Hybrid houses and dispersed communities: negotiating governmentality and living well in Peruvian Amazonia

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Abstract

Focused on one officially recognised Ashaninka *Comunidad Nativa* ('Native Community') on the Ucayali River in Peruvian Amazonia, the article examines indigenous responses to the demands and expectations of being part of the Peruvian state and the associated techniques of government. The article traces the origins of such communities to the 1974 Law of Native Communities, showing how their form and function has been produced through the constant interplay between external and internal conceptions of the proper organisation of communal life. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss' notion of *bricolage* as well as more recent discussions of 'indigenous creolisation,' hybridity and the 'openness' of Amerindian societies the article emphasises the productivity of focusing on the everyday constructions of hybrid forms rather than distinct categories. In a final section it draws out the implications of this understanding to recent political discussions and uses of the concept of *Buen Vivir* ('living well'). In this way it argues that while emphasising and projecting particular ideas of indigenous culture may be one strategy for indigenous survival and action, the ability to combine and mix new forms of living remains a key component of contemporary indigenous lives in Amazonia.

Keywords: Amazonia, Peru, Indigenous peoples, Development, Buen Vivir, Governmentality

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Hybrid Houses and Dispersed Communities: Negotiating Governmentality and Living Well in Peruvian Amazonia

1. Introduction

Wemmick's house was a little wooden cottage in the midst of plots of garden, and the top of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.

'My own doing,' said Wemmick. 'Looks pretty; don't it?'

(Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*)

I begin with this description of Mr. Wemmick's suburban 'castle', "with its miniature drawbridge, its cannon firing at nine o'clock, its bed of salad and cucumbers, thanks to which its occupants could withstand a siege if necessary" (Lévi-Strauss, 1964:17) because it was one of the examples given by Lévi-Strauss when he introduced the idea of bricolage in *The Savage Mind*¹ and emphasises the long-standing preoccupation in European writing over modernity's interaction with older forms of living. On rereading this passage recently, it also brought to mind houses that I had seen on a recent trip to Ashaninka communities on the Ucayali River in Peruvian Amazonia, which exhibited a similar mixing of styles in their composition. An initial view might see such forms as absurd mongrels, comic in the way that Dickens clearly intended the reader to see Mr. Wemmick's house, and representative of the failure of indigenous peoples fully to incorporate modern forms of living and being in the contemporary world. In this article, however, by taking forward aspects of Lévi-Strauss's ideas of *bricolage*, while engaging with more recent discussions of indigenous 'creolisation' and 'hybridity' I suggest that such 'hybrid' houses as well as other physical aspects of the wider communities in which they are found should be seen as material manifestations and representations of the ingenuity and pragmatism of indigenous peoples in their on-going engagement with the state and the associated techniques of government and wider expectations of 'modernity'.

Through this lens and in line with the other contributions in this volume this article considers the forms of governmentality with which indigenous peoples are currently engaged, particularly in relation to territory and indigenous identities. Specifically, it considers the way in which Ashaninka people continue to interact with the Peruvian nation state and its laws as well as wider societal expectations of what it means to be both 'indigenous' and a 'citizen' while retaining their own ideas of how best to live. The foundations of this tension in Peruvian Amazonia can be traced to the 1974 *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* which was modelled on Andean rural communities even as it was applied across Peru's diverse social and cultural landscape. While progressive in its push for the recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights to territory, the law also carried with it particular ideas of the 'correct' structure and organisation of indigenous communities that was alien to many Amazonian groups, and particularly to Ashaninka people. As such it could be understood to continue longer processes of governmentality and the assimilation of indigenous peoples into

¹ Lévi-Strauss notes the particularly French character of the practice of bricolage and the figure of the bricoleur but associates them with the English term 'Jack of all Trades' which is how Dickens' Wemmick describes himself: "I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades," said Wemmick, in acknowledging my compliments."

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forms of living and being dictated from the outside, rather than based on their own logic and values. In the contemporary moment, 45 years after the introduction of the law, these tensions remain even as new forms of indigenous valorisation and visibility have risen.

2. Governmentality

The relationship between the state and its citizens has long been understood in the social sciences using Foucault's notion of governmentality. In his foundational lecture on the issue Foucault traced ideas of government from the 16th Century starting with Machiavelli's treatise *The Prince* arguing that with the move away from the divine right of kings and the emergence of first the 'administrative state' and then the 'governmental state,' "the art of government, instead of seeking to found itself in transcendental rules... must find the principles of its rationality in that which constitutes the specific reality of the state" (Foucault, 1991:97). That is that the state actively works to control its population, territory and wealth through techniques of government. Foucault argued that the form of state power that emerged was "both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power... in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific pattern" (Foucault, 1982:782-3). In taking this approach Foucault used the term 'government' in the expansive manner of its use in the sixteenth century, referring not only to political structures or to the management of states but rather designating "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed" (Foucault, 1982:790). An understanding that can be summarised as 'The conduct of conduct' (Gordon, 1991:2). Following Foucault, Burchell describes government as the "'art' of acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively, so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves" (Burchell, 1993:267).

