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# Persistent pasts in Peruvian Amazon: temporal clashes and justice among the Ashaninka of the Ene river (1980-2017)

Passados que persistem na Amazônia peruana: disputas temporais e justiça entre os Ashaninka do rio Ene (1980-2017)

Guilherme Bianchi

## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this text is to understand how the Amerindian insistence on the persistence of the past is part of a political strategy of non-repetition. For this, based on ethnographical research and bibliographic review, I propose to address the historical experience of the Ashaninka that inhabit the basin of the river Ene, in the central Peruvian Amazon rainforest. I believe that the disagreements over the time framing of the "internal armed conflict" between Ashaninka discourses and the Peruvian state can help us to legitimize and take seriously non-Western perceptions of time and justice. By discussing the limits and potentials derived from indigenous cosmology as a legitimate way of being and relating with time and politics, I claim that it is possible and necessary to produce ontological and epistemological value for differentiated experiences of time, in order to address history as an ethical tool in order to think about epistemic justice.

## KEYWORDS

Ashaninka; Memory, Indigenous history

## RESUMO

O objetivo principal deste texto é entender de que maneira a insistência ameríndia na persistência do passado é parte de uma estratégia política de não repetição. Para tanto, com base em pesquisa etnográfica e revisão bibliográfica, proponho abordar a experiência histórica dos Ashaninka que habitam a bacia do rio Ene, na Amazônia central peruana. Acredito que as discordâncias em relação ao entendimento dos marcos temporais do "conflito armado interno" entre o discurso dos Ashaninkas e o discurso do Estado peruano pode nos ajudar a tensionar e, assim, levar a sério as percepções não-Ocidentais de tempo e de justiça. Ao discutir os limites e potenciais derivados da cosmologia indígena como um modo legítimo de ser e de se relacionar com o tempo e a política, creio que seja possível e necessário produzir valor ontológico e epistemológico para experiências diferenciadas de tempo, a fim de conceber a história como uma ferramenta ética que permita um espaço de reflexão para a justiça epistêmica.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ashaninka, Memória, História indígena

*Back then I was afraid that the terrorists would kill me, nowadays I fear the oil company.* Ashaninka woman, Cutivireni Native Community (CARE 2012, p. 21)

Words like the above present the intense feeling of persistence regarding the conflicts that marks the indigenous place in the national history of Peru. As the largest indigenous group in country, the Indigenous Peoples Database of the Peruvian government estimates the current population of Ashaninkas to be about 114 thousand people.<sup>1</sup> Settled in territorial areas of several provinces of the country (Junín, Ucayali, Huánuco, Cusco, Pasco and Ayacucho) and reaching part of the Upper Juruá basin in the Brazilian state of Acre, all of these communities cannot be reduced into fixed cultural coordinates (SANTOS; BARCLAY 2005, p. xxi). My own study focused on the communities that inhabit the Ene river basin. In order to compare and re-evaluate the impressions of the particularities of these communities I make use of a series of anthropological and historical works that have taken as their axis of analysis communities from other regions inhabited by Ashaninkas, with a special focus on the recent investigations of Oscar Espinosa and Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti.

*1 - Information available at: <http://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblo/ashaninka>. Accessed April 13, 2017.*

Firstly, I will outline the historical pathway of the conflicts that these communities have been involved with since their first experiences of Spanish colonization. Secondly, I will reflect on the contemporary relationship between the Ashaninka people and the Peruvian State through the examination of the Ashaninka discourse and politics that I had the opportunity to witness in Peru during the first half of 2017. I try to explore how this relationship is presented and interpreted by the Ashaninka, focusing mainly on the issue of the temporal frameworks that defined the internal armed conflict and the indigenous perception of the persistence of the past in the present. I will then sketch a hypothesis: that there are radical gaps between national and indigenous conceptions of justice and time.

My intention is to outline the production of a symbolic discourse by this indigenous group and how this works, in day-

to-day practice, as a tool of political mobilization for them. By intimately relating the violence of the past with the continuous conflicts of the present (and even of a relative suspension of the stability of the predicates "past", "present" and "future"), the Ashaninka cosmology, like much of Amazonian indigenous cosmology, creates and reproduces *new* subjectivities to think about the phenomenon of the presence of the past. I use the word 'new' not to denote some kind of innovation, but to indicate the way that in which these subjectivities are being actively inserted into contemporary political and academic debates.

My conclusion will be based on the critical potential of such conceptions, emphasizing how they can open an intellectual space in which become possible to rethink hegemonic antagonisms of Western thought, and with it, modern historical discourse itself. Investigating the practical and political function of the *kametsa asaiki* philosophy as a tool for picturing the continuities between past and present and to guarantee the non-repetition of past violence, I propose to utilize the Ashaninka perspective as a differentiated and productive way to conceive and experience temporality.

## Historical experience and Ashaninka resistance

The Peruvian central jungle (*selva*) region was not of immediate interest to early European invaders. It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century, with the growth of the gold rush and the evangelizing interests on the part of missionaries, that contact began to be built (whilst other things began to be destroyed). Until the twentieth century, many other events altered the structure of violence against the Amerindian people of the Peruvian Amazon. For example, the contact with Franciscans and Dominicans between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,<sup>2</sup> the rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in 1742,<sup>3</sup> the so-called rubber boom and the resulting rubber extraction in the region, are the most striking examples of the logics of exploitation and violence in post-conquest Ashaninka world. (ESPINOSA 2016).

