

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Julián's Choice: Of Jaguar-Shamans and the Sacrifices Made for *Progreso* in Peru's Extractive Frontier

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## Abstract

In May 2010, Julián Miranda, an Indigenous Asháninka shaman, died hours after killing a jaguar-shaman. Despite knowing that it could kill him, he killed a jaguar-shaman to protect his cows, an investment to support the much-desired *progreso* ('progress') of his children and grandchildren through education. Julián's choice was one of personal sacrifice driven by the hardships he experienced in the degraded forests of the Bajo Urubamba valley in the Peruvian Amazon. My examination of his decision to kill the jaguar-shaman engages with the multi-disciplinary literature on how local peoples engage with the expanding extractive frontier in Latin America. The emphasis most literature places on social movements and – to a lesser extent – on the ontological characteristics of these conflicts needs to be counterbalanced by individual experiences like Julián's for a deeper understanding of the multiple local experiences of large-scale resource extraction and the different strategies through which people pursue their desired futures.

**Keywords:** development; progress; education; Indigenous peoples; Amazonia

## Introduction

Julián Miranda, an Indigenous Asháninka<sup>1</sup> man from the eastern Peruvian Amazon, died on 15 May 2010. A respected elder in his village of Nueva Esperanza in the Bajo Urubamba valley (Ucayali Region), Julián died less than 24 hours after killing a jaguar (*Panthera onca*) that had killed two of his cows. Based on the years that I have reflected on his death with his family and other Asháninka people, I understand that it was caused by the jaguar, or jaguar-shaman

<sup>1</sup>With a population of around 110,000, Asháninka people make up the largest Indigenous Amazonian society in Peru. See 'Asháninka', *Base de Datos de Pueblos Indígenas u Originarios*, available at <https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblos/ashaninka>, last access 10 Dec. 2021. This only includes people that identify as Asháninka; those that identify as Ashéninka were counted separately.

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to be more precise. In killing the jaguar-shaman to protect his investment, Julián sacrificed himself, with full knowledge and understanding that he may die. Jaguars are physically powerful beings whether they are shamans or not and are only confronted in desperate situations like Julián's plight after losing his cows. Furthermore, Julián was a *sheripiari* – an *ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and tobacco shaman – and had assured me that during his training he had seen his mentor Don Mauricio Fasabi transform into a jaguar in many *ayahuasca* sessions. That is why – he repeatedly told me – Asháninka people never kill jaguars, as the soul of the dead jaguar-shaman would attack in retribution.

Julián often described his cattle as 'his bank' that would ensure the *progreso* ('progress') of his children and grandchildren by funding their education, understood as the source of the knowledge *para defenderse* ('to defend themselves') in their interactions with outsiders – from government actors to timber and hydrocarbon company representatives. Julián's pursuit of *progreso* is framed by Peru's expanding extractive frontier, which the government portrays as necessary for the country's 'progress' despite its different negative impacts on Indigenous peoples' lives and livelihoods. This article is based on insights from 42 months of ethnographic engagement since 2007 with Asháninka communities in the Bajo Urubamba valley. This area is seldom visited by tourists as it is hard to reach, its forests and river have suffered different impacts from large-scale hydrocarbon and timber extraction, and until recently had no large-scale agro-industry apart from coca, for cocaine-paste production.<sup>2</sup> The Bajo Urubamba is a key historical site for logging and includes Peru's current flagship extractive project – Pluspetrol's natural-gas extraction site at Camisea. Camisea became active in 2004 and Pluspetrol paid the government US\$6.3 billion in royalties in its first decade of activity; almost 50 per cent of the royalties Peru received from extractive ventures in that period.<sup>3</sup> However, Camisea's impact on the communities and ecosystems of the Bajo Urubamba was criticised from early on,<sup>4</sup> and recent monitoring revealed that the people in the area are 'worse off than before [Camisea] in terms of health, nutrition, education, and overall perception of wellbeing'.<sup>5</sup> Julián's village is downriver from Camisea and was affected by liquefied gas spills when its pipeline leaked five times during 2005–6; there have been more spills

<sup>2</sup>Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, 'War by Other Means at the Extractive Frontier: The Violence of Reconstruction in "Post-War" Peru', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 27: 1 (2021), pp. 146–64.