Working primarily in Western states Foucault and those that developed his ideas focused on the institutions of the state that most obviously affected conduct such as prisons, schools and hospitals, emphasising those spaces where the state's 'technologies of power' are most explicitly operationalised and the behaviour of citizens disciplined (Foucault, 1988:18 quoted in Rose-Redwood, 2006:473). Such technologies of discipline worked in concert with 'technologies of the self' such that "the subjects so created would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient" (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2009:10). Such disciplining of the self occurs most obviously in the formal institutions of the state but also through spatial division. Foucault himself used the example of the 'artificial town' of Richelieu from 1631, noting its paralleling of a roman camp with clear grids of streets and arguing that "discipline belongs to the order of construction" (2007:53). This extension of state power works in two ways, to both expand the physical realm of the state but also to order physical space as a means of encompassing, controlling and disciplining its population (Ó Tuathail, 1996:7). As Allières argues territory is not a natural given, but a "historically dated invention" (1980:25, quoted in Kent, 2008:290) with the state then working to shape and discipline all people, things and events within its boundaries (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2009:6-7). I will now turn to examine these processes in Peruvian Amazonia, where such understandings of governmentality have seldom been applied.

3. Peruvian Amazonia

This article focuses on the Ashaninka community of Pijuayal on the Ucayali River in eastern Peru where I have been conducting research over almost 20 years, including extended periods of ethnographic fieldwork. Ashaninka people constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Amazonia as a whole. While the contours and membership of this group are contested, this article follows Santos-Granero in using ‘Ashaninka’ as ‘the general term used to refer to the cluster of Arawak-speaking peoples living in Peru’s Selva Central region, a cluster that includes speakers of Ashaninka, Ashéninka and Nomatsiguenga’ (Santos-Granero, 2017: 101). The diversity of Ashaninka experiences and lives is emphasised in their geographic range, which stretches from the slopes of the Andes across to the Brazilian state of Acre. Thus, while the communities described in this article identify themselves as Ashaninka and have many of the general social and cultural characteristics associated with Ashaninka ways of being, it is important to recognise the variation across the whole and understand that no individual’s or individual community’s experience stands for all.

Fig. 1: Map of Ashaninka Groups and Research Area

Ashaninka people have a long and varied history of interacting with other groups, from extensive trade networks that encompassed Andean populations (see Biedma, 1989 [1682] and Johnson, 2003:29) to bellicose relations with threatening external groups. This has included rebellions against early Franciscan missionaries, defence against rubber traders and, more recently, terrorist militias and encroaching colonists (Brown & Fernández, 1991; Hvalkof, 1994; Espinosa, 1993a & 1993b, Rojas Zolezzi, 1994:227). In the past 50 years, however, the most enduring and ultimately impactful engagement for Ashaninka people has been with the ever-growing Peruvian state. While less immediate and clear cut than their interaction with other groups it is the apparatus of the state, particularly in the form of its education and legal systems, that have had the greatest influence on the form and style of Ashaninka ways of being.

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As the state has expanded it has worked to include all of the people within its territory as citizens, officially granting them rights under the Constitution and the *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* but also bringing with it various conventions and obligations. While there have been different currents throughout Peru's history in relation to its indigenous history and peoples (de la Cadena, 1996) these have seldom placed any value on Amazonian groups. Instead the historical reality has been of the subjugation and marginalisation of indigenous Amazonian peoples with non-Amazonian and non-indigenous populations understanding them as in need of 'development' and 'civilisation'. In Ashaninka communities two key ways in which citizenship has been enacted is through formal education and the granting of land titles for officially recognised communities.

In the former, as has been documented in many similar cases in Amazonia (Gow, 1991, Rival, 1996, see also Killick 2008), and beyond (for example Garcia, 2003 and Canessa, 2004), teachers hold particular standards of comportment and knowledge that are embodied in children as new ways of being in the world, that separate them from many of the older forms of living. In relation to land titles an officially recognised *Comunidad Nativa* (Native Community) carries with it a certain ideal type. Both of these processes, involving the claiming of legal rights and forms of support from the state, also bring with them the forms of governmentality discussed above, as the state expands to encompass such citizens and both overtly and implicitly create and encourage certain forms of behaviour (Foucault, 1980:122). Such processes can have multiple forms and outcomes under the guise of supporting citizens (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). My focus in this article is to the manner in which indigenous groups can and do engage with these processes in complex ways. I turn now to the specificities of my fieldwork.

4. Indigenous Buildings

The settlement of Pijuayal formed around two brothers-in-law, Agustin and Germán, Asheninka men who had come into the area from further up the Ucayali and were the main instigators of the community's official recognition as a *Comunidad Nativa* in 1985. Over time the physical presence and population of the community has fluctuated, but it encompasses approximately 40 families, around 300 people, across its whole territory. Its centre, however, remains small, growing in recent years, from four families to seven, the smallest centre of any community I have visited in the region. This emphasises how, instead of living clustered together most of its inhabitants live spread at varying distances throughout the forest, right up to the Sira hills behind. Previously one could imagine the disappearance of its central, wooden buildings and thus the dissolution of its official existence if families withdrew from communal activities. However, the likelihood of its permanence has been increased in recent years by the construction of buildings from more durable materials. This began with the replacement of the wooden school building with one made from bricks, concrete and a metal roof, paid for by the local municipality. This building has, in turn, added impetus to some of the community members' desire to have further, durable community buildings and to live and work closer together. On one recent visit I found myself participating in the activity of bringing one such building into being.