2 - Between this period the Ashaninka population was substantially reduced, in a ratio of 3.5 to 1, due mainly to the epidemics that arrived along with the missionaries (ROJAS ZOLEZZI 1994; ESPINOSA 2016, p. 141).

3 - Cf. BROWN; FERNÁNDEZ 1991; ESPINOSA 1993.

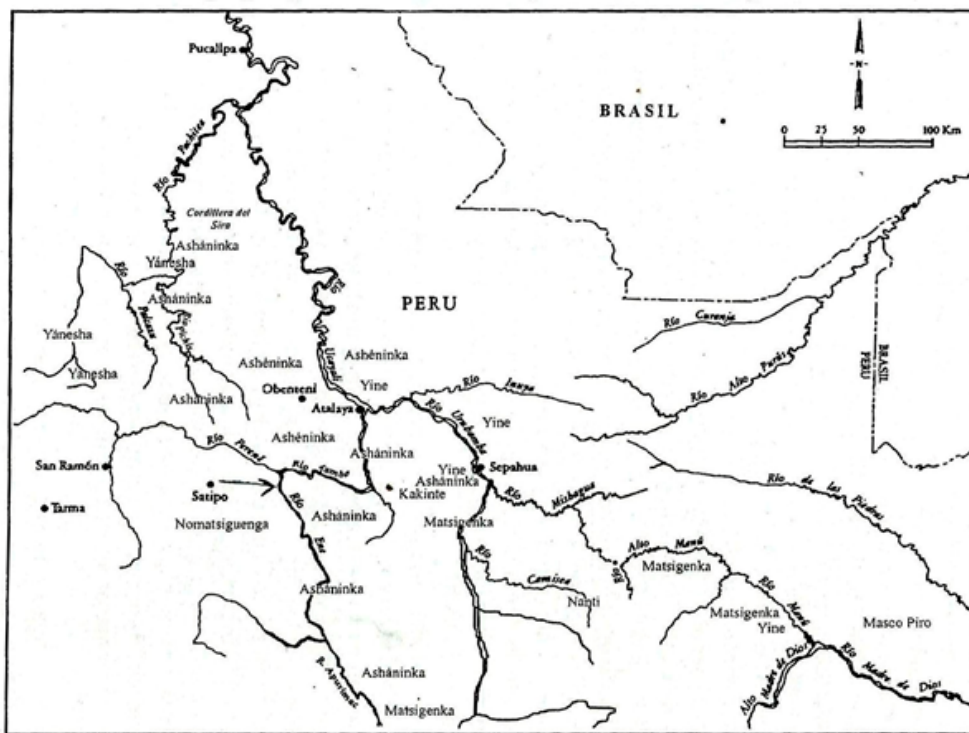
More recently, Ashaninkas participated in another bloody chapter of Peruvian national history: the so-called internal armed conflict. One of the roots of this conflict can be traced back to March 17, 1980, when the Maoist-inspired guerillha Sendero Luminoso, officially named *Partido Comunista del Perú - Sendero Luminoso* (PCP-SL), declared armed struggle against the Peruvian government just as the country was getting out of twelve years of military rule and free elections were finally being held. The PCP-SL instigated violence by burning ballot boxes in the district of Chuschi, in the province of Ayacucho and the next two decades were the scene of brutal conflict between left-wing guerrillas, Peruvian State forces and autonomous peasant and indigenous militias.

The violence from the conflict has affected Peruvian society in unequal ways. The poorest part of the population, those excluded and ethnically marginalized suffered with much more intensity. The final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación* - CVR) in 2003 concluded that the number of fatalities from the conflict reached almost 70,000. In addition to the number of deaths, it is also noted that 79% of the victims lived in rural Peru, and 75% of them had Quechua or other native languages as their mother language.<sup>4</sup> Ashaninkas participated on different sides of the Peruvian armed conflict throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes supporting the guerrillas, sometimes serving as support for the Peruvian army, sometimes forming their own self-defense armies. This led to the death and disappearance of about 8,000 Ashaninkas, almost 12% of the total number of victims throughout the conflict.

A tributary of the river Ene called the Apurímac river provided to the guerrilla groups an entrance and exit zone between the central jungle and the mountainous region of Ayacucho (see map 1). The Ene river, the Apurímac river and the surrounding regions became important strategic locations for guerrilla groups in the area. Sendero Luminoso also used the region to gather followers for their “popular war” and to

4 - *Final Report of Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, Tomo VIII, 2003. In: <https://www.cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/index.php>. Accessed September 21, 2017.*

recruit young men and women from the area to their ranks. The Maoist guerrilla has been acting within the indigenous communities that inhabit the river banks since approximately 1982 when *senderistas* (the followers, members and fighters of Sendero Luminoso) who fled the military offensive in Ayacucho settled in the region. Together with groups of settlers, they established on the edge of Ene river to dedicate themselves to the cultivation of the Coca leaf. The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission named this phenomenon the “Ene River Colonization Committee”. Seeking to escape the military, the MRTA (*Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru*) also arrived in the area in the mid-1980s, establishing itself mainly in the zones of Oxapampa and Chanchamayo, while Sendero Luminoso was mostly settled in the vicinity of the city of Satipo.



