Oh, why did this happen to me," I tell myself, "I have to thank God." (Victoria, EX)

Table 3: Local expressions of common theodicies based on Chester (1998).

It has been noted that differences in theodicies create differential responses to disasters and hazards among religious communities (Rumahuru & Kakiay, 2020). In Éxito and Leoncio Prado, both Catholics and Evangelicals expressed theodicies that fit within at least one of Chester’s (1998) three major disaster theodicies. Respondents answered almost equally that severe floods and droughts affect their community because of either God’s wrath (retributive), human sinfulness (Augustinian), or as an opportunity to learn and practice patience and trust (Irenaeian). Some individuals also expressed clear distinctions between God’s sovereignty and humanity’s free will [to sin] in their responses. The broad consensus across the interviews was that God is in control of the environment, including over floods and droughts. Jorge (see Table 3, Retributive) later also

mentioned that if others joined him in fervent prayer that the water levels would drop immediately, and people would stop suffering from God's wrath.⁹

There was no evidence of syncretism in theodicy responses, including no discussions of the cosmos, folklore, multi-naturalism (human-animal-spirit relationships), or *Pachamama* [Earth mother]. Syncretism did not appear to influence views about hazards whatsoever. Instead, respondents employed variations of Chester's (1998) three main theodicies towards a variety of challenges, including non-environmental ones.

As the dry season went on during fieldwork, people generally began to express livelihood challenges connected to dry weather and droughts but rarely connected God to these challenges. A couple individuals expressed a desire for God to bring rain, but for the most part, community members were not interested or engaged in conversations about God's control over the environment when it imminently affected their livelihoods. Theodicies, therefore, did not take precedent over general climate-related discussions, such as the lack of rainfall, the extreme heat, and the lack of fish. Additionally, discussions about God in both communities were more likely to occur during church services and home visits, rather than in passing (unless prompted). Concerns about floods and droughts were varied. While many saw floods and droughts as a normal part of life on the floodplain, the difficulties associated with living conditions and livelihoods were evident. Often, individuals expressed that faith in God served as an aid in the face of difficulties and as a source of meaning beyond everyday existence. Over time, it also became clearer that each person held a unique expression of faith and that digging for evidence of cohesion or fragmentation through religious beliefs would require a tailored approach that extended beyond simple questions about God.

4.2 Micro-Conflicts and Lived Religion

Lived religion has been conceptualized in various ways over time and across disciplines (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). Lived religion generally represents how and in what ways an individual's everyday beliefs and religious practices are informed by external frameworks (or worlds), and the

⁹ This idea was relayed to me by my supervisor, Dr. Abizaid, who had recently been in communication with Jorge in Éxito (C. Abizaid, personal communication, 13 March 2025).

manner in which they are embodied or woven into their life (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020; Ammerman, 2014; McGuire, 2008). Lived religion can therefore differ from a denomination's specific creed or typical practices as it is highly dependent on the individual. Focusing on people's lived religion also provides a more nuanced depiction of variations within a denomination—in this case, rural Amazonian Christianity. Furthermore, by characterizing the commonalities and differences of lived religion among rural peoples, we can better understand the links between fragmentation and religion-driven social tensions, and their potential in creating larger social challenges, including towards hazards.

Denominational differences may contribute to social fragmentation, for example. This is in part due to how denominations could dictate group social identities through shared norms and values (Fonseca et al., 2019). In both Éxito and Leoncio Prado, Evangelicals felt different to their Catholic counterparts. For one, many Evangelicals (like Carmen below) explained during interviews that their Catholics neighbours take part in dancing, drinking, and festivities, but Evangelicals choose to abstain from those activities:

Evangelicals and Catholics believe in the same God, but they are different. Catholicism is not the same as Evangelicalism because the Catholic doesn't get married. Priests live alone, for example. They [Catholics] say that the best thing is to live alone. On the other hand, us Evangelicals must get married because God says that no fornicator or sinner will enter the Kingdom of Heaven [citing 1 Corinthians 6:9]. But [Catholics] don't [get married]. At church, they believe in God, but when they go out, they smoke, drink, dance, and talk to each other... and each one is very different. (Carmen, EX)

Many Evangelicals echoed Carmen's perspective on Catholics. Carmen chose to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 6:9 to explain the religious requirement behind her marriage, although not legally married herself. At 19 years old, Carmen currently has one child with her partner, the son of Éxito's visiting Evangelical pastor. The pastor visits once a week for church on Sunday and is not a community member. Interestingly, Carmen believes that Catholic individuals do not get married (her quote focuses on priests and their celibacy), when in fact there are some Catholic individuals in Éxito who are legally married, and the majority are co-living (legally single, but socially partnered). Carmen's perspective on Catholicism is telling of larger trends within interviews—where Evangelicals believe that Catholics are hypocritical or living sinful lives. Juan, a Catholic from Éxito, explains these tensions as follows:

There are controversies... the two religions don't get along very well. [Evangelicals] say to [Catholics] that they worship a saint [instead of God], and [Catholics] reply by saying that all Christians must carry that ideology to be [true] Christians. (Juan, EX)

Julia [Evangelical] elaborates that this tension extends into daily work and mutual aid, which could easily carry implications for fragmentation and community resilience during hazards:

Sometimes we [Evangelicals] work together and other times we work with them [Catholics]... But we often don't get together because we are Evangelicals, and they are Catholics. They get together [to work] on their own. (Julia, EX)

Catholic individuals in Éxito and Leoncio Prado also had specific perspectives on their Evangelical neighbours. Some Catholic individuals told stories about previously being invited to attend Evangelical church meetings by Evangelical community members because the Catholics had no church to attend. However, stories of these experiences included feelings of exclusion, where members felt a sense of otherness. For example, two Catholics explained that Evangelical church members had made them feel obligated to donate to the offering plate every time they attended the church. Julio, a Catholic, also explained how the differences between Evangelical, Catholic, and AEMINPU doctrines created tension:

[The different religions here] don't understand each other. There is a man here who is an *Israelita* [referring to Jorge]. Others are Evangelicals, but many are Catholics. We all don't get along because of our different faiths. *Israelitas* only believe in the Old Testament, Evangelicals only trust the New Testament, and us Catholics believe in both. (Julio, EX)

Julio believed that Catholicism was the only version of Christianity that considered the entire Bible sacred. He also expressed that if there was a functioning Catholic church in Éxito, then he would gather there and “become a congregation” with other Catholics in the community. Julio also voiced concern over denominational tensions:

I don't think the town can carry forward united with these differences. It became a problem the other day... When we were holding a little church meeting [among Catholics], the [Evangelicals] told us we couldn't continue because they believe that we believe in idols. (Julio, EX)

Julio's example demonstrates that Éxito's Catholic community has previously experienced difficulties with the Evangelical community because of theological differences. These micro-conflicts may also contribute to fragmentation within the social fabric of a community which could lead to challenges in decision-making and may have implications for hazards.

In Éxito, Evangelicals (and Jorge the *Israelita*) had also previously protested the Catholic church being built due to disagreements regarding the veneration of saints, which the Evangelical group deems idolatrous. Nonetheless, Éxito's Catholic community members began constructing a church in the Evangelical Quarter during the summer of 2024. The choice of location for the construction project may point to power struggles between the two denominations due to the rapid growth of the Evangelical Quarter and the arrival of several new Evangelical families during the summer. Alternatively, the construction of the Catholic church in the Evangelical Quarter may indicate that Éxito's Evangelical population is open to sharing their (informally designated) spaces with their Catholic neighbours. When asked, Éxito's Evangelicals explained that they would simply continue meeting together in their own church building and spoke at large about how beautiful their church building was, referring to it as *la casa de Dios* [the house of God].

In Leoncio Prado, the Catholic population felt that their lack of a church weakened their sense of Catholic community. Carlos and Óscar speak of this feeling:

Of course we have a church [here], but they are Evangelicals, and it was built by the Koreans. There is no church [for us Catholics] here. That is why we do not go to church. (Carlos, LP)

I don't belong to any congregation because I don't participate or go [to church]. It's mainly because there is no Catholic church here, and going to the city is difficult and requires mobility. (Óscar, LP)

What is most notable from disagreements like these, especially regarding church building projects (which require labour, materials, and time), are the ways in which fragmentation can be kindled through a seemingly small disagreement over theology. Furthermore, small disagreements over lived religion and worship styles can contribute to social tension across the entire community. For some individuals, Catholic-Evangelical denominational tension limited full participation or inclusion in church activities, whereas for others, these tensions proved to be disappointing, isolating, and difficult. Again, social and denominational tensions such as these may have

implications for hazards and resilience because people may be less inclined to gather, collaborate with one another, or provide mutual aid (Fonseca et al., 2019).

Interestingly, nobody in either community mentioned that syncretism (or syncretic features) created disunity or social problems. Syncretism was never cited as a source of tension or a driver of disagreement. In fact, it was difficult to piece apart whether people in either community believed in Indigenous cosmologies at all or engaged with any related syncretic practices. The lack of syncretism in Éxito and Leoncio Prado may indicate that syncretism may not drive fragmentation or micro-conflicts on the same level as other denominational differences do. Furthermore, while practices within rural Amazonian Christianity indeed vary along the lines of denomination, personal conviction, and hazard perception, syncretism does not appear to create division in either community.