It was a hot afternoon and some of the young men in the village had gathered around a large boat that had recently arrived from the local city of Pucallpa. The boat was full of bricks that were part of a payment to the community from a timber operation that

had taken trees from their land. The sun seemed particularly hot as we carried these bricks from the riverbank to pile them beneath the house of one man, Carlos. I was told that they were for an ‘office’ for the community’s *agente*, one of the three official, elected positions within the community.² A place for the *agente* to meet people and to keep the community’s official records, which consisted of the rubber stamps of the community leaders and the book in which the minutes of meetings were written. Whenever I voiced some scepticism as to the need for a whole building for such small items and whether the *agente* would actually need an office, people responded that to be a ‘real community’³ they needed to have one and so our labour continued until there was a large pile of bricks under Carlos’s house (Fig. 2).

As we worked, I also started to think about Carlos’s house which, raised high on stilts, made entirely from solid, sawn planks, with walls enclosing all of its sides and a roof of corrugated iron sheets, was markedly different from most of the houses of the other people in the area and any I had seen here on previous trips. He told me that he had only recently finished it and its painted front was clean and shiny. He also proudly showed me the padlock on one of its doors, the room of which he was using as a place to store crates of beer and soda that he was selling. Indeed, as the work continued men would approach him for beer, which he would only give them if they paid in cash, refusing to grant credit to anyone. When we discussed the merits of his new house, he said that the walls and padlock not only meant he could store things safely but also that people could not see inside to observe what he had or what he was doing. He also claimed that the house was much stronger and protected from the elements than other houses, while its high position held it above the muddy ground during the rain.

Fig. 2: Carlos’s ‘modern’ house with the pile of bricks beneath it

As the number of bricks left to carry dwindled and we passed around some sodas that I had bought from Carlos the other men started to talk about the future of the

² The three official positions in Pijuayal were *agente*, *teniente* and *jefe* (chief). Article 22 of the law notes that there should be a *Jefe*, *Secretario y Tesorero* while other communities appear to do it differently as well (cf. Sarmiento Barletti, 2011).

³ ‘Una Comunidad de verdad’

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community. One man in particular, Raul, who I had never previously met started talking about how there would soon be a street of houses like Carlos' stretching up a small incline to the new school. He pointed to the row of poles that held sagging electricity cables and empty lamp shades saying that these would be repaired and then linked to a new generator that they were demanding another timber company buy for them. The new brick building was to be placed at the end of this street at the point where another man, Jorge's, gardens began. This then was their vision of what the community should look like, with electricity, order and new types of buildings. 'Developed,' ('*desarrollado*') as Raul put it. Raul also linked this future to new people taking on the elected positions in the community, including himself as *jefe* (boss), making people more active in their participation in the community's activities and also demanding more support from the local and regional government, including getting better teachers and a permanent health post.

As I talked further with Raul his own background became clearer. He was a cousin of many of the men present but his parents had moved to the *mestizo* settlement of Margarita down by the main river when Raul was young. He told me that this was primarily to enable his and his siblings' attendance at the school there. He had decided to settle back in Pijuayal a couple of years before as there was no land available in the other settlement for him to build his own house or grow crops. His new house, which he lived in with a wife and small child, was situated right by the river and was clearly the template for Carlos's house. Its raised and enclosed style is a common form of houses in communities on the main Ucayali River and Raul emphasised to me that it was how all houses in Margarita were built. This then, was the future that Raul and the other young men apparently now envisioned for Pijuayal. Replacing the dispersed, wood, palm trunk and thatched houses of their parents with a neatly ordered cluster of this newer style of building.

As we were having this discussion it was notable that it was the younger, male adults of the community who were envisaging this future. Indeed, it had been these individuals who had been the most active in moving the bricks that day, while a few older men, including the community's founder Agustin, mainly sat, watched and talked among themselves. Apart from Agustin all of these other men and their families had always lived further off into the forest and arguably continue to see the settlement as relatively transitory, with the school and the presence of state-funded teachers as the only real reason for its existence (Killick 2008). This tension could also be seen in the other practices of the community and its politics, particularly in communal meetings and with ideas of forming larger political organisations, a trend that, as we shall see, while relatively common across Peru in recent decades, had previously been resisted in Pijuayal. Yet while it would be easy to present a generational divide a closer look at the community complicates such arguments.

At the other end of the smaller sandy path that was destined to become the wider, clear central street, lay Carlos's older brother's house. 'Winsho' as he was universally known⁴ had built a house that failed to conform to Raul's template, instead offering

⁴ The man's given name is Agustin Júnior, named after his father. In Ucayali Spanish 'Winsho' is the nickname for a family's youngest son. I therefore never fully understood why this was Agustin Júnior's moniker even though he was older than his brother Carlos. I suspect the name was kept after infancy for the same reason that I will refer to him as Winsho in this text, so as to distinguish him from his father.

an interesting mix of older and newer elements. The house was taller than the usual houses, but rather than being raised on stilts Winsho had made it into two storeys, with an outside staircase allowing access to the upper room which he mainly used to store things. The lower space was the one that he and his family lived in and, while it was enclosed, he had also left deliberate large gaps between the slats, 'to make it cooler' as he told me. Similarly, while he had used some corrugated iron for the roof the main part of it still used palm thatch. This may have been partly about cost but Winsho also said that it was cooler with thatch and he preferred it that way. Moreover, in observing his family's everyday activities it was clear that they actually spent most of their time in the open and thatched structure next to the enclosed house. Here, as in all of the Ashaninka houses with which I was familiar, the family could cook and carry out their everyday activities, the children could crawl around on the palm wood floor and hammocks could be strung between the rafters. The enclosed part of the house was mostly used for storage or to shelter in when it was cold and wet or when the family wanted more privacy from passers-by.