Map 1 - Distribution of the Arawak groups in Peru - meeting of the river Ene with Apurímac river in the lower left (Santos; Barclay 2005, p. XVI).

According to the same report (which, as we shall see, is often contested by indigenous accounts), it was not until 1985 that the offensive against the Ashaninka became more pronounced.

The actions of the PCP-SL in the zone followed a similar pattern in almost all communities [...]. Initially, the *senderistas* commands of Ayacucho clandestinely convoked some Ashaninka teachers. The latter were characterized by having a higher level of education, contact with the city and mobility around the area. Because of these characteristics, they were more inclined to learn the process of *senderista* indoctrination. (CVR - Tomo V 2003, p. 248).

The most common explanation the Ashaninkas gave me when asked what convinced them to fight alongside the Shining Path was their belief in the guerrilla's promise of social justice. Valter, a 35-year-old man, resident of the Centro Caparocía community, told me that many of his Ashaninka fellows (*hermanos*) were sympathetic with Sendero and trusted in their assurance of greater distribution of national wealth to the poor, while others, such as his own family, preferred to flee once they faced the extreme violent sanctions which the guerrillas imposed upon those who disagreed with their rule. He told me, while we were walking a long distance trying to reach a motor boat that would take us back to Satipo, that following the murder of his father by the guerrilla his family fled of their old community, Potsoteni, and settled in Centro Caparocía. In fact, as the CVR notes, most of the Ashaninka who fled from Sendero Luminoso preferred to seek refuge in the forest than to live in the nearest cities, such as Satipo or Pichanaki (CVR - Tomo V 2003, p. 271).

With the division between those who chose to fight alongside Shining Path and those who preferred to flee or to resist, distrust among indigenous began to intensify. In 2010, the educational researcher Sofia Huerta collected an important testimony from an 18-year-old Ashaninka girl which demonstrates the upheaval of community relations at that time: "My parents told me that [in that time] no one was brother (*hermano*) anymore, distrust had arrived. One Ashaninka kills another. My uncle killed my cousin. But not because he wanted to, but because he was obliged by the commanders [...]. That is why there's no trust between Ashaninkas anymore [...]" (*apud.* ESPINOSA 2012, p. 297).

Known henceforth as “Popular Committees” by the *senderistas*, the communities dominated by the armed group became, in practice, concentration camps, as CVR described. Forced labour, chronic malnutrition, daily killings, repression and torture were part of daily life in these communities. As noted by Mariella Vilassante (2014, p. 10): “Although some mass graves have been discovered in the Ene river region, not all burial areas have been identified. Most of the Ashaninkas deaths had take place in the *senderistas* camps, that is to say that they died a slow death, consequence of the hunger, the terrible conditions of life, the illnesses and the executions”. These dynamics of terror, in turn, increased the indigenous rejection and fear of the guerrilla and, by the late 1980s, there were considerable increases in escapes and plans for armed resistance. Rapidly the first proposals for the creation of an “Ashaninka Army” was put forward, one army that could protect the Ashaninka territory without dependence on state actors. After the disappearance of the Ashaninka chief Alejandro Calderón in 1989, a strategy for fighting the guerrilla began to be drawn. In September 1990, the *Comité Central de Autodefensa y Desarrollo Ashaninka* (Central Committee of Self-Defense and Ashaninka Development) was formally established (CVR - Tomo V 2003, p. 252).

At that time, also the peak of the Shining Path’s territorial power throughout Amazonia, Peruvian Army attacks on the jungle bases led to the destruction of 14 out of 35 of the Ashaninka communities situated on the banks of the Tambo River and all of the 30 communities that existed on the banks of the river Ene. This extreme violence forced entire populations to flee to other valleys, far from their ancestral territory (CVR - Tomo V 2003, p. 253). Between 1991 and 1994, the committees of self-defence, together with Peruvian armed forces, were able to gain valuable victories against the *senderistas*. These victories still remain in the Ashaninka imaginary and in the popular memory of the conflict in Peru. The report also stated that, in the late 1980’s, about 10,000 ashaninkas were under the control of Sendero Luminoso. By 1991 more than 3,000



Ashaninkas had been rescued only in the Ene river basin. However, a problem arose with the rescue and subsequent relocation of the Ashaninkas in new communities. After being rescued, former inhabitants of different communities, without a well-defined kinship relationship, which is a central characteristic of Ashaninka cosmology, were transferred to nucleated communities, where often ex-enemies began to live side by side (FABÍAN 1995).

With the passing of the years and the end of the conflict in 2000 (as officially conceived) it is certain that guerrilla violence has diminished and, in most cases, ceased to exist. But wounds have remained open, and the perception of the continuity of conflicts, or even of their never-ending interruption, remains alive in Ashaninka consciousness. In what follows, I try to approach more closely the meanings of persistence and continuity that are at stake in the Ashaninka narratives of the “past-present violence”. With this, I propose that this kind of narrative should be understood within a more elaborate framework of conjunctural-historical circumstances which, in turn, are always organized by certain cultural perspectives that are very specific to the Ashaninka and Amazonian cosmology, as is the case of the centrality of the body as a producer of temporality and Ashaninka identity (*Ashaninkasanori*).