Differences in theodicies towards hazards also did not appear to create tensions. People were generally disinterested about debating whether God sends floods and droughts as punishments (Retributive, Free Will) or as opportunities for growth (Best of all Possible Worlds). However, disagreements over building the Catholic church in Éxito for example may certainly contribute to a lack of social balance through weak interconnectedness or cohesion. Additionally, knowing that denominational tensions exist over the question of perceived idolatry, similar debates could arise over other theological questions and issues. For example, if a particularly severe flood or drought were to affect the community, it is possible that certain community members would hold to their theodicy more strongly than others, which could end up creating debates over whose sins or moral errors are responsible for making God angry enough to send a bad flood. Without interconnectedness creating unity in the face of denominational differences, social fragmentation is more likely to occur (Minh Pham et al., 2020; Fonseca et al., 2019). Furthermore, a lack of interconnectedness within small rural communities like these can create barriers towards equitable decision-making, leading to more people feeling that they were treated unfairly (Minh Pham et al., 2020). While the rise of Evangelicalism has also previously been linked to cases of social fragmentation across Latin America (Blanton, 2022; Hager, 2022; Walsh-Dilley, 2019; Opas, 2022), it is evident that religious diversity—for example, Jorge taking the Evangelical side of the debate over the Catholic church issue—increases the potential for cross-denominational tensions, which are shown to lead to further micro-conflicts, disunity, and distrust.

While this thesis does not analyze kinship as it does religion, kinship networks are also worth noting. In around half of all interviews in both communities, kinship was not directly tied to religious affinity. What this means is that although a Catholic or Evangelical family unit (man, woman, and their children) may consider themselves purely Catholic or Evangelical, the man and woman's siblings, cousins, and other extended family members may not be. There were several instances where Evangelical families or individuals had Catholic relatives, and vice versa. However, for around another quarter of all interviews, Catholicism ran deep within families, spanning a variety of generations and including extended family members. The final quarter of respondents could be divided into two main categories: 1) Catholic and Evangelical families who had relatives belonging to the AEMINPU, and 2) purely Evangelical families. The least common response was for an Evangelical family to have a purely Evangelical kinship network. This may be due to Evangelicalism being relatively new in the region but growing in popularity, as noted in Chapter 2. This could also indicate that Evangelicals are less often raised as Evangelicals from infancy but rather convert to the faith as teenagers and adults. Supporting this, Catholics in both communities always indicated that they had been raised as Catholics since infancy, whereas Evangelicals often provided conversion stories related to illness and healing:

I was sick and didn't want to give up on my life, so I gave myself to the Gospel. (Janeth, EX)

I became an Evangelical because my son had an illness. That is why I carry the Gospel [with me] because it is the power of God. (Julia, EX)

When my sister had become ill, I accompanied her to the hospital to pray for her. We went there and they preached the word of God. There I received Christ, and my family too. (Antonio, LP)

Furthermore, while there were no instances of Evangelical-to-Catholic conversions, nor atheist-to-Catholic conversions, some Evangelicals spoke about how they had once been Catholics. This demonstrating evidence of a Catholic-to-Evangelical conversion pattern was clear in both communities. Julia and Antonio's excerpts (above) also attribute the healing of their family members to their Evangelical conversions, demonstrating a potential connection between religious affinity and kinship. Generally, family members of different denominations did not create problems among themselves, also demonstrating that kinship networks may allow for cohesion where religious differences persist. Nonetheless, Evangelicals at times expressed a desire for their family members to convert:

I am an Evangelical, my brother-in-law is an *Israelita*, and my sister is a Catholic. Even though [my sister] is Catholic, I can see that she's taking steps towards accepting the Gospel. (Victoria, EX)

Victoria herself converted from Catholicism to Evangelicalism due to a dream she experienced. Now as an Evangelical, Victoria is persuading her sister to convert as well, and she believes she is seeing progress. If anything, Victoria's pursuit to convert her sister may allow her to draw nearer to her sister emotionally, or to pursue unity within her extended family along the lines of religion. Alternatively, she may desire for her sister to attend Evangelical church meetings with her or could otherwise be theologically motivated. Regardless of Victoria's motive and drive, fragmentation due to religious differences was not highly evident within kinship networks. However, there was evidence of fragmentation among neighbours of different denominations, showing that kinship networks may be more strongly held than neighbour-to-neighbour networks. Roberto, for example, expressed disdain for his Evangelical neighbours, which leads well into the following discussion of disunity and distrust:

My neighbours are Evangelicals. When they decided to become *hermanos*, nothing changed about them. They are just bad and miserable as they used to be. (Roberto, LP)

4.3 Disunity and Distrust

"Do you feel happy living here [in Éxito]? Do you feel calm here?" I prompted.¹⁰

Rosa's eyebrows furrowed in upset as she processed. "No, I don't feel happy. Yes, I feel somewhat calm living here, but not *that* calm."

As she spoke, tears began to fall, and I quickly reached for the roll of toilet paper on the table beside us to give to her as a tissue. Seeing her cry struck me with pangs of guilt and empathy. She spoke to me for a while. She told me about how her previous two romantic partners had left her, about how much she missed her teenage son who was still studying back home in Cerro de Pasco, in the Andes. She told me about how her son had no support or contact with his biological father,

¹⁰ This interview took place on 2 August 2024.

which burdened her parents who were left to care for him, and how here in Éxito she has little emotional support from her current partner.

“It’s hard to live like this,” she explained. “It is hard to know that my children do not know their parents and do not feel their love.”

Rosa also talked about the problems she faces in the community as a newcomer from a different region of Peru, and how the rest of the community gossips about her, to the point where she does not want to leave her house or participate at the Evangelical church anymore. She shared that she prefers the quieter *chacras*, further away from the rest of the town. However, her struggle with unity, belonging, and happiness in Éxito go beyond gossip and being accepted as a newcomer. Rosa also mentioned that “because some of us are Evangelicals, they [Catholics] point us out as people who are problematic.”

As previously noted, people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado expressed awareness about the differences between Evangelicals and Catholics. For some respondents, the perceived and real differences between them led to disagreements and challenges for cohesion (and hazard resilience) more broadly. However, as evident in Rosa’s story, the emotions surrounding her lack of belonging and disunity contributes to deeper divisions. Because of what Rosa experienced as a newcomer to Éxito, she made the difficult choice to self-isolate from everyone and remove herself from Evangelical church meetings to avoid further issues with gossip and being emotionally hurt. This section is concerned with questions of affect, sensibility, and an individual’s sense of belonging and identity in their community. Rosa’s story invites reflection on whether someday she may integrate and feel fully accepted in Éxito, or if issues with gossip will continue to persist.

Leoncio Prado has similar dynamics. Diego explained during his interview that the community has divided opinions, and that people do not often engage in mutual aid or sharing work tasks, which leads to a great sense of disunity:

Disunity... That is what we suffer from here, since everyone works on their own. Nobody works together. We are all divided, each one [like a bird] in his own nest. (Diego, LP)

Diego has lived in Leoncio Prado for his entire life. He is a member of the founding family and shared several stories about how the community had once been. He described how in recent years,

the community has been attractive for newcomers seeking agricultural work near Pucallpa, and that as a result, Leoncio Prado's population has grown. He then reminisced about how village life had once been, explaining that living with members of his family was peaceful until "strangers" arrived and created problems that he was unable to fully explain.

Although Diego's story is quite different from Rosa's, they both expressed feelings of hurt and division. Although Rosa was a newcomer to Éxito and Diego had always lived in Leoncio Prado, they both felt that the present state of their communities did not provide them with the sense of belonging that they desired. For Rosa, these feelings stemmed from her experiences with gossip, and for Diego, losing the version of Leoncio Prado he had once known had been a difficult adjustment throughout his life. Isabel, a Catholic woman, also explained her frustration with Leoncio Prado's disunity and community member attitudes towards religion:

People here are disunited. If you talk to others about religion here, they don't want to listen. They won't listen. I just tell them that they shouldn't be evil and that sooner or later they will die, and the Lord will punish them. People only listen to their mothers. I think, 'maybe I will have the Korean [missionary] speak to them,' so I say to them, "Come on, let's go to church," but they don't want to go. They don't want to know anything. (Isabel, LP)

Interestingly, Isabel does not focus on a single denomination in her excerpt. Isabel instead focuses more broadly on the unwillingness for others to listen or learn about religion. She compares Leoncio Prado to 11 de Agosto (a neighbouring community) and highlights community fragmentation through describing people's inability to change.

Community members may also feel less trusting of one another due to their differences (Fonseca et al., 2019). Froese (2023) suggests that the level of trust between members of an SES or community contributes to cohesion or fragmentation. Low levels of trust among members of a group can also inhibit mutual aid, reciprocity, and emotional commitment (Fonseca et al., 2019). This is evident in Rosa's story as she feels like she cannot trust anyone because of her struggles with gossip and belonging and therefore has very low emotional commitment to her church community. Similarly, Wilton [in Éxito] felt more willing to trust fellow Catholics rather than Evangelicals because "there is more unity" between them. These examples point to how predisposed notions, assumptions, and perceptions can create fragmentation through distrust. For Wilton, his perceptions influence his decision to not work or interact with Evangelicals as

frequently. Similarly, Rosa feels unable to freely leave her home and participate in social life. The disunity exemplified here likely also have implications for hazards. For example, Rosa may not be able to trust her neighbours or fellow Evangelicals during bad floods because of her previous experiences, and Wilton may be less willing to engage in mutual aid with Evangelicals because he simply has less rapport with them.