Fig. 3: Winsho's 'hybrid' house

On first seeing Winsho's house, a person's reaction might parallel Pip's bemusement at the sight of Mr. Wemmick's house in *Great Expectations*, the description of which Dickens clearly intended to be comical. Yet in talking to Winsho, it is Lévi-Strauss's observation that seems most appropriate. Winsho has fashioned his bricolage house using the items and techniques at his disposal to fashion a new kind of dwelling to suit his own needs and preferences. He follows the archetype of Mr. Wemmick almost perfectly as a 'jack-of-all-trades', *bricoleur*, able to fashion his own house according to his own taste and whims.

The inventive and deliberate nature of Winsho's approach was fully emphasised to me the day after the brick-carrying labour, when I was walking along one of the forest paths that led away from the centre of Pijuayal. I was walking to see what had changed since my last visit while heading for some of the houses of the older generations that I knew were scattered off from this main path. Hearing voices on a part of the path where there had not previously been any houses, I turned off down a newer and unfamiliar path towards them. Soon the path opened out into a cleared

space with a house at its centre (Fig. 4). As I made the customary call of greeting and warning that I was approaching I heard the voice of Carlos calling back and came to the house to be greeted by the sight of Carlos holding his young baby while his wife busied herself with a fire on the ground.

Slightly surprised to see Carlos in this also new looking house, I asked him if this was his house as well. He confirmed as much and as we sat there, and his wife served me manioc beer, surrounded by all of her cooking pots and utensils, the baby's clothes and all the other signs of domestic life that had been absent from the other house the day before it was very apparent that this was the family's main residence⁵. Carlos confirmed this as he talked about how it was cooler and more peaceful to live in this house, away from others, than in the centre under the hot corrugated iron of the house in the centre. I laughingly asked him what the other house was for and he told me that it was his shop, and also for if he had 'business' (*'negocios'*) in the centre. We were all of a 15-minute walk away from his other house.

Fig 4: Carlos's other house

Carlos's strategy was not entirely new to me as it fitted with my experience of other Ashaninka communities I know and particularly the community of La Selva, a few hours walk away from Pijuayal and nearer the main Ucayali River. There the centre has been largely filled by *mestizo* incomers and many Ashaninka with houses in the centre also had dwellings in their gardens further out in the forest. While Sarmiento Barletti (2011:91) has suggested that the dispersal in such settlements might be caused by the presence of *mestizos* the fact that it occurs in Pijuayal as well emphasises to me that locally, the dispersed form of living remains the preference for Ashaninka families. I argue that the core consideration is to avoid the gaze and interference of others in order to protect a family's freedom and independence

⁵ The focus of this article is on Ashaninka men's experiences. As seen in my description of Carlos' house, however, the houses and forms of living involved entire families and usually reflected a joint decision.

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(Killick 2005:220). This then was Carlos's hybrid strategy for being part of the envisaged future of a 'modern' Pijuayal while still living in the ways in which he wanted. Winsho's hybrid house was arguably trying to achieve the same balance but within a single building. Thus, Carlos's apparently modern house masks a reality in which it is more of a simulacrum of an actual house while his life continues to occur between the different poles. In contrast Winsho's house was a fully realised manifestation of that continued effort to draw these worlds together.

The example of the houses and the different architectural and location strategies employed by individuals speaks to broader questions of this community's interactions and engagement with the wider Peruvian nation state and broader ideas of both government and development. Drawing on recent discussions of 'indigenous creolisation' and hybridity as well as recent broader discussions of development, and particularly ideas of *Buen Vivir*, in the rest of this article I seek to emphasise the productivity of focusing on the everyday constructions of hybrid forms rather than on particular categories. In this way I argue that while emphasising and projecting particular ideas of indigenous culture may be one strategy for indigenous survival and action, the ability to combine, select and bricolage new forms of living remains a key part of contemporary indigenous experience.

5. The *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas*

As I noted in the introductory parts of this article the origins of contemporary *Comunidades Nativas* lie in the *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* which was passed on June 24, 1974, under the military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado. The law's stated aim was to "establish an agrarian structure which would contribute to the integrated development of the jungle in such a way that its population could maintain a level of living compatible with human dignity" (Smith, 1979:42). The government saw the law as a means of formalizing the state's relationship with its indigenous inhabitants and was also part of Velasco's broader drive to implement left-leaning policies that redressed some of Peru's social and political inequalities. In this context the law was formulated and implemented relatively rapidly and those charged with formulating it mainly fell back on an idealised form of Andean community which already had some recognition (Gow, n.d.). Greene notes the influence of the anthropologist Stefano Varese in some of these policies and particularly his definition of a native community as: "a stable socio-economic unit linked to a particular territorial area with a type of settlement that may be nuclear, semi-dispersed or dispersed" (Varese, 1972:126 quoted in Greene, 2009:143)⁶. For all of the flexibility suggested in this definition however, as Greene observes, "in the early phases of native community demarcation the sedentary and agrarian-oriented model of the Andean peasant community often won out" (Greene, 2009:143). The power of this standardised version of what an official community should look like is clear along the Ucayali and Urubamba rivers. Here the majority of settlements conform to a clear pattern with a central square of grass, usually used as a football pitch, surrounded by official buildings such as the school, health post and community buildings. A grid of residential streets then extends from this central space. The impact of the introduction of the *Comunidades Nativas* stretches beyond their physical forms.