*5 - Recorded interview in Potsoteni Community, April 2, 2017.*

## Temporalities in conflict

Most of the Ashaninkas with whom I spoke disagree with the historical framework of the conflict defined by the CVR, *i.e.* that it started in 1980 and, particularly, that it ended in 2000. In Potsoteni, a local chief who was a member of the self-defence Ashaninka committees at the time of the conflict told me his opinion regarding the official date of the end of the conflict: “they say we are pacified, but unfortunately, we are not. What happened between 1981 [sic] and 2000 is still happening”.<sup>5</sup> While I speak with the chief, in the middle of the

community, members of the Peruvian armed forces patrolled the area of Potsoteni. The presence of the Army in the communities is part of an attempt by the Peruvian State to combat drug trafficking since the region (the VRAEM,<sup>6</sup> as it is called) is also the place where most of the plantations that supply the narcotraffic on a continental scale are concentrated. Until today it is also usual to observe the members of the self-defence committees, wielding their weapons in the communities, not without a certain pride and symbolism. The indigenous armed groups continue to exist legally as a guarantee of territorial vigilance (see figures 1, 2 and 3).



6 - Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (Valley of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro rivers).

Figure 1 - members of the Self-Defense Committee of the Potsoteni community carrying their weapons, 2017 (personal archive).



Figure 2 - Ashaninka ronderos in the community of Cutivireni, 1995 (Photo by Alejandro Balaguer).



Figure 3 - Military of the Peruvian army patrolling the Potsoteni area, 2017 (personal archive).

The Ashaninka perception that the internal armed conflict does not arise as an unique event, completely authentic and new in relation to other events of past violence (the colonization or the rubber boom, for example) seems widespread. In his recent work, the anthropologist Juan Pablo Barletti (2011) showed how the past is comprehended as different “*tiempos*” (times) in an Ashaninka village in *Bajo Urubamba* region: “time of the ancestors”, “time of slavery”, “time of the missionaries”, “time of the subversion”, which leads to today’s “time of civilization”. Barletti’s conclusion is based on the remark that this “separation” is an active/political way of organizing time in the specific context of the Ashaninka life: “specific instances of the past are remembered and forgotten not only for an understanding of the past but also to reflect on their lives today” (BARLETTI 2011, p.54). From my observations this is also the case in the Ene communities, however the difference is that in many cases, as the elder ex-local chief told me, the “time of the subversion” (*el tiempo de los subversivos*) connects with the recent struggles against “new” sources of violence.

During the last two decades, with the so-called “commodities boom” during the 2000’s, the energy policies of the Peruvian government, coupled with the dynamics of large construction companies and contractors of South America, presented another threat to the day-to-day life of Ashaninka communities in Peru (CYPHER 2010). The government agenda concentrated its efforts on the extraction of natural resources such as oil, gas and wood and the construction of large energy projects including motorways and hydroelectric reserves. Both of which continually encroach upon ancestral territories and, unsurprisingly, the recent fear of the guerrillas and the open wounds that the conflict inflicted upon Ashaninka people’s trust in civic institutions is felt again, only the enemy has changed. The threats of deterritorialization that came from the war are still present but in a different form; Now due the unpredictability created by the governments plans of development, and due to the little commitment given by continental politics to the rights of the Amazonian people. The threats of deterritorializations that outcome from the war are still present, but now by different means.

In an article published in 2012, Oscar Espinosa explored the implications of the Ashaninka sentiment that “the war has not ended” (ESPINOSA 2012, p. 297). For Espinosa, the traumas arising from the conflict embodied in the continuity of fear and distrust between Ashaninkas, the State and other armed actors, characterized the feeling of persistence. On other hand, the very uncertain nature of the surrender and end of the Sendero Luminoso fed such feeling of persistence and continuity. In August 2015, confirming that this perceptions was far from unfounded, the Peruvian army announced the rescue of 54 people who in some cases had been held hostage by Sendero Luminoso since the late 1980s at the VRAEM in San Martín de Pangoa.<sup>7</sup> At a news conference held at the time of the rescue, the deputy defence minister Ivan Veja explained that the rescued group comprised 20 adults and 34 children up to the age of 14 whose mothers were mostly Ashaninka women, and that the children were born, in the majority of the cases, as result of sexual violations (BARLETTI 2015; VILLASANTE 2016). It is not difficult to understand then why the perception of continuity, coupled with the distrust of the time frames established by the CVR, are feelings so usually present in the discourse of Peruvian Amazonian groups. The number of Ashaninkas that are still under the armed power of the *senderistas* remains uncertain, but by the time of the 2015 liberations the government had suggested that between 170 and 200 Ashaninkas were still living under the command of the guerrilla (TAYLOR 2017).