4.4 Peruvian Self-Criticism

Apart from citing fragmentation, disunity, and denominational differences, people shared disdain and discontentment with their lives in Peru on a larger scale. This may be due to deeper embedded cultural attitudes, such as a distinctly Peruvian type of self-deprecation,¹¹ which can limit a community's ability to move forward and transform from within, as people find themselves at odds *with* themselves. In Éxito and Leoncio Prado, these cultural attitudes manifested when people discussed the unfair advantages of other countries, or about how Peru's culture and economy created additional challenges towards cohesion and happiness:

Peru is not like other countries where the government helps everyone, the rich and poor. No, here in Peru it is not like that. We have problems sometimes. Where I used to live, I had everything. Here I have nothing. I only have *quayabitas*¹² to eat in the winter. The flood affects everyone. (Manuel, EX)

Previously [farmers like us] were completely invisible to the government. There was little to no support for us from neither the municipalities nor the regional and national governments. We were discriminated against by the settlers of our own country. (Jorge, EX)

Manuel's quote above links back to the challenges associated with living on a floodplain and his frustration about the lack of state support the community receives. Jorge's quote, on the other hand, demonstrates a larger frustration with regional governments and their lack of care for farmers and rural people like him. Both quotes point to distrust for institutions, which may have implications for hazard contexts by weakening overall community cohesion (Fonseca et al., 2019). For example,

¹¹ This idea comes from a personal communication with a colleague who has lived in Cajamarca, Peru semi-permanently since 2016, to quote: "There's a very self-critical stream in Peruvian society. People love to blame the problems Peru [faces] on Peruvianness... and so I wonder if people [here] are trying to wrestle with these parts of their own culture—both a love of their own community history and identity, yet also a deeper self-rejection." (Iain L. Ross, personal communication, 19 August 2024)

¹² Likely either *Psidium cattleianum* (Strawberry guava) or *Psidium guajava* (Common guava).

when *viveres* are provided by the municipality during a flood, the communities may still feel that there was a lack of consultation about their specific needs. People may also be less inclined to accept or participate in governmental or external development programs due to pre-existing distrust over policies and governmental motives—even if the programs are intended to help. However, not everyone was frustrated or displeased with institutions. Some chose to reconcile frustrations with positivity:

The support we receive from the municipality is what you would expect, right? Our problem is air pollution. This is not only a problem here, but also nationwide. We need to be able to take on the challenges we face together. I tell myself that at least here [in Leoncio Prado] I can still breathe. Our community's air is fresh because of the trees... But pollution is becoming more and more common, and the droughts are deteriorating us more and more. (Jheremy, LP)

By comparing his situation in Leoncio Prado to other parts of Peru, Jheremy provides a balanced perspective to contextualize his own reality. However, not everyone chooses to do so, instead finding themselves mobilizing narratives of being unable to change, or attitudes of being perpetually 'stuck.' Juan explains the stagnancy, 'stuckness,' or closed-mindedness of Éxito, for example:

Éxito is a half-closed society with closed minds. They don't leave their own worlds. They have had this ideology since they were very young that newcomers have nothing to do here and that they must just dedicate themselves to hard work. This mentality is like a growing tree that just gets bigger with each new generation. They cannot change their ways. (Juan, EX)

Although not directly linked to fragmentation or cohesion, it is possible that cultural attitudes are limiting change (as Juan hints) or creating potential tensions beyond religion through negativity, which could prompt fragmentation during hazards. One could also argue that local cultural attitudes contribute to cohesion as everyone is similarly stuck. Feelings of stuckness could also leak into conversations surrounding hazards, where an individual may feel helpless and unable to do anything to save themselves from life's difficulties when they are at the will of an angry and powerful God. In the Retributive and Free Will theodicies echoed by most respondents, human beings have little to no place to go (or to grow spiritually) other than to be obedient, to avoid sin,

and to do their best to work hard to appease God. For some, holding this core belief may contribute to feelings of helplessness and frustration, especially towards an ever-changing physical environment. When placed in a country where progress seems impossible (as indicated earlier by Jorge and Manuel), these emotions are only exacerbated. People may feel that if God is going to continue sending floods and droughts as a punishment or lesson, and their own government has betrayed them or ignored their needs, they have nobody other than themselves and their communities to face challenges with. However, when the community itself is facing tension, this task becomes understandably more frustrating and difficult.

All in all, the social fragmentation outlined in this chapter was most prevalent through micro-conflicts, disagreements along denominational differences, and general disunity and distrust between members of different denominations. Instances of fragmentation were generally tied to social attitudes, lifestyles, and beliefs, which are aspects of lived religion. Religious conflict in Éxito and Leoncio Prado were also shown to have the capacity to disrupt social fabrics and kinship networks. This chapter also explores how conversion to Evangelicalism is more prevalent than Catholicism. It also shows how negative emotions towards livelihoods, life, and economic situations were less tied to God and religion in interviews, and there were few instances of fragmentation or disunity directly related to theological ideas, like God's providence or support. Regarding hazards, this chapter also makes it clearer that improving social cohesion in both communities could enhance overall community resilience by bringing people together and improving instances of mutual aid through trust and shared values (Fonseca et al., 2019). Self-critical Peruvian cultural attitudes also contribute to distrust and may increase community vulnerability towards fragmentation. These attitudes may also create challenges in development more broadly, with implications for hazards. To provide further nuance and contrast, the following chapter reveals that religion is also reparative, can encourage cohesiveness, and ultimately serves as a source of rural hope.

Chapter 5: Christian Meaning Making and Unity

This chapter describes how lived expressions of rural Amazonian Christianity contribute to social cohesion through meaning making. While Chapter 4 discussed religion's connection to social fragmentation, this chapter provides an alternate perspective to contextualize how people use faith to confront challenges and foster hope. This chapter is not intended to be a pure antithesis to Chapter 4 but aims to compliment those findings through nuance and contrast.

5.1 The Best of all Possible Worlds?

One time when I was about to harvest, strong winds came and knocked down all my corn. When I saw it, I began to cry. After all the sacrifices I had made, I thought I was not going to be able to sow again. Sometimes I owe people produce too. People around me told me that the wind is unavoidable. Suddenly, I felt God's presence with me. I knew God was going to bless me later with more corn, or better harvests. I felt happier in that moment. Later, it didn't take long for us to replant our corn, and we ended up having a really good harvest. I was talking to my wife recently about how sometimes there are things we try for the first time that end up working for us. Thanks to that wind, and later the good harvest, I was able to take my family to Lima to visit my sister-in-law. For me that's a blessing from God. That's what tests are like; sometimes suddenly it seems like nothing can be done to fix a problem. Sometimes we deny the wind, deny the heat, and even if a lot of rain comes, we deny it too, right? To me these are things that God does for us. Sometimes [God] does a little thing that we notice, or sometimes nature ends up affecting us. But I tell myself that all of these are things that God gives us—good or bad—and we must accept them. (Jeyson, EX)

The above quote highlights Jeyson's experience creating meaning through his faith when he faced an unexpected crisis with his harvest. Jeyson described how his faith and hope in God changed his perspective and gave him new hope for his future through a personal Best of all Possible Worlds theodicy. While Jeyson's story began by understanding his theodicy as an individual, he later extended his ideas and hope with his family to continue to make sense of God's plan and purposes, allowing him to build up resilience for similar future challenges. By gathering, sharing ideas, grieving, comforting, and problem-solving together, people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado continue to supply themselves with hope in the face of difficult times. For Jeyson, thinking about God sparked motivation within him to continue sowing his crops even in the aftermath of the windstorm. Building on Jeyson's example, this chapter explores how rural Amazonian Christianity and the 'sub-communities' within that tradition foster cohesion, hope, and meaningful social interactions between the members of Éxito and Leoncio Prado (Fonseca et al., 2019).

5.2 Comfort and Hope in Rural Life

To begin, this section examines how people generally experience a sense of belonging in Éxito and Leoncio Prado outside of rural Amazonian Christianity (Table 4). Respondents were asked what makes them feel like they belong in their community, and why they feel that way.

Reason for belonging	Interview excerpts
Working on the land and opportunities	We have land here. We feel like we belong. (Ester, LP) There's plenty of land to work on here, even though it is not fully mine. It is shared with my partner. Together we have enough land to work successfully. (David, EX)
Feelings of safety, peace, tranquility, and happiness	I have a house here, fields here, and my children live here. When I go to other places, it doesn't feel the same, because I am comfortable here. (Clotilde, EX) I'm from Iquitos, in Loreto. Because of my wife's death, I wanted to move to clear my mind. In Iquitos, I also felt oppressed and desperate for change... Now that I am here, I feel relieved and calm. I'm getting used to this place. (Óscar, LP)
Support from community members	When I arrived here, the people welcomed me with a handshake and gave me help. They continue to support me too. This is why I feel like I belong. (Julio, EX) [The members of this community] support me collectively. (Jheremy, LP)
Familial ties to space and place; kinship networks	My parents founded this village, and my children grew up here. (Antonio, LP) I was born here and have lived here ever since. I had children here and benefited from education here myself. (Wilton, EX)
Lifetime attachment in community	I've been here for 38 years. (Roberto, LP) I've been here since I can remember, since I was born. I have my own family now, I am 19, and we will continue to belong here. (Carmen, EX)

Table 4: Reasons for belonging with illustrative interview excerpts.

First, for nine people across Éxito and Leoncio Prado, a sense of unity and belonging in their community was derived from opportunities to own land and practice agriculture. Day-to-day tasks in agriculture are extremely important for bringing the community together and developing a shared sense of purpose. Community *mingas* for example enhance people's sense of belonging and pride in their work and have been shown to empower individuals to shape public community

spaces (Medina et al., 2024). I also witnessed that *mingas* and mutual paid labour also encouraged group discussions and goal setting during my first visit to Leoncio Prado. Even in the face of hazards, agricultural work was highly valued and sought out by members of both communities. According to some respondents, living and working together on the land have several advantages. For one, living and working together provides people with opportunities to develop collective efficacy—or the ability to work harmoniously towards meaningful change (Fonseca et al., 2019, p.238). Óscar, for example, speaks about public works and collective efforts to complete tasks:

If there's a job here in the village to be done, everybody goes to work and there are no problems. There is harmony, there is understanding, there is respect among everyone. And as the saying goes, strength makes unity. (Óscar, LP)

For others, the amount and quality of the land provides meaning or purpose. Having a larger portion of land is not only advantageous for making more money, but provides individuals with a sense of accomplishment and happiness:

I like being in this town. There's plenty to work with, and I have lots of land to work on. (Alex, EX)

Others spoke about being hired (or hiring) fellow community members to help complete tasks, both of which continued to encourage cohesion and cooperation:

If anyone needs help with something, I can help them and get paid a little. (Ester, LP)