⁶ "la unidad socio-económico estable, vinculada a un determinado espacio territorial, con un tipo de asentamiento que puede ser nucleado, semidisperso o disperso, que se auto-reconoce como comunidad y que se diferencia de las otras unidades socio-económicas vecinas, sean estas nativas o no" (Varese 1972:168).

Rubenstein, drawing on Fried's (1975) work on 'secondary tribes', argues that for the Shuar in Ecuador: "What is from the Shuar perspective *inclusion* in a larger entity is from the Ecuadorian perspective an *extension* into a new geographic and social space" (Rubenstein, 2001:264). Not only have these processes tied Shuar land into the state's territorial control they have also drawn Shuar people into new and regulated identities. Similarly, Erazo's ethnography of Kichwa people in Rukullakta, Ecuador shows how residents had to conform to the state's definition of an "agricultural cooperative" in order for their claims to territory to be legally recognised (2013:194). Such examples show the manner in which the expansion of state territorial control, and specifically the foundational demand for sedentary communities, has reduced the flexibility and mobility of many indigenous communities globally.

In the Peruvian context similar processes have been documented in *Comunidades Nativas*. Here in many cases the new styles of settlement, in parallel with the influence of formal education, have become explicitly compared favourably with previous 'uncivilised' forms of sociality. Writing about more concentrated Ashaninka communities on the Bajo Urubamba Sarmiento Barletti observes that:

This manner of organisation is now common and I later learned that one of the good things about living in a *Comunidad* is the close living they can achieve as 'civilised' people as opposed to their 'uncivilised' ancestors who lived apart (Sarmiento Barletti, 2011:11, see also Gow, 1991).

While such ideas were echoed at times in Pijuayal, as can be seen in my descriptions of the settlement patterns of people and the example of Carlos's second house the differentiations between older and newer forms of living were not as apparently clear-cut as in other communities in the region. That is people largely continue to prefer to live tranquilly with family and friends in dwellings spread out through the forest. Coming together at certain times to share food and drink and sociality, but then dispersing back to their houses to live in relative peace and quiet.

While all three writers, Sarmiento Barletti, Rubenstein and Erazo, show and discuss some forms of resistance to and adaptation of these outside forms in general, as noted in the introduction to this collection, such work is relatively rare. Here I want to engage further with the manner in which Pijuayaliños construction of their houses and communities can be understood in relation to the forms of governmentality described above, specifically through the lens of notions of 'living well'.

6. Living Well

Amazonians' preoccupation with the 'aesthetics of living' and how to 'live well' have long been noted in the anthropological literature (Overing & Passes, 2000:3) an observation to which Ashaninka people conform. Similarly, Sarmiento Barletti (2016a & 2016b) recounts how some of the Urubamba communities described above use the Ashaninka words *Kametsa Asaiki*, which he broadly translates as 'living well together,' specifically noting how community members credit the new forms of settlement as allowing them to do this. In Pijuayal there was no explicit, local equivalent formulation but nevertheless there was a similar preoccupation with living well, understood as families having abundant food and drink and able to partake in peaceful sociality with those around them. A key part of this ideal for my informants, I would argue, is the maintenance of an egalitarian ethos between individuals living in

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an area, with all adults maintaining an idea of equality and a lack of hierarchies (see also Killick 2007). It is this which, in part, underpins a dislike of living too closely with others. The fear that individuals become subject to the claims and demands of others in ways that undermine their autonomy and ultimately the peace of the wider community.

These tensions were particularly apparent in many of the community's official meetings where conflicts between further community integration in the form of collective work and responsibility and the desire for autonomy play out. At times this would be in the form of verbal discussions, with individuals standing up to make speeches about how much time was being demanded to cut the grass, keep the paths cleared or provide food and drink for communal events. In the main, however, these disputes played out much less explicitly, through taciturn silences in response to the exhortations of the *jefe*, or more often the *mestizo* teacher, about the need to undertake some specific task. These would be followed by a lack of any action taken, such that even if an appointed time and day for an activity had been 'agreed' upon in the meeting, few people would actually show up. Rosengren has used similar observations in the Matsigenka communities he works in to argue that for older Matsigenka, "decisions can only be individual, never collective, and formal decisions taken at communal assemblies may therefore be conceived of as being of no relevance to them" (Rosengren, 2003:232).

Similarly, while Agustin was recognised as having been one of the key founders of the settlement, its officially elected *jefe* at various times and as a man who continued to be respected in the area it was still recognised that ultimately no one held any real authority. In this understanding people would only remain as long as they felt that they and their families gained some advantage from doing so. In opposition to this perspective stands Raul's view of what it means to be a *comunero* in a modern community, of the need to live and work together in a much more ordered and clustered form.