My argument is that the existence, in the Peruvian context, of other symbolic perceptions of the temporal frameworks of conflict, perceptions that emphasize its character of continuity, challenges the hegemony of the juridical conception of time present in the CVR, a conception based on the unceasing need to transform present in past, strengthening the barriers between past, present and future, and presenting these barriers as self-evident ones. What changes if we understand that these barriers are not self-evident? If we take seriously the Ashaninkas’ view that “the conflict is not over”? In that note, and affirming the

7 - To see notes from the Peruvian and international press on the Ashaninka rescue in 2015, see: <https://goo.gl/jgGFFG> and <https://goo.gl/Au4i9u> & <https://goo.gl/wduVmJ>

need to denature such conceptions, to understand them as situational, Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (2013, p. 9) recently drew attention to the little attention given to this phenomenon in modern historical thought:

Although since the birth of modernity history presupposes the existence of 'the past' as its object, 'the past' and the nature of the borders that separate 'the past', 'the present' and 'the future' until very recently have attracted little reflection within the discipline of history. This 'omission' is remarkable because cultures and societies have fixed, and still do fix, the boundaries between past, present and future in quite different ways.

This different ways in which the borders between past, present, and future are negotiated are very clearly illustrated through the observation of how indigenous peoples in South America organize their temporality (FAUSTO; HECKENBERGER 2007). In Ashaninka daily life I was able to observe the denaturalization of the Western barriers of past, present and future in an intense way. Towards the end of my short fieldwork, in the community Centro Caparocía, I was talking with members of the main Ashaninka organization in the region, the *Central Ashaninka del Río Ene* (CARE), when they received by radio the information that an ancestral territory in the Meantari community, which had recently been recovered by Ashaninkas after the conflict, had just been invaded again by about 50 settlers. In the tense atmosphere that arose amongst our group and upon hearing this news some Ashaninkas were quick to say: "they are *terrucos*".<sup>8</sup> Although this was highly unlikely as according to CARE colonists had invaded the territory to engage in illegal logging, the strong sense of connection between this event and the recent past of the guerrilla invasion illuminated the visibility of the threats to their territories as a fundamental part of their identity as Ashaninka.

8 - A colloquial term that is used as a substitute of "terrorist".

Back in the 1990s, amid the internal armed conflict, the Ashaninka leader Micah Mishari Mofat spoke about how the conflict against the guerrillas was no longer an entirely new event

Violence in the Amazon is not new, it comes from the first contact with the Western world. What is happening now is only a new phase of this violence, which for us is a historical, genocidal

violence that has been seeking, through any pretext and any flag, the extermination of the indigenous population (MISHARI 1990).

Many commentators already noted that over the last twenty years the indigenous peoples of South America engaged in projects of a cultural and political resurgence that had different effects in each particular national context. For a long time, the Western faith in the inevitable advance of globalization pointed to the supposedly predictable fact that the indigenous societies were doomed to disappear. The more industrial capitalism advanced, the nearer to extinction "traditional communities" would become. It was not only their symbolism which seemed about to disappear due the integration of all peoples in the global consumer market, but also their physical presence and their territorial existence, who was directly threatened since they occupied extremely attractive lands in the eyes of private producers and developmental governments. Despite these very real threats to indigenous populations there are also other simultaneous movements. The process of incorporating indigenous societies into State-nations, which for a time seemed inevitably destined to transform "savages" into "citizen-consumers", have shown, against all expectations, that these societies have been able to maintain their cultural identity and ethnic diversity while at the same time sharply increasing their demographical rates (PAGLIARO; AZEVEDO; VENTURA 2005, p. 12).

This new space for strengthening "ethnic and cultural self-consciousness", to use Terence Turner's term (1993, p. 44), seems to be made possible by the very dialectical dynamics between the indigenous incorporation into national cultures (access to language, discursive spaces, technology and medicine, for example) and the effective resistance of these groups in a scenario where more and more indigenous peoples of Amazon see the affirmation of their cultures and the maintenance of rituals and traditional social institutions as an integral part of their political resistance to the loss of lands, resources and conditions of self-determination. It is through understanding this process of dialectical incorporation and resistance through cultural affirmation that it is possible to gain insight into the

political agency of the Ashaninka in their own terms. For this, it is necessary to examine how the Ashaninka promote other politics of knowledge capable of shaping not only their own indigeneity but also other worlds, non-indigenous ones.

## The Ashaninka *kametsa asaiki* as a political and epistemological alternative to persistent pasts

In this sense, it is interesting to perceive how the Ashaninka people have pursued the recovery of traditional community senses while looking for an earlier past (earlier both of the conflict years and the more recent environmental threats). This can be observed in the reaffirmation of the Ashaninka spirit of *kametsa asaiki* ("the good life"), an *ethos* of living together referred to the creation and maintenance of social relations between human and non-humans; between beings involved in the *aipatsite* ("our land"). These beings include both physically visible beings (plants and animals), but also those who can only be seen under the trained eyes of the shaman, who can view the spirits of the forest. The term *kametsa asaiki* is used extensively by Ashaninkas of the most varied regions in Peruvian Amazon when they are questioned about their life's philosophy. The translations of the term vary between "well living" or "living well together". After consultation in 12 communities in the Ene river region, CARE organization defined *kametsa asaiki* through 8 points: 1) to live as a *Ashaninkasanori* (an authentic Ashaninka person); 2) to live eating what we know; 3) to live safe and quiet in our ancestral territory; 4) to live in peace without threats from the terrorism; 5) to produce better to buy what we need; 6) to live healthy with our knowledge and well attended by health posts and the military; 7) to live with an education that enhances and empowers us as Ashaninka; 8) to live well with an organization that listens to us and defends our rights.