Sometimes one of our neighbours wants help cultivating. He looks for people to help him, we get together, and we go. Sometimes we work until ten o'clock, like we did this morning. Then, if another neighbour also has a job to do, we are immediately there [to help] ... (Jheremy, LP)

Hiring and being hired was more prevalent in interviews from Leoncio Prado. In Éxito, there were also some discussions of this, but particularly among members of the same family, where an uncle or aunt would hire their niece or nephew to complete tasks for money or food. This finding may be due to the diversity of families in Leoncio Prado, as compared to Éxito which is more insular. However, for Abel [Evangelical] in Éxito, working with people outside of his immediate family was religiously motivated, and even extended outside of Éxito itself, demonstrating cross-community Evangelical cohesion:

I help an Evangelical man who fell away from the faith (but who still knows the word of God) in Santo Domingo [neighbouring community]. He still has God in his heart of course, which is why God keeps supporting him and giving him blessings. He pays Julia and I for tending his *chacras* because we don't have our own land yet. I also encourage him to bring his tithe to God so that God will help him succeed more. (Abel, EX)

Beyond land and agricultural work, eight respondents cited positive emotions and used affective reasoning to describe their sense of unity and belonging. Affect, or the transpersonal production or capacity of a person to both 'affect' and 'be affected,' goes beyond emotions (Pile, 2009). To these individuals, living in the *chacra* [countryside] felt safer than living in the city. People also frequently mentioned feeling happier, calm, and at greater ease working and living in their communities, and that they never have desired to move away. It is thus evident that individuals reap emotional benefits from their rural lifestyles, despite the challenges it can also bring. Their sense of safety and happiness also strengthen feelings of unity and belonging, which then enhance cohesion towards hazards:

We face challenges together. For example, during floods—strong floods—we come together. Sometimes when diseases come, we also stay united. (Steffani, LP)

These findings, although not directly tied to rural Amazonian Christianity, point out how land-embedded communities¹³ create belonging, meaning, and encourage positivity through place and resource-based relationships and the activities practiced there (NBSF, 2025). This is due to a longstanding connection these communities have to the land, including through cultural and economic capital, politics, law, and their continued reliance on the community's natural resources (NBSF, 2025). During interviews, respondents frequently employed place-based affective reasoning. For example, several respondents cited that "good" and "peaceful" feelings made them more willing to continue working even in difficult conditions. Some people also compared Éxito and Leoncio Prado to Pucallpa, explaining that Pucallpa was noisy and polluted and that they felt happy to live in a place that was quiet and clean:

I love living in Leoncio Prado because here I can breathe fresher air than the city. We also have nice, tall trees. (Roberto, LP)

¹³ Land-embedded communities are a concept I borrow from the Nature-Based Solutions Foundation [NBSF] (2025).

They also cited feeling positive emotions because they perceived little to no real danger or conflict in their communities. Some went on to express that even foreigners are welcomed and safe:

You are part of our family. Even though you are a *gringa* [foreigner], you are safe because nobody here attacks *gringos* [foreigners]. We are all safe here. (Wilton, EX)

Other aspects contributing to positivity were family or kinship networks, cited by nine additional people. For most of these individuals, being close and connected to family members provided a deeper sense of belonging and happiness. Among these, historical connections to the land (land-embeddedness) were also evident for five individuals. For those individuals, the spaces within Éxito and Leoncio Prado contain memories and nostalgia that foster a sense of belonging beyond kinship networks alone. Memories proved to be influential, whether respondents were born in the community or came to settle there:

I've become accustomed to living here over the years. (Lili, LP)

When I arrived here, the people welcomed me with a handshake and helped me. They continue to support me too. I feel like I belong to Éxito for this reason. (Julio, EX)

I have liked farming since I was a child. My parents taught me to work here. That's why I bought this land to work on too. (Isabel, LP)

Interestingly, people in both communities also felt that their fellow community members were accepting and fostered a sense of togetherness and friendship, even if they were not necessarily relatives, neighbours, or members of the same denomination. Again, this points to deeper-seated cohesion (Fonseca et al., 2019). However, this finding contrasts directly with Rosa's story in Chapter 4, where she felt isolated and alone as a newcomer. While Rosa and Julio both arrived in Éxito as newcomers, Rosa's Evangelical faith sets her apart from Julio and may have contributed to her feeling like an outsider. Rosa's house is also located further away from the Evangelical Quarter. It is possible that the distance between herself and the other Evangelicals may also lead to her sense of being 'other.' Lili in Leoncio Prado was also once a newcomer but belongs to the Catholic majority. For Julio and Lili, integration into their respective communities appears to have been much easier than what Rosa experienced.

5.3 Affective Therapeutics: An Emotional Geography

Related to affective reasoning are ‘affective therapeutics,’ a concept I borrow from Richlin (2019; 2022) to explore the “emotional geographies” of individuals (Pile, 2009, p.6). Affective therapeutics refer to a set of practices to help target specific affective issues in individual lives (Richlin, 2019). Richlin’s (2022) book *In the Hands of God: How Evangelical Belonging Transforms Migrant Experience in the United States* examines the precarity and vulnerability of the lives of undocumented Brazilian migrants in Washington, D.C. The book explains how Evangelical migrant congregations use a variety of affective therapeutics, such as theologies of personal responsibility and a happiness rhetoric, to point towards the spiritual instead of the material, serving as a consolation to the distress they experience as migrants (Richlin, 2022). The remainder of this chapter explores how rural Amazonian Christianity itself acts as an affective therapeutic, and how religious narratives are used by people to make sense of, adapt to, and justify hazards. The emotional aspects of belonging and unity explored previously can also be interpreted as affective therapeutics, or more accurately, as affective reasoning. Similarly, it is important to consider that hazard experiences are subjective, especially when using examples from lived religion to describe them. Yet, the discussion of subjective experiences is equally valuable for understanding the emotional geographies of different worldviews and opinions, and the behaviours and habits of people within specific contexts (Pile, 2009). The following discussion of lived religious experiences and meaning making provide a pathway between the emotional and disaster branches of geography.

There are several reasons why rural Amazonian Christianity can serve as an affective therapeutic to the fragmentation and disunity explored in Chapter 4.

First, for 18 out of 42 respondents, faith provided them with the means to remain calm during difficult situations and hazards. The majority cited praying to God for help and having prayers answered as their primary reason for remaining calm during severe floods and droughts. Thankfulness was another aspect of maintaining calm. As one respondent puts it:

My only way to stay calm is to thank God, because He does everything. I thank God in the good and the bad moments because everything belongs to God. There is no need to worry, because when we are worried, we can remind ourselves that everything we have comes from above, and that gives us joy. Yes, nothing is ours. These fields are not mine—they are God's. My house too, it is not mine, nor is my life my own. So, as long as we are alive, we have to keep thanking God. (Victoria, EX)

Victoria acknowledges “the good and the bad moments” as equally valuable opportunities to show gratitude towards God. Her lack of worry is associated with her understanding of God giving her everything she currently owns as a gift—a gift that she reciprocates with thankfulness. Victoria’s mindset due to her faith serves as an affective therapeutic towards having very little, and by focusing on God’s ownership of all things, farming and working on ‘God’s land’ is spiritually meaningful. Another focus within discussions of prayer was God’s care and protection for people. For instance, to Clotilde, an elderly Evangelical woman in Éxito, the evidence of God’s protection is that she has never lacked basic food and has lived a relatively peaceful and happy life. She also acknowledges her need to thank God and continue to ask for her needs to be met:

I always ask God to take care of us here, and I pray that nothing happens while we are underwater. He is the only one who gives us what we need and protects us. I am Catholic and I ask for God’s protection day and night—when I get up, when I go to bed, when I am in my *chacra*, when I am eating... I ask him, I thank him for everything he has given, not only to me, but to all our people, and to protect us from evil. I also feel protected by the Lord because I have never lacked food or water. I am blessed by God, and I am not afraid. (Clotilde, EX)

Rural Amazonian Christianity also promotes some level of cohesion through denominational similarities. Denominations within rural Amazonian Christianity (Catholic, Evangelical, etc.) can be described as sub-communities or microcosms of the greater community. Denominations promote cohesion among themselves. In particular, the Evangelical community reinforces this notion through language, as members call each other *hermanos* [brothers] and *hermanas* [sisters], imitating the language used by biological families. The Evangelical ‘family’ also meets regularly (3-4 times per week) which builds strong bonds between members. Janeth in Éxito pointed to this family-like religious bond directly: “As Evangelicals, we are a family. We always come together during hard times.” Catholics, similarly, refer to one another as *tío* [uncle], *tía* [aunt] and *primo/a* [cousin] more often than Evangelicals, also enhancing the familial aspects of interpersonal relationships regardless of bloodlines. However, the term *hermanos* (plural) used among Evangelicals equates to ‘brethren,’ which has a broader implication for spiritual kinship.

Attending church meetings also fosters cohesion. Carmen, for example, explains the ways that she can socialize and form friendships with fellow Evangelicals by attending church:

Going to church and participating in church meetings helps me socialize. I get to see people and talk with them, and we invite all the community members too. Sometimes the church also hosts a birthday party for a fellow Evangelical, and we eat cake and food to celebrate. Sometimes there are conversions during those meetings too, because we invite the entire population. (Carmen, EX)

Interestingly, Carmen also explains that everyone in the community is invited to the birthday celebrations held at the Evangelical church regardless of denomination. She explains that the Evangelical population sometimes will evangelize during those meetings and convert fellow community members, which may point to a secondary motive for hosting birthday celebrations. This could also be a matter of Carmen associating the Evangelical church as a place where people come to know God more personally. I also observed Evangelical church members spending time with each other outside of their regular church gatherings. In Éxito's Evangelical Quarter specifically, I commonly encountered Abel [an Evangelical] wandering around Janeth and Meysi's properties [both Evangelicals] and using the second floor of Karen's house to rest in the shade and make calls on his cell phone for hours. During these types of informal Evangelical house gatherings, community members would take turns sharing stories and Bible verses with one another over a meal. In these informal ways, the Evangelical inner circle is united and promotes belonging for its members.