The contrast here is arguably not just about what it means to be a *comunero* but also whether the 'community' exists at all in the ways envisaged and enacted by the state. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the centre of Pijuayal was better understood as an extension of Agustin's own family, rather than as a more cosmopolitan and official '*Comunidad Nativa*'. Such a view would conform with older descriptions of Ashaninka settlement patterns, and particularly the description of *nampitsi*, agglomerations of a few houses around a charismatic leader whose reputation and abilities were enough to attract a group of followers to live around him (Elick, 1970: 191). In this case it could be argued that Pijuayal was a *nampitsi* that had formed around Agustin, that then took on a new significance and permanence owing to his success in getting it officially recognised as a *Comunidad Nativa*. From this perspective Pijuayal itself, like Winsho's house, can be understood as a hybrid form, based on an older Ashaninka idea of how settlements are formed around an individual, on top of which has been laid a state-recognised form that has allowed its *comuneros* to make claims on the state, most importantly in the form of educational provisions for their children. Such a perspective emphasises that while the creation of the *Comunidad Nativa* can be understood as an extension of the state, in a form that reproduces some of the structure and ideology of the state, its arrangement and everyday patterns of life are still underpinned by Ashaninka notions of how best to

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live.

7. Bricolage, Indigenous Creolisation, Hybridity and Openness

Lévi-Strauss introduced the idea of *bricolage* in his attempt to understand the difference between “two distinct modes of scientific thought” that of the mythological thought of ‘the savage mind’ and that of (modern) ‘scientific thought’. For him the difference could be characterised as that between the activities of ‘the *bricoleur*’ and ‘the engineer’. In his representation the *bricoleur* has a closed set of instruments and materials from which he must approach any problem and offer a solution. A process that he understood as paralleling that of mythological thought.

The elements which the ‘bricoleur’ collects and uses are ‘pre-constrained’ like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre (Lévi-Strauss, 1964:19)

In contrast the ‘engineer,’ who for Lévi-Strauss stands for the more ‘removed’ level of ‘scientific thought’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1964:10) fashions new tools and sources materials for each new task.

This assumption that the modern scientific method allows individuals to “go beyond the constraints imposed by a particular state of civilization” has, rightly, been the subject of deep critique. Derrida in *Structure and Sign and Play* argues not only for the impossibility of any subject being able to construct his own discourse ‘out of nothing’ but goes further to argue that the figure of the engineer is itself a myth: “the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the bricoleur” (2001:360). Here I do not seek to defend Lévi-Strauss’s arguments about the differences between modes of thinking but I do find it useful not least because Winsho’s house so mirrors one of the key examples that sprang to Lévi-Strauss when he tried to encapsulate what was occurring in indigenous culture. Here though, I suggest that such examples of bricolage can be understood as *more* inventive than their ‘modern’ counterparts. That is, whereas Raul and Carlos were trying to reproduce what they understood to be a ‘modern’ house as faithfully as possible Winsho was producing a much more innovative form.

In recent work Halbmayer, writing about Yukpa people in Venezuela, argues for the expansion of the application of the concept of Creolisation from a geographic focus on the Caribbean and plantation economy and emphasis on “foreign settlers becoming native in a new context” (2013:66). Instead he argues that Creolisation’s underlying characteristic of the creation of new populations in both continuity and discontinuity with local and immigrant populations can be applied in other cases. Specifically, he coins the term “indigenous creolization” and follows Cohen and Toninato (2010) in seeing creolization not simply “as a synonym for cultural mixture” but also as entailing “a process of internal restructuring, inventiveness and reflexivity” which is “a highly creative and continuous process.” (Halbmayer, 2013:67). He notes that creativity reflects the long-noted Amerindian “openness to the other” that relies on “the incorporation of elements of the Other” but also that “such a partial incorporation of external elements also leads to a transformation of the self. It produces ontological changes and mixed cosmologies” (Halbmayer, 2013:67).

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Lévi-Strauss was the first anthropologist to explicitly refer to an Amerindian ‘openness to the Other’ and their use of alterity in the production of local identities and social and cultural reproduction (Carneiro da Cunha, 2007:xii). More recently Londoño Sulkin has described the ‘Amazonian package’ as the worldview “that human bodies are fabricated socially, that this occurs in the context of a perspectival cosmos, and that relations with dangerous outside Others are necessary to the process” (Londoño Sulkin, 2017:24). He further notes that:

The third element in the Amazonian package is the... concept... that the creation or formation of proper human bodies and the achievement of a desirable lifestyle also depend on relations of alterity, that is, relations with a panoply of Others (Londoño Sulkin, 2017:25).

Santos-Granero has shown how such an understanding emphasises the agency of indigenous Amazonian groups in processes of apparent “acculturation or deculturation” as such changes are not just a consequence of external pressures but are also driven by an internal desire and logic (Santos-Granero, 2009:479).

In this understanding Pijuayaliños are not just mixing different aspects of Peruvian society and governance with their own, but the very act of doing so fits with a much more general way of relating to ‘others’. Such an argument fits well with Rubenstein’s observation of the need for “an awareness that binaries such as “nature/culture” and “traditional/modern” often structure our own implicit knowledge, are themselves produced, and that good research must struggle against them” (Rubenstein, 2004:151-2). If we agree that indigenous culture and ways of being are open to transformation, then the emphasis on particular, easily categorised and depicted, indigenous forms can be understood as yet another creation of the modern (see also Greene, 2009:15). The importance of this fuller understanding of indigenous engagements with the state and their own perspectives on interactions with outsiders is of particular importance in relation to the apparent, contemporary valourisation of indigenous political forms.