In the case of some specific communities, the perception is that, as Barlleti noted, that the beings inhabitants of the *aipatsite* were not able to rest, since the internal armed conflict



was immediately followed by the violence that resulted from the developmentalist policies. In the way they observe, this incessant repetition of violence has led to the shortage of hunting and fishing in their settlements, and a consequent decrease in productivity in their crops. Some communities understand this as a result of the wrath of *aipatsite* during the years of conflict (BARLETTI 2015). In order to retake *kametsa asaiki*, Ashaninkas and their representative organizations have been mobilized in political struggles against governmental economical plans, achieving considerable successes, such as the withdrawal of the project from the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht, which aimed to build a hydroelectric plant on the upper part of the Ene river,<sup>9</sup> which would flood most of the territory of 10 native communities. The same struggle for the protection of the territories also activated dangerous reactions from illegal loggers, as was the case with the killing of four Ashaninkas, victims of loggers in 2014.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, while speaking about justice, the Ashaninka communities do not necessarily imagine a justice orientated to the past because, as we have seen, this past remains materially alive in the present. Justice is thus understood less as a tool for the conveyance of truth and more as a strategy of social survival in the present. The “political uses” of *kametsa asaiki*, for example, also aim to make visible the persistent continuities between past and present. In this case, the social struggle that accompanies “memory work” (the struggle against the exploitation of natural resources, or the struggle for a possible coexistence among peers) appears as the proper effects of a remembrance that is intended to be active and future-oriented. In a social context in which “past” violence has not been overcome, where it is still present, elaborating the past also means the composition of a politically oriented remembrance. This remembrance is often seen in Ashaninkas references to certain ancestral past, “*el tiempo de los abuelos*” (the time of the grandparents), a time when certain guarantees of community coexistence allowed the fulfilment of vital desires and needs without big external threats.

9 - For a more detailed analysis on the resistance to the project of the Brazilian government, Peruvian government and Odebrecht in the river Ene see CRUZ 2012.

10 - Cf. <https://goo.gl/2QLFfZ> Accessed September 13, 2018.

In that same consultation work about what communities understood as a “good living”, the *Central Ashaninka del Río Ene* (CARE) compiled a series of reports that demonstrate this somewhat “nostalgic” dimension of Ashaninkas. One parent in the Boca Anapate community said that “the ancestors did not have the problems we have now. They were happy, if they visited each other, when someone came to his house they invited him to eat. They lived happily with their children and their sons-in-law”. One woman, a resident of the Tsomabeni community, said in a similar way: “I want to live in peace like our ancestors, no one harmed our territory, neither loggers nor oil tankers” (CARE 2012). Such testimonies require some interpretive care to avoid reducing them to a mere “desire for the past” operation. It seems clear that in referring to “grandparents” they aim to identify both a factual pre-colonial past, and also to mobilize an image of the past laden with an ideal and mythical ancestry, populated by significant folds between past and present, with a very open conception about what is inside the “past” dimension. But these folds are not subject to temporal hierarchies - a refusal which, as we shall see, reappears constantly in assertions of Amazonian cosmologies. The Ashaninka experience of the past, surpassing the identification of it as something completely absent or completely present, mobilizes time in diffuse senses of belonging and overcoming, and thus seems to be able to also say something about the symbolic inversions operated in practice by its particular politics of time.

This “shuffling” is understood by Marisol de la Cadena (2012, p. 5) as radical “since it emerges from circumstances that are not situated within the divisions that separate humanity from what it’s the ‘other’ (nature/culture, animate/inanimate, material/spiritual)”. Regarding the concepts of “time” and “history”, the Amerindian perspective are affected by those assumptions. In the Amerindian world, time, liberated from the radical separation between nature and culture, appears mainly through the sign of *instability*. It is important to note that there is no easy approach, nor any singular perspective that can address the issue in some form of “Amerindian total

theory". Each group, with its own dynamics of historicity, retains its undeniable particularities in terms of cultural form and social identity, which I will try to emphasize. However, I agree with Viveiros de Castro's (1996, p. 347) argument that the innumerable references found in indigenous South American ethnography about worlds inhabited "by different species of subjects or persons, human and nonhuman, who apprehend it from different points of view" may be useful in the exercise to take seriously other forms of ontology and epistemology, at a time when the booms and crises of neo-developmentalism so strongly threaten these other(s) ways of life.

An important angle to understand how such visions, inversions and images find barriers and limits in state recognition is the work of indigenous organizations, such as CARE, that work to fill a void very difficult to overcome: the "translation" of Ashaninka cosmology in political projects that can be legitimized by modern and Western law. Thus, the claim of the ancestry of territory that is normally treated by governments as a non-constitutional claim may, through certain legal and political mechanisms, adapt in different ways to the legal expectations of state power. In a meeting between two members of CARE and residents of the community of Centro Caparocia in April 2017, I followed the dynamics of this work.