Cohesion between Catholics and Evangelicals is also present in both communities despite their denominational differences. The following examples directly oppose the religion-driven disunity found in several examples in Chapter 4:

As Catholics, we are just like the Evangelicals. We are like a family. Though we are not from the same religion, we do our work together in the mornings and share with each other. (Roberto, LP)

Even though there are Evangelicals here too, we are all united together. We come together when anything happens. We unite. (Steffani, LP)

Roberto's excerpt here also specifically demonstrates how the concept of a spiritual family is not just pervasive in Evangelical circles. As a Catholic, Roberto's understanding of Catholics and Evangelicals as family members demonstrates how individuals may perceive rural Amazonian Christianity as a whole and indicates some level of unity bridging the denominations. During

hazards and difficult times, cross-denominational cohesion, or unity (as Steffani notes), could contribute to resilience.

In addition to group dynamics and cohesiveness, rural Amazonian Christianity creates an affective therapeutic towards environmental hazards and social difficulties through the ways in which people believe God will help them. By believing they can rely on God's providence, many respondents echo the Best of all Possible Worlds theodicy. For instance, Jeyson's narrative presented at the start of this chapter shows how he comes to create his own affective therapeutic towards his destroyed crops through remembering that God was still present in his life. In a similar vein, Juan from Éxito understood that God had specifically allowed the community's *chacras* to continue to be fertile and healthy:

Somehow by the grace of God this land is still producing, even though there has been a lot of changes in the climate, fumigation, and chemical use over time. If God had not placed His hand here, I think things would be much worse. God is giving the people here what little they have. He is giving them chances to continue to sow. Even I was affected by the chemicals here once, where I couldn't breathe, but thanks to God nothing bad happened. (Juan, EX)

To Juan, health and agricultural productivity were signs of God's mercy. God "giving [people] chances to continue to sow" is also a significant theological element to his excerpt. Juan understands that God's will involves spiritual growth by being given second chances, demonstrating the Best of all Possible Worlds.

Like Juan, others also provided examples of attributing bodily healing and second chances to God. For example, several claimed that they (or someone close to them) had only been healed because of God's plan for their lives:

During the times of COVID-19, I got sick with the virus and nobody knew. I was 14 years old. It almost killed me. Every night I would whisper to God, and I told myself that I was going to die. I couldn't sleep because my chest felt like it was closing. One night, one of the *hermanos* had gone to the church but had not yet returned, so I got up to tell him about my affliction, but I didn't do it because I was alone. The next Saturday we waited for the pastor to come [for church]. After church the following day, I was feeling worse. I had been unable to eat for two months, and I still could not breathe properly in my chest. When the pastor prayed [over me], I felt my body go cold and then suddenly it felt hot. Two days after that, I no longer had symptoms, and from that moment on I became an Evangelical. Later, when I was 17, I became pregnant and had to leave the church. I did not meet with them [at that time], but since [giving birth], I am participating again. (Carmen, EX)

My husband once broke his leg, and I truly prayed to God from my heart. I knew that only God knows why [it happened] and whether he will be healed. I tried to cure him with pure vegetables and *suelta*,¹⁴ but I really cured him by asking God to heal him. Now my husband can walk and work anywhere. This is why I have faith in God. (Natalia, LP)

God's providence was also frequently associated with water—rivers, floods, and rain. Around half the respondents understood the high water (flood) season as God's blessing or gift, even though it had also been described as difficult and destructive as a hazard. Mateo from Éxito, for example, explained that rain was God's way of helping the plants survive. Abel also described how the floodwaters bring the community an abundance of fish—a direct “blessing” and form of “support” from God amid otherwise difficult times. Community members in Éxito and Leoncio Prado often likened even the smallest provisions they received to God's helping hand. They also understood that God sometimes does not provide what one expects:

When God tells the plants, “You will not bear fruit,” it becomes true. It has been proven, and I have seen this reality. There are times when the plants seem to be growing beautifully but we only get three or four grains of good corn. The opposite is also true. Sometimes God gives us tremendous cobs. (Jorge, EX)

Like Mateo, Abel, and Jorge, Manuel also attributed God's blessings to his experiences fishing. In one story, Manuel shared that he had gone out fishing one day in the Ucayali River. As he left, his friends who had been fishing earlier that day warned him that there had been nothing to catch. Manuel decided to still go out despite their warnings. Describing it, he explained: “The river was quiet, and then I could see something. God! There! Something was bubbling in the water. God had given me a *taricaya*¹⁵ [that day].”

Whether related to fishing or successful harvests, people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado further associated their faith in God to receiving blessings and other divine gifts, such as receiving money or having an unexpectedly successful harvest. Apart from blessings however, rural Amazonian Christianity also fostered a sense of calm or peace within people, specifically towards hazards. As voiced by a woman in Éxito:

¹⁴ Common comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), a flowering plant used in traditional medicine.

¹⁵ Yellow-spotted river turtle (*Podocnemis unifilis*).

If God takes away your water, it is because He wants to, isn't it? Or if God dries you up it is because He wants to. You can't ask yourself why it happens because only God knows why. I tell myself that I'm not afraid. I don't own that much, so I only worry sometimes when my plants are doing badly. Then I ask God to give me peace because I want to be calm. I don't want to worry anymore. I remain calm because I know that God is in us. (Clotilde, EX)

The reasoning Clotilde employs here is another example of an affective therapeutic towards floods and droughts and indicates a strong belief in God's control over the environment, also connecting back to the discussion of theodicies in Chapter 4. For Clotilde, sinfulness or human errors were not the primary reason God "dries you up" or "takes away your water." Rather, her excerpt suggests that there is no clear answer, saying that "only God knows why." For Clotilde, this ended up being a source of comfort, focusing on prayer for peace over worrying or asking "why?"

People also found it easy to derive meaning from hazards and use affective reasoning when discussing God and faith but found it more difficult to employ affective reasoning when discussing the economy, agriculture, and social challenges. Some respondents also provided personal examples of God's help and care to explain how God provides people with the means to be patient and to endure difficult situations. For example, Olivia, a Catholic woman, explained:

We don't just ask God to help us [during a big flood], but also to give us patience. **We have faith to endure it.** We have done well because we have faith. Right in the moment, God is not going to give you all the answers, but later when you are calm, you know... (Olivia, LP, emphasis added)

Olivia's emphasis on her faith and reliance on God shows a personal level of resilience towards the challenges she faces, like floods. For her, having faith allows her to face big floods through praying for patience. She also does this by reminding herself of God's bigger plan and reminds herself that she will have a better understanding of the situation once it has passed. This finding leads us into the next section, which focuses on meaning making in rural Amazonian Christianity.

5.4 Christian Meaning Making

One hot afternoon, I sat down with Angely, the oldest woman in Éxito.¹⁶

She had already shared much about her life with me while gutting *carachamas*¹⁷ in her house earlier that day. We walked slowly to a neighbour's porch, where we could have a quiet interview in the shade. At first, Angely spoke openly about her life, but as our interview progressed, one topic kept resurfacing—her eyesight. She explained that prior to becoming an Evangelical, she had been nearly blind.

“I used to be unable to see or read,” she explained. “My vision was cloudy, and I felt like I had no one to help me or take care of me. I wondered how I would manage if I couldn't see. I tell you; I couldn't even read a single letter. I worried about how I would work or how I would even go to the bathroom on my own. I thought I would need others to support me.”

My field assistant and I exchanged glances before turning back to Angely. Pointing toward the field in the Evangelical Quarter in front of us, he then asked her to identify a man walking toward the creek nearly fifty feet away. Without hesitation, she identified the man as Wilton. Her answer was correct. We smiled.

I then asked Angely about how she had regained her vision. She explained that she had prayed to God to help her, and that God healed her. “Now I can clean and read letters without any problems.”

Angely's voice then became steady with conviction: “People say that I am a liability at my age. But when I begged God for help with my eyes, I turned to the Gospel, and He restored my sight. I knew God could help me. I believe in God and the Gospel—it gives me everything. It gives me strength.”

Meaning making is a psychological coping process through which individuals alleviate real or perceived distress by interpreting their experiences in light of the past and justifying them through various means, including religious convictions (Lewis Hall & Hill, 2019; Park, 2005b). This process can lead to significant personal psychological and group outcomes after distress (Lewis

¹⁶ This interview took place on 1 August 2024.

¹⁷ *Pseudorinelepis genibarbis*, a species of armoured catfish native to the Amazon basin.

Hall & Hill, 2019; Park, 2005b). In Angely's example, she employs meaning making to her own experience regaining her sight by explaining that God and her faith in the Gospel was responsible for her healing. Angely may also believe that her healing is from God because she converted to Evangelicalism as an adult.

Like Angely, people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado also used their faith to derive meaning for a variety of situations. Almost all respondents explained that God's presence in their life was a tangible truth, often backed up with some form of evidence. Furthermore, having faith and believing in God gave their lives purpose and meaning, and generally provided people with the means to interpret challenges, hazards, and the precarity they face regularly. For example, several respondents attributed God's providence and blessings to their fishing and farming successes, as previously noted. In many ways, these examples are similar to the affective therapeutics of God's control over water and the environment:

Because of the Lord, we are happy and healthy... I thank God for blessing me and my community with resources. (Wilton, EX)

Thank God that this year my corn is growing beautifully. It is very pretty. (Rosa, EX)

I feel happy [here] because God blesses us. He blesses us because we can catch fish and when the water goes down, we can plant. (Victoria, EX)

Victoria's excerpt here specifically points to hazards. Instead of looking at the negative side of floods, such as the inability to plant crops year-round, Victoria's focus was on the positive side (perceived blessing) of eventually being able to plant again and being able to fish in the meantime.