8. *Buen Vivir*

In recent years indigenous understandings of ‘living well’ have increasingly moved into wider national and international political discourse, particularly in relation to questions of socially and environmentally sustainable development. This is especially true in Latin America where notions of *Buen Vivir* have gained increasing importance, including their formal integration into the constitutions of both Bolivia and Ecuador. Yet even in this apparently progressive political climate there is a danger that indigenous ideas and practices continue to be manipulated, particularly through the reification of specific, idealised forms, such that the voices of indigenous peoples themselves become ventriloquised, co-opted or suppressed (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Hunt, 2014; Sundberg, 2014; Todd, 2016). Moreover, it is not clear that the promise of apparently indigenous-led development or plurinationalism is being fulfilled. This is clearest in Bolivia where the Morales government has long been held up as the exemplar of these new forms of ethnogovernmentality, under the Aymara term *Suma Qamaña*. For example, Anthias (2018) shows the limits of the Morales government’s postcoloniality in a reality in which the government continues to depend on rents from hydrocarbons as well as the wider capitalist framework. The plurinational state is also limited by various economic, political, social and cultural aspects, including conflicts between different regional populations and ethnic groups. Thus Anthias (2018 & this

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volume) shows how Guaraní people in the Bolivian Chaco have used the potential of hydrocarbons on their territory to push back against the state and try to claim power and gain recognition in new ways. López (2017) has depicted similar conflicts in Bolivian Amazonia between Tacana people and Aymara colonists from the highlands.

Peru has not embraced plurinationalism and notions of *Buen Vivir* to the same extent as its neighbours and indigenous voices remain marginalised in national politics. Nevertheless, the rise of indigenous federations has continued to influence some policies and champion indigenous forms. This has included the notion of *Kametsa Asaiki* discussed above in relation to Ashaninka communities on the Bajo Urubamba which Sarmiento Barletti argues has become a symbol of resistance in those communities’ “fight for the right to have rights in Peru” (2011:iii, see also Belaunde 2013). Sarmiento Barletti presents his informants’ conception of *Kametsa Asaiki* as an ethos of well-being based on three key pillars: “(1) the control of antisocial emotions... and the everyday practices of the socially constructive ones; (2) an ethos of hard work... and (3) relationships of care” (2017:109). Such detailed and careful analyses emphasise the focus on interpersonal relations but also the complexities and nuances of such notions. As I noted above, although my informants did not explicitly use the term *Kametsa Asaiki*, the values that Sarmiento Barletti articulates resonate with their understandings of how to live well. As this article has emphasised, however, in Pijuayal the majority of families understand that the best way to achieve this is best achieved by drawing on a mixture of different forms. For older couples this involves continuing to live in a more dispersed manner while for younger families, such as those of Carlos and Winsho, it involves constructing hybrid forms of living, either between two houses or in single, material form.

That different indigenous peoples have distinct and varied ways of living should not be a controversial observation. Nevertheless, it stands in contrast to the mainstream depictions of indigenous living that have gained increasing regional and international currency under the banner of *Buen Vivir*. Gudynas in looking at the main trends of the discourse around *Buen Vivir* notes the core idea being ‘quality of life, but with the specific idea that well-being is only possible within a community’ (Gudynas, 2011:441). While such definitions need not necessarily be associated with a particular, physical form of community, in reality an idealised version of an indigenous community has become attached to this political project. Again, as with the *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* before it, the influence of indigenous cultures from the highlands is clear, with their particular ideas of settlements and political organisations around the concept of the ayllu underlying much of the popular understanding of *Buen Vivir*.

In fact, Gudynas actually goes further in tracing not only the influence of Aymara ideas, but arguing these are in a particular, idealised form stemming from the work of the Aymara sociologist Raul Yampara (Gudynas, 2011:444). It is this more formalised and idealised form of *Buen Vivir* that has come to dominate public and political discourse and that has also taken on a particular political dimension that stretches beyond the everyday wellbeing of indigenous groups. A first key step in this process has been to note that ideas of everyday good sociality can be extended out to encompass “not only persons, but also crops and cattle, and the rest of Nature” (Gudynas, 2011:444). This emphasis on communities and wider relations is often then placed in opposition to ideas and outcomes of Eurocentric ‘development’. In line with

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this approach Gudynas describes *Buen Vivir* as:

A plural concept with two main entry points. On the one hand, it includes critical reactions to classical Western development theory. On the other hand, it refers to alternatives to development emerging from indigenous traditions, and in this sense the concept explores possibilities beyond the modern Eurocentric tradition (Gudynas, 2011:441).

In such formulations the political intent of discourses of *Buen Vivir* are clear. Here indigenous forms of living are held up as alternatives and antidotes to the state and the wider, globalised capitalist system (see also Escobar, 2012).

My point in these final remarks is not to undermine these political aims but to note how they may diverge from the experiences and desires that lie at the heart of everyday attempts by indigenous peoples to live well. As can be seen in Pijuayal as well as much of the ethnographic work on indigenous Amazonian peoples that I have cited there is a sense of wanting a better future for themselves and their children. This is particularly clear in relation to formal education but also in a desire for various manufactured goods as well as a wider engagement with the world. And what all of this work emphasises are the innovative and composite ways in which indigenous people continue to take forward these processes, including through the embracing of new forms of education, intercultural health, leadership, trade and communal organisation. As Sarmiento Barletti emphasises such new forms are encompassed precisely to “defend their right to pursue *kametsa asaiki*” (Sarmiento Barletti 2011:iii). In this view *kametsa asaiki* is not a strategy in itself, nor something that can be split from a contemporary desire for ‘modernity’ and some of its offerings. Rather it just the articulation of some key values that are deemed necessary for living well with those around you. The manner in which individuals, families and communities choose to achieve those expectations and the *bricolage* of structures and materials they use and build to help them do this remain flexible.