Along with leaders from various communities, CARE had recently finalized a statute for each community to legally standardize local practices and customs, and they used the occasion to socialize among Ashaninka residents some central aspects of this statute. At the end of the meeting, an indigenous member of CARE's technical staff told the community that the importance of "putting on paper" the goals and rules of a community was simply "to prevent some things from happening again", referring to the idea that formalizing certain community practices could work as a guarantee of non-repetition of the recent past, of the "time of terrorism", in its own terms.

To further understand the contextual difficulties that indigenous people face in Peru it could be useful to observe,

for example, the words of Alan García in an interview for a Peruvian television channel seven years ago, when he was the president of the country:

[it is necessary] to defeat these absurd, pantheistic ideologies, which believe that walls are gods, that air is god. We return to these primitive forms of religiosity where it is said "do not touch that hill because it is an Apu and it is full of millennial spirit and I do not know what thing"? Well, if we get to that then we do not do any mining, we do not touch these fish because they are creatures of God and are the expression of the god Poseidon. Do we return to this primitivist animism?<sup>11</sup>

Against all attempts to erase the cosmopolitical legitimacy of the indigenous peoples, ensuring and positivizing their worldview makes sense as part of a calculated strategy of resistance, both to resistance against the power of state developmentalism and the Western hegemonic thinking. It is what Ashaninkas are trying to do. It is possible to imagine critics that would say that such "adaptation" to the legal discourse could represent the subjugation of the indigenous cosmologies to the Western spectrum of the law, but in my understanding this activity must be understood considering the possible strategies of survival and guarantee of territorial security. These claims and strategies seem to have an emergency character, a necessary contingency in the face of the existing institutionality (GREENE 2006; BROWN 1993). Finally, it is noteworthy how the *kametsa asaiki* also functions as a conception capable of elaborating and re-meaning the traumatic experience of the recent past of internal armed conflict.

Before I arrived to Amazonia, I had just read Juan Barletti's ethnography, and he noted, at some point of the text, that when Ashaninkas seek to explain why many of their *members* (*guerreros/warriors*) fought alongside with the left-armed guerrillas (and therefore usually against Ashaninka communities themselves), they usually say that the indigenous body was no longer the same previously body. The Ashaninkas that decided to fight alongside with Sendero Luminoso did that "because their body changed", they were transformed, accordingly to

11 - Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vf4WfS5t08>. Accessed 16 oct. 2018.

Ashaninka narratives, “into a red demon (*kityoncari kamaari*) causing them to see their families and their friends as enemies or as prey” (BARLETTI 2014).

Impressed as I was with this information, I asked one of my interlocutors if, for him and the people in his community, that was the case too. He laughed, and a few seconds later told me that it was true, that many people had been *demonized* at that time. The philosophy behind this attitude is pretty clear: the sensible perception of the world changes if the body changes (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 2012). The man, Valter, resident of Centro Caparocia community, told me also that after the end of the conflict, with the need to reintroduce ancient “demonized” Ashaninkas into the villages again, a work of reconciliation, reincorporation (but sometimes of punishment too, even death) thus meant the production of a mutation in the way the community perceived and interpreted the body of those Ashaninkas. In a way, he told me, what had to change was the body of those individuals itself.

But how can one change a body and, with that, change the perception of the world around him/her? As so many Amerindian groups, the body is the place where Ashaninkas think about the past and the future (or even the place where they denied those categories); the body as the place in which time is put into perspective. This, of course, is not new. In a bulletin in the Brazilian National Museum in the late 1970s, three authors pointed to this dimension:

the originality of [...] South American tribal societies resides in a particularly rich elaboration of the notion of person, with particular reference to corporality as a focal symbolic idiom. Or, to put it another way, we suggest that the notion of person and a consideration of the place of the human body in the image that indigenous societies make of themselves are basic paths to an adequate understanding of the social organization and cosmology of these societies (SEEGER; DA MATTA; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO 1979)

Recalling present-pasts and stories of violence, it seems to me that there is something to be learned from the confrontation

of our modern epistemologies of the world, which fully trust the body/spirit division, and the particular way in which the Ashaninka insert corporality as the foundational moment of their temporality experience. I'm afraid that I will not have space to further develop this issue in this text. Meanwhile, I want to finish with a reflection about what I think historians could learn from Ashaninka and Amerindian politics of time.

## Amerindian heterotemporalities and the situatedness of historical thinking

Throughout this text I attempted to highlight the problem of how Ashaninka communities in Peru perceives general lines of persistence between past violence and present violence, and how they sketch active conceptions of the past that function as productive horizons of socialization and resistance. Thus, while *kametsa asaiki* appears as an everyday practice capable of recognizing the right and the indigenous capacity of living in the present and in the future (with health, education, territorial security, etc.), it potentializes a specific "politics of memory" mainly because this "well living" cannot be guaranteed without the safeguarding of non-repetition: to forgive those who repent, to reincorporate them in the communities, or to change the perspective between the demonized body (*kamaari*) to a legitimately Ashaninka body (*Ashaninkasanori*), it is always necessary to rethink the temporal experience.