Blessings play a central role in rural Amazonian Christianity. In interviews, both Catholics and Evangelicals mentioned blessings, but they were more detailed among Evangelical responses. Rather than viewing God's provision of fish and farming opportunities as arbitrary, most respondents saw these material blessings as rewards for their good behaviour. In this way, the blessing narrative appears to balance out the punishment narrative within a Retributive theodicy—both of which are rooted in the presence or absence of sinfulness. Evangelicals also sought and expected an extra measure of blessings through regular tithing at church. With the hope of receiving blessings (and avoiding retribution), community members actively chose specific lifestyles that they believed were good and righteous. Victoria, for example, abstains from consuming alcohol:

I became an Evangelical because of the dreams I had. When I was 12 years old, I had dreams where I could hear myself singing and partying. I then felt afflicted for a few moments, and I wanted to leave [the dream], but I kept dreaming. I remember hearing a pastor preaching that we [Evangelicals] should not drink. Those words nailed me in my head until I woke up. [I became a Christian] before I had ever drunk alcohol. (Victoria, EX)

Victoria was proud to share that she had not yet consumed alcohol. Within the Evangelical tradition of rural Amazonian Christianity, abstaining from consuming alcohol is a core belief. For Victoria, God had provided her with wisdom and knowledge to adhere to this lifestyle. If it had not been for her dream, she would have not known to abstain from alcohol. To Victoria, her dream itself was a blessing from God and ultimately brought her closer to God through obedience and righteousness. Similarly, Óscar, a Catholic man in Leoncio Prado expressed that feeling close to God in his heart and mind allowed him to continue doing good unto others and pursue righteousness:

To believe is to have God in my mind and in my heart. I have received God in my heart. Without God I am nothing, and if I didn't have Him, I would easily get lost. An accident could happen to me, or I could go down a bad road, or I could get into delinquency and sin. Many things can happen to us—these are things of the world. Unholy things [can happen] to people. But if I stay with God and I have God living in me, God will protect me and set me apart from those bad things. (Óscar, LP)

Like Victoria (an Evangelical), Óscar (a Catholic) emphasizes his avoidance of that which he believes is morally wrong or sinful. Óscar's excerpt demonstrates a different type of reliance on God than that discussed earlier. Rather than citing material or bodily reliance on God (for food, shelter, etc.), or reliance on God's plan to come to fruition (for blessings, rain, etc.), Óscar's account expresses relying on God to dwell in him and guide him to make righteous decisions. His faith in God (and assurance of God's presence within him) shapes his understanding of his actions in the world. Though Óscar's idea of what constitutes "delinquency" differs from Victoria's convictions towards drinking alcohol, the point he proposes reveals a more nuanced understanding of his relationship to God.

Another relevant aspect of meaning making and the affective therapeutics of rural Amazonian Christianity is having faith in God. When people were prompted about why they believe in God, they often reiterated the idea that their religious beliefs were positive aspects of their lives and made living in their respective communities more meaningful. Despite denominational differences

and the micro-conflicts expressed in Chapter 4, people continuously expressed the opinion that belief in God was something good and helpful for the community and that it improved their quality of life. For example, upon completing his interview, Jeyson expressed that he felt happy because he got to talk about God:

Talking about God is so nice and beautiful, isn't it? I feel quite happy because I got to talk [to you] about religion, and above all, God and the truth. (Jeyson, EX)

For those who had experienced fragmentation firsthand like Rosa, placing emphasis on faith in God can also serve as an emotional outlet despite it:

I believe people are looking for God. I know that God can change [their ways]. He can touch their hearts, but they have hardened their hearts. They don't believe in God... Well, maybe they do, I don't know, but that's how I see it. (Rosa, EX)

Rosa created meaning out of her situation by understanding that those who had gossiped about her and excluded her had "hardened" hearts. However, she also expressed trust that God could change the situation for the better, but did not indicate any idea of how or when that could happen. Others in both communities also expressed feelings of happiness due to God's love, presence, and support. Manuel and Olivia [Catholics], spoke at length about being grateful for God making their lives better and allowing their communities to thrive:

Believing in God means a lot to me. I believe that God helps me when I travel, for example. I notice that nobody steals from me, that I am supported, and that God and the guardian angels take care of me... How nice it is that I don't lack food or water! (Manuel, EX)

This community is very humble. We don't ask God "why" about the floods anymore. Apart from different organizations that have helped us thrive, we are certain that only God has a great love for us. I pray a lot for this hamlet—I pray that our lives go well and that we continue to move forward. I pray for God's protection over all of us. (Olivia, LP)

The examples above highlight how individuals continually assign positive notions of God's presence in their lives as an affective therapeutic to the regular woes of rural life. For example, Manuel subtly acknowledges the reality of food insecurity (those who may legitimately lack food and water) and sees his own position as separate (and better) due to God's love and the presence of "guardian angels" in his life. Likewise, Olivia's sees God's love as an overarching force acting upon Leoncio Prado more powerfully than anything the government or charitable organizations

can help with. Olivia also attributes Leoncio Prado's current (and future) success to God hearing and answering the community's prayers. Her excerpt also elaborated that instead of asking God about why hazards happen, the community simply accepts them as a piece of God's larger plan. This itself also acts as an affective therapeutic by shifting the focus of hazards away from the challenges (or negativity) and into trusting God (garnering positivity). Prayers were also often cited as an affective therapeutic towards a variety of other stresses, including sickness, difficult relationships, a lack of opportunities, and financial strain.

To conclude, this chapter finds that Christian faith and meaning making are used by people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado as an affective therapeutic towards hazards and a variety of other challenges they face. It explored how social cohesion was present among and between rural Amazonian Christian denominations, where Evangelicals referred consistently to one another as members of the same spiritual family, for example. Responses also indicated that Catholics and Evangelicals supported one another through specific challenges. This created a sense of unity (enhancing cohesion) among individuals which may help to overcome some of the social tensions present in the communities. Furthermore, the ways in which individuals leaned on their faith and created meaning through difficult situations were highly personal and often pointed back to theodicies and core beliefs. Each respondent also held a unique faith story which meant that they approached challenges differently than their fellow Christians. This chapter also demonstrates that the affective therapeutics of rural Amazonian Christianity still have limitations and may be unable to fully relieve some of the lasting social challenges faced by community members such as Rosa, whose lived experience with gossip in Éxito continued to isolate her from her own denominational community, despite her hope that God could (and will) change the situation for the better. Nonetheless, people like Jeyson and Angely demonstrate how their belief in God is meaningful and provides them and their families with a transcendent sense of hope and comfort towards a variety of difficulties.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

While the literature has shown a relationship between religion and hazard resilience through social cohesion, it simultaneously suggests that religion contributes to rifts in the social fabrics of communities, in turn affecting their adaptive capacities towards hazards. It is thus unclear whether religion directly or indirectly contributes to individual and community resilience. This thesis argues that understanding religion as a social identity, cultural phenomenon, and driver of cohesion and fragmentation is crucial—not only for understanding how religion and resilience intersect conceptually, but most importantly, to advance effective and culturally appropriate disaster risk reduction (DRR) in settings with predisposed vulnerabilities and religious embeddedness. The Peruvian Amazon serves as an ideal setting for this type of study, and the findings of this thesis could be applied to other rural or floodplain communities with mixed-denominational religious traditions, like rural Amazonian Christianity.

The substantive chapters of this thesis describe the extent to which rural Amazonian Christianity contributes to both social cohesion and fragmentation in Éxito and Leoncio Prado. Chapter 3 first investigates examples of cohesion and fragmentation (apart from religion) in both communities. It explores the most pervasive challenges faced by people in Éxito and Leoncio Prado, including environmental, social, economic, and accessibility related challenges. Flooding, droughts, and hot weather were some of the most cited environmental challenges, affecting safety, health and well-being, financial stability, food security, agricultural productivity, and community accessibility. During floods and droughts, many also saw the lack of external aid and governmental support as a major issue and felt unable to improve their living situations without it. Coming alongside this issue was also the lack of basic services, such as running water and full sanitation in homes. Environmental pollutants were another relevant challenge, particularly through their connection to drinking water and sanitation issues. Furthermore, facing an unstable and unpredictable economic situation was cited by many and was often connected directly to financial strain, especially during the ‘low’ economy season. Socially, the largest challenges cited were gossip, conflicts, and disputes caused by a lack of consensus among community members or through interpersonal relationships. This chapter also found that accessibility (through market access, transportation, and cost of travel) contributed to distinct challenges and opportunities in both communities.

Chapter 4 focuses on fragmentation by exploring how rural Amazonian Christianity (and related community challenges) degrade or limit cohesion. The findings presented here likely have implications for development and hazard resilience. For one, individuals in both communities had different opinions on theodicy, or the question of God's purpose during hazards, which could lead to a lack of consensus. While some explained that disasters happen naturally and are not part of God's retributive plans, others blame each other (or themselves) for sinning and causing God to send the hazard. Differences in opinion such as these have the potential to create micro-conflicts within communities and could worsen pre-existing fragmentation over time. Furthermore, theological differences between Evangelicals and Catholics created a variety of social tensions. Differences in lived religion in particular contributed to larger community arguments over theology and ultimately led to a lack of support for one another's projects, such as building the Catholic church in Éxito. Surprisingly, the presence of religious syncretism was not found to be significant in either community. When discussing syncretism, neither Evangelicals nor Catholics found it to be a significant problem, and it did not appear to contribute to any fragmentation in the communities. However, religion-driven social conflicts did occur through examples of distrust and gossip. For individuals such as Rosa, the social conflict and gossip she faced ultimately forced her to no longer engage in her religion, demonstrating considerable fragmentation. The denominational divide also grew when Catholics and Evangelicals provided examples of disliking one another and refusing to work together. These tensions also limited the ability for some individuals to fully integrate into their community's social fabric. Finally, some individuals shared discontentment with their lives more broadly, citing negative emotions towards Peru and their personal situations, which may point to distinctly Peruvian cultural attitudes of self-criticism. These cultural attitudes (paired with retributive narratives) may exacerbate fragmentation through a sense of 'stuckness,' distrust for institutions, and the perceived inability to make meaningful progress in advancing development.