This observation of the varied and flexible ways in which a good life can be achieved, including through the incorporation of different ways of being and thinking, is important because it tends to get obscured as the term *Buen Vivir* moves into the political realm. As it is held up against an idea of Western ‘development’ the variation becomes concealed and its transformative abilities denied. Instead of becoming a means of valorising indigeneity, it becomes another form of stricture on indigenous identities, one that is again governed by, and defined in contra-distinction to, modernity, that denies the reality of contemporary indigenous engagement with ideas of social, political and economic change. This is particularly apparent in Bolivia, as one indigenous group and particular ideas of *Buen Vivir* have been valorised over other possible examples. In such cases there is a danger that those dominant ideas turn from being descriptive to becoming normative, and thus extending older forms of governmentality and the “postcolonial conditions of development” (Radcliffe, 2012:240).

In the Peruvian case where *Buen Vivir* has not been adopted into the national, legal frame, this older form of domination can still be re-enacted within the frame of “authenticity”. Hale and Millamán have expounded the idea of the ‘permitted Indian’: the observation that only certain forms of indigeneity are given prominence in national and global projects, with severe limitations on indigenous people’s

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transformative aspirations (Hale, 2004:17, see also Hale & Millamán, 2005; Lopez, 2017). Applying this idea to the political use of *Buen Vivir* one can argue that in valorising indigeneity but explicitly or implicitly equating it with a particular understanding of community and sociality the notion can come to impose a new form of governmentality on indigenous peoples themselves. Those who do not conform to the template are dismissed as ‘inauthentic’ or derided in the same way that Dickens invites us to react to Wemmick’s ‘castle’. That is, there is a danger that rather than all forms of contemporary and historical ways of being indigenous being accepted only certain types are understood as ‘authentic’ and thus therefore worthy of support and continuation.

As with most forms of governmentality, little of this process is deliberate. Indeed, Gudynas explicitly states that “There is no sense in trying to apply the concept [of *suma qamaña*] to other regions; other cultures will have to explore and build their own Buen Vivir. The term Buen Vivir is best understood as an umbrella for a set of different positions” (Gudynas, 2011). Nonetheless as it gains currency and political power and particularly as it is brought into formal, legal processes it may – like the earlier *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* – have unintended consequences for how indigenous communities and identities are understood in the present and future.

9. Conclusion

In the introduction to this collection Anthias and Hoffman note Foucault’s insistence that he understood resistance as “coextensive and absolutely contemporaneous” to power (Foucault, 1989:224). Similarly, theorists of colonial power have long argued that technologies of government have never been imposed monolithically (Stoler & Cooper, 1997) and have always been engaged with and resisted at the local level (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). Such insights underlie the form and approach of the articles in this volume and their focus on the heterogeneity and complexities of how forms of government and power are experienced at the local level. Another key point from Foucault’s initial writings on governmentality is that power depends on the existence of ‘freedom’ arguing that “the relationship between power and freedom’s refusal to submit cannot, therefore, be separated” but rather can be understood as in a state of ‘permanent provocation’ (Foucault, 1982:790).

In this view the actions of Amazonian indigenous peoples discussed in this article can be fitted with the acts of resistance and counter-conduct described by others in the wider literature on governmentality (Ortner, 2006; Death, 2016; Nepomuceno et al. 2019). A key novelty of what has been described here, however, is the manner in which indigenous forms themselves have been adopted by the state power itself, first in the 1974 *Ley de las Comunidades Nativas* and more recently in the official integration of *Buen Vivir*, examples which emphasise the constant interplay between outside and indigenous ideas of governance and communal living. In contrast to delineating a singular, unified indigenous worldview this article emphasises the intricacies, contrasts and disjunctures that exist within contemporary indigenous lives and the manner in which individuals negotiate them in their everyday interactions and relations, particularly in relation to the impositions of the state as it seeks to encompass indigenous people within its legal, social and political frames.

In the same interview cited above Foucault went further in decrying the simplified dualism of seeing power as “evil... ugly, poor, sterile, monotonous, dead; and what

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power is exercised upon is right, good rich” (Foucault, 1989:221), suggesting the need for a careful analysis of all sides of such relations. In much of the current public, political use of *Buen Vivir* I see a similar danger of simplified dichotomies between the indigenous and ‘modern’ acting to obscure the forms of coextensive creation that are occurring in contemporary, indigenous lived-worlds. Instead the close description and analysis of one Ashaninka community on the Ucayali, along with discussions of *bricolage*, indigenous hybridity and ‘openness to the Other’ have been used in this article to emphasise the manner in which different members of the community negotiate the tensions and opportunities of their contemporary situation to produce their own preferred forms of living. This emphasises the manner in which indigenous Amazonians can both push back and refashion techniques of government and expectations of modernity to better accord with their own understandings of how to live well. Showing that while emphasising and projecting particular ideas of indigenous culture may be one strategy for indigenous survival and action, the ability to select, combine and mix new forms of living remains a key part of contemporary indigenous experience.

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