The difficulty in making such practices legally recognized is partially addressed by indigenous organizations, as I have tried to demonstrate with the example of CARE. The need for recognition of the Ashaninka cosmology legitimacy by the Peruvian state does not aim to merely "integrating" indigenous into the established order, but simply strengthening indigenous claims as legitimate political forms. The potentiality of such strategy can be observed, for example, in the Ecuadorian context with the inclusion of nature as a subject of constitutional law in 2008, inclusion based on the strengthening of the

political legitimacy of indigenous groups, the political claim for *Pachamama's* rights and, also in this case, the well-living (*Sumak Kawsay*).<sup>12</sup> It is clear that the formal inclusion of rights "on paper" does not guarantee by itself any progress in everyday life, as the own example of Ecuador is able to demonstrate (with the recent allotments of indigenous lands for the ore industry).<sup>13</sup> A concern that the Ashaninka, with their little faith in the institutional law, informed me so well. Still, within the legal framework, the legitimation of non-Western views on nature of politics and on politics of nature can provide an important assumption of ethical resistance and claim of ancestral rights, with or against the State.

I believe, however, that the pathway to legitimize indigenous practices also requires the implementation of an inverse route. While the promotion and protection of indigenous people rights and conceptions retain a real political power, it cannot be fully established without exercising the opposite: a relative "indigenization" of the Western thought itself, at least in the possibility of integrating difference as a horizontal multiplicity of forms to conceive life, time, and justice. In this sense, Miranda Fricker (2007), accepting the challenge of thinking about radical possibilities for an opening of Western thought, stated that the problem would be presented on two fronts to be confronted: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. While the former would be characterized by the lack of credibility we give to certain discourses, the latter would be marked by a gap in the interpretive level that places one subject at a disadvantage to another. All this range of problems to be faced must be thought in relation to certain geopolitics of thought which continue to obscure the critical possibilities of taking non-Western epistemologies seriously. Another fruitful exercise seems to be Walter Mignolo's (2009) proposal about how to situate our own thoughts geographically (and thus understand them as localized and non-universal) could open space for other processes of understanding, meaning and action in the world. The idea is that if locality and situatedness do not determine beforehand the value of a discourse, self-awareness about its

12 - Cf. RADICLIFFE 2012; ACOSTA 2012.

13 - Cf. MARTÍNEZ NOVO 2017.

limits may offer the possibility of constructing differentiated partial perspectives of knowledge (HARAWAY 2009).

For the Ashaninka, this range of problems are addressed through the emphasis on the differentiated political nature of their collective governability (the senses of justice, reparation, and reincorporation produced on the daily life). Such a contribution matters to the perception of how this knowledge is constructed and represented, activated and reactivated in the contemporary struggles for historical justice. However, one question seems to remain open: in what ways the “creation” of “epistemological value” would be possible for such types of narratives about time and politics, narratives that seem to walk in the opposite direction of the established field of academic historiography?

Committed to specific methods and localized conceptions of knowledge, the “historical past” rarely had analytical tools capable of interact with the multiplicity of ways of knowing the past that does not necessarily ascribe hegemonies to the same forms as we do (writing and discourse, for example). Through the pursuit to make nonmodern past experiences into commensurable and intelligible realities for us, the historical past had to rely on limited models and limited categories of analysis. If the tools of historical past presuppose a localized knowledge, how can it be required that this device translate experiences of all worlds in a satisfactory way?

Sanjay Seth (2013, p. 175) recently wrote that, if history-writing is a code which constructs/represents the past, this code is incapable of codify non-Western pasts. However, beyond represent the past, recent historical thinking is rich in examples that try to describe the temporal hegemonic conceptions of the present: “shrinkage”, “enlargement”, “intensification”, and so on. Valid diagnoses (although without great consensus) to explain the phenomena that have been developed in post-industrialized western modernity, they do not seem to be able to go any further, either to take seriously the critical possibility of other conceptions of time or to illustrate the real potency



of these relationships as other legitimate ways of being in the world. Of course, we shouldn't blindly positivize these other modes as "pure" places of the subject-world relationship, but maybe there's an emergence to critically consider them as real epistemological, ethical and aesthetic possibilities of inhabiting the contemporary. Although most of the temporal diagnoses of scholars acknowledge the bias of their perspective, we need approaches that directly address concerns about the cultural specificity of modern historical discourse and, above all, about what kinds of impasses the epistemic authority of this discourse throw toward the consideration of alternative temporalities, counter-discourses, creative experiments, embodied memories, etc.

This self-referential disciplinary ethos was defined by Pierre Clastres almost half a century ago as the assertion of Western thought as a constant, centripetal movement in which other systems of knowing always gravitate around a definite and modeled system, at the same time denying the centrifugal power that would be able to coexist (contemporaneously) these multiple systems of thought and these infinite forms of existence. For Clastres, only a "heliocentric conversion" could liberate a "better understanding of the world of others and, consequently, of ours" (CLASTRES 2013 [1969], p. 44). I believe, therefore, that such critical investments can only be realized if accompanied by a counter position of the epistemic presuppositions that reduce the experience of the "others" to a lower ontological status than of scientifically oriented discourses. For historians, the situations pointed out here may also indicate questions that would allow the development of a reflection on the role of historiography in the production of a knowledge capable of understanding the multiple possible forms of interaction between individuals and historical time. The understanding of this relation would, in turn, allow the development of a concept of history capable of recognizing the past not as a close category but rather as an open one.

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