Chapter 5 provides an alternate perspective by arguing that people's sense of belonging and their ability to create religious meaning and hope alleviates some of the distress they experience through pre-existing fragmentation, environmental challenges, and social challenges. This chapter also illustrates how rural Amazonian Christianity generally serves as an affective therapeutic where cohesion is lacking, ultimately building personal levels of resilience. On one hand, people found that rural life was a comfort unto itself, through feelings of tranquility, safety, and connections

with family members. Land embeddedness, the ability to practice agriculture, and the time spent living in the community were also positive traits towards this sense of comfort. When reflecting on God's role and the reasons for their faith, individuals cited prayer and thanksgiving frequently as an affective therapeutic towards both environmental and social challenges. Individuals also experienced a sense of belonging within and (surprisingly) across their denominations, with some indicating that they felt like they belonged to larger spiritual families. Many also cited heightened reliance on God's care and trust in God's control over their livelihoods and health, especially when receiving perceived blessings or (divine) gifts from God as reminders of His goodness and love. Personal resilience building and endurance towards hardships were also kindled by turning to God and understanding that God may send difficult situations to encourage spiritual maturity and growth (Best of all Possible Worlds). Faith in God's plan was also observed in interviews as a way for individuals to foster positive emotions during difficulties. The examples of affective therapeutics contained within this chapter are complimented by instances of Christian meaning making, where stories of bodily healing, receiving blessings, and finding agricultural and moral success were attributed to God's transcendent and continuous presence. Ultimately, the strong religious convictions felt by community members focused on an understanding of how God's love prevails over every challenge or hardship.

It is evident that rural Amazonian Christianity and the lived religion of individuals both supports and degrades social cohesion in Éxito and Leoncio Prado. This finding points to potential entanglements towards the community's ability to build hazard resilience towards hazards. While different denominations within rural Amazonian Christianity contribute to conflicts and some level of fragmentation, the lived religion of individuals is seemingly more likely to create micro-conflicts through disagreements, distrust, and lack of consensus. However, a person's faith provided moral guidance, a basis for meaning making, and served as an affective therapeutic towards the precarity of their situations and their community's perceived (and realized) emotional and physical tensions. Moreover, individuals professed their religious beliefs to alleviate not only tensions, but environmental and economic challenges. The bond of one's spiritual *familia* [family] contributed greatly to affective reasoning and meaning making during difficult times, with several respondents being able to bridge the denominational gap. Finally, individuals also often perceived hazards (namely flooding) and the meaning of life with an unwavering sense of trust in God—believing God would hear and answer their prayers, even in their weakest moments.

6.2 Limitations

Ethnographic studies are inherently interpretive, implying that subjectivity and research bias may exist (Reeves et al., 2013). Therefore, subjectivity and researcher bias may exist in my analysis and thematic coding. Furthermore, though I visited Leoncio Prado eight times, I spent multiple days at a time in Éxito, which may affect the depth and content of my interviews. Additionally, as expressed in my positionality statement, my position as an outsider as well as my ethnicity may influence power dynamics and my relationship with my interlocutors—however, relatability and interlocutor comfort were prioritized in my methods to mitigate for this limitation. Furthermore, while this thesis captures a snapshot of Éxito and Leoncio Prado’s social and environmental challenges, it may not fully account for any long-term changes in resilience due to external factors like migration patterns and changes in governmental policies.

Spanish being my third language may also partially limit my understanding of linguistic nuances within this thesis. This may appear in the translations of my interview excerpts. To minimize the risk of error, I carefully carried out transcriptions and translations immediately following each interview, allowing me to vividly remember the conversation that was had. When faced with any confusing or unknown words during interviews, I asked my field assistant for clarification. These strategies ensure an ‘as-accurate-as-possible’ result. Finally, my time spent studying Spanish in Arequipa prior to beginning my fieldwork allowed me to become familiar and confident with conversations and regional terms.

6.3 Implications and Policy Recommendations

This thesis is relevant across a variety of academic and policy-relevant fields due to its place at the nexus of cultural geography and hazard studies. First, this thesis highlights the intricate relationship between hazards, resilience, rural Amazonian Christianity, and social cohesion. While religion has historically been ignored in hazard and disaster studies, this work demonstrates the richness of this subject matter and its connection to resilience, advocating for its inclusion in future research. Further, it has been noted that class, gender, and ethnicity are regularly considered within hazard, disaster, and community development literature, but considerations of religion are frequently lacking depth or sufficient detail. As shown in this thesis, considering religion provides geographic research with another form of complexity that otherwise may be overlooked. Further

engagement with these topics will also ensure that the lived experiences of these communities are neither overlooked nor oversimplified. Therefore, I continuously advocate for its inclusion. To continue, this thesis also contributes to the geographical understanding of religion by outlining some of the defining characteristics of rural Amazonian Christianity and the social dynamics of rural floodplain populations. Therefore, it contributes to a growing body of knowledge on lived religion, emphasizing how faith is practiced rather than on institutional structures alone. I recommend that rural Amazonian Christianity is studied in greater depth so we can better understand the nuances of lived religion in this geographic context and its continued potential to promote and degrade cohesion. Further research on the religious dynamics of the Peruvian Amazon may have implications for economics, livelihoods, and health. Similar regions (tropical environments, rural Christianity, mixed-denominational, etc.) could also benefit from further research on these topics. Continued research could also contribute to enriching development and emergency management projects by enhancing their cultural and religious sensitivity.

Since this thesis demonstrates that religion plays a dual role in strengthening and degrading social cohesion, many policy-relevant implications also exist. For community leaders, NGOs, and policymakers who work in vulnerable, religiously embedded, and denominationally diverse settings, these findings are significant. For one, instead of continuing to ignore or belittle the role of religion, this work demonstrates that religion has an undeniable connection to coping, resilience, and shaping cohesion. Thus, this thesis advocates for a greater integration of religion into DRR and community development policy through appropriate faith-based programming informed by context-specific research. Furthermore, while many resilience strategies historically focus on preparedness through structures, materials, and finance, this study recognizes that religion and social structures have a significant role in shaping responses to hazards and could be beneficial in shaping a community's hazard preparation efforts. This more holistic understanding of resilience could inform faith-based networks and provide non-faith-based actors with the necessary concepts and knowledge to create more equitable and effective DRR programming. To continue, development policies could be tailored to include faith-based actors and concepts for approaching environmental and social challenges outside of hazards.

In practice, faith-based organizations and leaders in vulnerable communities could also participate in spreading awareness over hazards which may help encourage the community's participation in mitigation and adaptation activities, increase institutional trust, and enhance community resilience.

Local religious and community leaders could also encourage cohesion by facilitating inter-denominational gatherings focused on sharing concerns over micro-conflicts. The use of a mediator could be especially helpful for this. Regular community gatherings focused on putting aside religious differences could also help the community brainstorm conflict management techniques to mitigate against further fragmentation, and to encourage the inclusion of newcomers. The use of a third party could be especially helpful in these gatherings as well. Religious and community leaders could also be trained in providing basic psychosocial support which could help individuals cope with various stressors that may otherwise degrade cohesion. In terms of environmental and social challenges, I finally recommend that community leaders continue to advocate to the regional municipalities on behalf of their communities for development projects, such as improvements in water and sanitation. Likewise, decision-making bodies (municipalities, regional governments, etc.) must ensure that community needs and expectations are considered within their hazard and development programs to increase local trust. By communicating transparently about what kind of support and funding can be feasibly dispersed, community members will be more aware of what they can reasonably advocate for during and after hazards.

To conclude, this work sheds light on critical aspects of religion, social cohesion, and barriers for community resilience in the Peruvian Amazon, yet many questions remain far from settled. The social and cultural complexities of this region demand ongoing investigation, as the forces of globalization, environmental change, and shifting religious landscapes continue to shape and reshape local realities. Only through sustained, interdisciplinary inquiry can we develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how rural Amazonian Christianity functions as both a unifying force and a source of division.

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Appendices

Appendix I: List of interlocutors

Community	Pseudonyms and ages by denomination
Éxito	Catholic Manuel (72), Julio (65), Ada (64), Mateo (59), Wilton (59), Clotilde (58), Luis (52), Juan (45), Jeyson (39), Brayan (37), Elissa (36), Leo (33), Lesli (31), Ronaldo (31) ¹⁸
	Evangelical Angely (72), Moises (53), Abel (50), Alex (46), Victoria (45), Julia (44), Janeth (42), Karen (40), Rosa (35), Meysi (28), Carmen (19)
	AEMINPU Jorge (55)
Leoncio Prado	Catholic Carlos (63), Óscar (58), Roberto (58), Isabel (55), Klever (50), ¹⁹ Steffani (46), Natalia (43), Lili (39), Olivia (30)
	Evangelical Antonio (63), Diego (58), Ester (55), Jose (55), Sofia (48), Roger (43), Jheremy (24)

¹⁸ Ronaldo is Éxito's community leader.

¹⁹ Klever is Leoncio Prado's community leader.

Appendix II: REB protocol approval letter



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT,
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

RIS Protocol
Number: 46416

Approval Date: 24-May-24

PI Name: Joycelin Van Caulart

Division Name:

Dear Joycelin Van Caulart:

Re: Your research protocol application entitled, "The Role of Rural Amazonian Christianity in Shaping Social Cohesion and Hazard Resilience in Ucayali, Peru"

The Social Sciences, Humanities & Education REB has conducted a Delegated review of your application and has granted approval to the attached protocol for the period 2024-05-24 to 2025-05-23.

This approval covers the ethical acceptability of the human research activity; please ensure that all other approvals required to conduct your research are obtained prior to commencing the activity.

Please be reminded of the following points:

- An **Amendment** must be submitted to the REB for any proposed changes to the approved protocol. The amended protocol must be reviewed and approved by the REB prior to implementation of the changes.
- An annual **Renewal** must be submitted for ongoing research. Renewals should be submitted between 15 and 30 days prior to the current expiry date.
- A **Protocol Deviation Report** (PDR) should be submitted when there is any departure from the REB-approved ethics review application form that has occurred without prior approval from the REB (e.g., changes to the study procedures, consent process, data protection measures). The submission of this form does not necessarily indicate wrong-doing; however follow-up procedures may be required.
- An **Adverse Events Report** (AER) must be submitted when adverse or unanticipated events occur to participants in the course of the research process.
- A **Protocol Completion Report** (PCR) is required when research using the protocol has been completed.
- If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Appendix III: Personal interview guide [English translation]

Demographic information

- How old are you?
- What is your gender?
- Are you married, single, divorced, widowed/widower?
- How many years (or months) have you lived in this community?
- What kind of work do you do?
- What do you farm?
- How much land do you farm on?
- How many members of your family live in this community?

Religious affinities

- What religion do you identify with? [Catholic, Evangelical, etc.]
- How long have you been in that religion?
- How did you become religious?
- Is your family also Evangelical or Catholic?
- How and why is religion an important part of your life?
- Do you think others in your religion feel the same way? Why or why not?

Sense of belonging

- Do you feel that you belong in your community?
 - o Why or why not?
- Do you think that people in your community are united by kinship/family?
 - o Why or why not?
- Do you live or work with members of your family?
- Do you think that people in your community are united by life circumstances?
 - o Why or why not?
- Do you think that people in your community are united by common religious beliefs?
 - o Why or why not?
- Do you feel that you belong to a religious congregation?
 - o [If yes] Describe your religious congregation.
- What else makes you feel like you belong here?

Social and environmental challenges

- What are the biggest social problems (or challenges) in your community?
 - o Regarding these social problems, how do they affect you or your family?
 - o What do you or your family do to deal with social problems?
- Do you think religious beliefs help solve social problems in your community? In what ways?
- Do you think religious beliefs create more social problems in your community? In what ways?
- What are the biggest environmental problems (or challenges) in your community?
 - o Regarding these environmental problems, how do they affect you or your family?
 - o What do you or your family do to deal with environmental problems?
- What do you think your community needs to help with environmental problems?

Mutual aid and collaborative assistance

- What are some of the ways people share and care for each other in your community?
- Does your religion encourage people to share resources and work in your community?
 - o How and why?
- Who do you interact with most often in your community?
- When you need more seeds, crops, or food, who do you go to most often?
- When you need more food, who do you go to most often?
- When you need help with your work in the fields/river/at home, who do you go to most often?

- When you need help with something else, who do you go to most often?
- Who do you help most in your community?
 - o How do you help them?
- Tell me about a time when someone from your community shared resources or work with you or cared about you.
 - o Was the person you mentioned also Evangelical/Catholic?
 - o Was the person you mentioned also family?
 - o How did that interaction make you feel?
- What are the advantages of sharing resources and work with other members of the community?
- Tell me about a time when someone from another community shared resources or work with you or cared about you.
 - o What were the results of the help your community received?
 - o Was the person from another community also Evangelical/Catholic?
 - o Was the person you mentioned also family?
- Do you think that others (in your community and outside) share and care for each other because of your religious beliefs?
 - o Why or why not?

Socialization

- Do you travel or work with other people in your community often?
- Where do you interact with other people the most?
- Do you often celebrate special events with other people in your community?
 - o What special events or days do you participate in the most?
- What other activities do you participate in?
- Are people in your community friendly to each other?
 - o Why do you think this is?
- Do you feel safe in the community?
- Do you feel happy in the community?
- Do you feel supported by the community?
- Who supports you the most in the community?
- What are some things that worry you?
- During difficult times in your life, do you relate more to your family, friends, or other people?
 - o Describe a difficult situation you have faced and what your family and friends did to help you through it.
- Do you feel more inclined to relate to someone of your same religion during difficult times in life?
 - o Why or why not?
- Do you feel more inclined to relate to someone of your same religion generally as well?
 - o Why or why not?
- How do your religious beliefs help you?

Flood stories

- Tell me about a time during a strong flood when you collaborated with another person or received help:
 - o Was that person who collaborated with you or helped you from your community or from an outside community?
 - o Was that person also Evangelical/Catholic?
 - o Was that person also family?
 - o Did you collaborate by sharing work tasks?
 - What tasks were shared?
 - How has sharing tasks helped?
 - o Did you collaborate by sharing equipment and natural resources?
 - What equipment or resources were shared?
 - What were they used for?
 - o Did you collaborate by sharing money?
 - How much money was shared?
 - What was the money used for?
 - o Did you collaborate by sharing seeds or crops?

- What seeds and crops were shared?
 - Did you encourage each other?
 - In what way and how?
- In what other ways have you collaborated?

Drought stories

- Tell me about a time during a severe drought when you collaborated with another person or received help:
 - Was that person who collaborated with you or helped you from your community or from an outside community?
 - Was that person also Evangelical/Catholic?
 - Was that person also family?
 - Did you collaborate by sharing work tasks?
 - What tasks were shared?
 - How has sharing tasks helped?
 - Did you collaborate by sharing equipment and natural resources?
 - What equipment or resources were shared?
 - What were they used for?
 - Did you collaborate by sharing money?
 - How much money was shared?
 - What was the money used for?
 - Did you collaborate by sharing seeds or crops?
 - What seeds and crops were shared?
 - Did you encourage each other?
 - In what way and how?
- In what other ways have you collaborated?

Emotions and belief in God

- How do you feel when there are floods and severe droughts in your community? [Are you afraid, worried, calm...?]
- What do you do to stay calm during floods and severe droughts?
- Does God have control over floods and severe droughts?
 - Why do you believe this?
- Do you believe that God has helped you or your family personally during floods and severe droughts?
 - If so, explain the situation and the results.
- Do you believe that God will help you during floods and droughts in the future?
 - Why do you believe this?
- What else do you believe about God?
- What does it mean to you to believe in God?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix IV: Community leader survey [English translation]

Community and community leader information

1. Date of interview
2. Community name and location
3. Community river access
4. No. of houses; no. of families
5. Lowland OR upland
6. Full community leader name, age, position/title

Community history

7. What year was the community founded?
8. How was it founded?
9. Was it ever part of a different community that split?
 - a. If yes, what influenced the split?
10. When was the last severe flood?
 - a. How did it affect the community?
 - b. What did the community do to tackle these challenges?
 - c. Has a large flood ever forced your community to relocate?
 - i. If yes, in what year?
 - d. What are the top three difficulties that community members face here during severe floods?
 - e. What do community members do to prepare for severe floods here?
11. When was the last severe drought?
 - a. How did it affect the community?
 - b. What did the community do to tackle these challenges?
 - c. Has a large drought ever forced your community to relocate?
 - i. If yes, in what year?
 - d. What are the top three difficulties that community members face here during severe droughts?
 - e. What do community members do to prepare for severe droughts here?
12. Has your community ever had to relocate due to riverbank erosion?
 - a. If yes, in what year?
 - b. What were the top three reasons that your community had to move?
 - c. What was the moving process like when your community had to move?

COVID-19 and recent changes

13. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your community?
14. What made illnesses worse during the pandemic?
15. What improved illnesses during the pandemic?
16. Do you believe that your community's way of life has changed in the past 5, 10, and 15 years?
 - a. If yes, how so?
17. Do you believe that the environment has changed in the past 5, 10, and 15 years?
 - a. If yes, how so?

Collaborating and sharing

18. How do people in your community share and care for one another?
19. How do people in your community collaborate at work?
20. How do people in your community collaborate at church?
21. How do people in your community collaborate during *mingas* and *faenas*?
22. How do people in your community collaborate during social events (parties, sports games, birthdays)?
23. What are some of the most popular social events in your community?
24. How do people in your community share products and groceries/food items?
25. How do people in your community share money?
26. In what other ways may people share and help one another in your community?

Work preferences

27. What do people mostly do for work here?
28. What are the most planted crops?
29. Is it more common to plant perennials or annuals?
30. What type of work does your community prefer to engage in?
 - a. Why do you think that is?
31. Do people in your community work with people from other communities?
32. Do people in your community hire people from other communities?
33. Are people in other communities hiring people from your community?
34. What type of work is most common to share between communities?

Intercommunity collaboration

35. Does your community collaborate with other communities?
 - a. If yes, how often?
 - b. What communities are collaborated with most often?
 - c. In what ways do you collaborate with them?
36. Are families in your community often collaborating with families from other communities?
 - a. If yes, in what ways?
37. Do people in your community travel to Pucallpa to work often?
 - a. How often?
38. What are the main reasons people travel to Pucallpa for work?
39. Does your community travel to Pucallpa to seek out aid/support?
 - a. If yes, what kind of aid/support is sought out most often in Pucallpa?

Religious population; experiences with missionaries and faith-based NGOs

40. Would you consider your community to be Catholic, Evangelical, or a mix?
41. Are there few or many Catholic people in your community?
42. Does your community have a Catholic church?
43. Are there few or many Evangelical people in your community?
44. Does your community have an Evangelical church?
45. From what year were Evangelicals present in your community?
46. Does your community receive regular visits from an Evangelical pastor?
47. Does your community receive regular visits from a Catholic priest?
48. What other community organizations or associations exist in your community?
49. Have Evangelical missionaries or Evangelical NGOs ever visited your community?
 - a. How often do they visit?
 - b. What do they do in the community?
 - c. What are the most common activities they carry out?
50. Have Catholic missionaries or Catholic NGOs ever visited your community?
 - a. How often do they visit?
 - b. What do they do in the community?
 - c. What are the most common activities they carry out?