<sup>3</sup>Leonardo Corral, Heath Henderson and Juan José Miranda, 'Evidence from a Natural Experiment on the Development Impact of Windfall Gains', Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Working Paper No. 687, 2016.

<sup>4</sup>Catherine Ross, 'Case Study: Natural Gas Project in Peru', in Jeffrey Atkinson and Martin Scurrah (eds.), *Globalizing Social Justice: The Role of Non-Government Organizations in Bringing About Social Change* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Conrad Feather, 'What Does It Mean to Be Vulnerable?', available at [www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/08/whatdoesitmeantobevulnerable.pdf](http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/08/whatdoesitmeantobevulnerable.pdf), last access 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>5</sup>David Hill, 'Pioneer Gas Project in Latin America Fails Indigenous Peoples', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2016, available at [www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2016/jun/02/pioneer-gas-latin-america-indigenous-peoples](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2016/jun/02/pioneer-gas-latin-america-indigenous-peoples), last access 23 Nov. 2021. See also Carolina Izquierdo, 'Well-being among the Matsigenka of the Peruvian Amazon', in Gordon Mathews and Carolina Izquierdo (eds.), *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective* (New York: Berghahn, 2008).

since.<sup>6</sup> Despite Camisea's economic success, in 2009 almost half of the children under five years old in the area were chronically malnourished.<sup>7</sup>

My Asháninka interlocutors discussed food scarcity as the result of extractive activity and related increased boat traffic, all of which reduced the amount of food they – and, like Julián asserted, animals like the jaguar that attacked his cows – could fish and hunt. This forced people to rely on cash incomes to buy food to supplement their diets and to fund their children's education. Education, they asserted, would prepare children to engage in better terms with the extractive companies and government actors that had impacted on their lives and livelihoods and on the market economy in Atalaya, the district capital.<sup>8</sup> In pursuing his children and grandchildren's *progreso*, Julián deployed a different strategy from most Asháninka families who commonly extracted timber or planted coffee and cacao for steady yet low incomes. Cattle required a large upfront investment and were a source of conflict between their owners and their neighbours as cattle tended to destroy gardens whenever they escaped their enclosures, but also provided great returns given the demand for cattle and beef in Atalaya.

The extractive frontier that frames Julián's choice is central to Peru's reconstruction effort in the wake of its internal war (1980–2000).<sup>9</sup> Economic and political reforms have made resource extraction the key sector for economic growth, export-led earnings and foreign investment.<sup>10</sup> This macroeconomic strategy exemplifies Eduardo Gudynas' appreciation that 'extractivism has become a part of South America's own contemporary version of development, which maintains the myth of progress'.<sup>11</sup> Advocates of the extractive model proffer Peru's macroeconomic growth and the reduction of its population living below the poverty line – from 60 per cent in 2003 to 21.8 per cent in 2015 – as proof of its efficacy.<sup>12</sup> *El chorreo* ('the spillage'), Peru's trickle-down economics discourse, proposes that macroeconomic reform and gains will lead to microeconomic gains to benefit economically poor people.<sup>13</sup> However, *el chorreo* has made no significant improvement in the quality of life of the communities in the areas like the Bajo Urubamba where

<sup>6</sup>Rhett A. Butler, 'Camisea Pipeline Leaks in Peru', *Mongabay*, 8 March 2006, available at <https://news.mongabay.com/2006/03/camisea-pipeline-leaks-in-rainforest-of-peru>, last access 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>7</sup>Alida Díaz, 'Desnutrición crónica en la región Ucayali', *Investigaciones Sociales*, 14: 24 (2010), pp. 285–93.

<sup>8</sup>Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, 'Between Care and Conflict: Relations of Resource Extraction in the Peruvian Amazon', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (forthcoming, 2022).

<sup>9</sup>Although the war is an important historical factor affecting the lives of Asháninka people, I omit a discussion of its events and impact. See Emily Caruso, 'Being at the Centre: Self and Empire among Ene Asháninka People in Peruvian Amazonia', unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2012; and Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, 'War by Other Means at the Extractive Frontier'.

<sup>10</sup>Jeffrey Bury, 'Mining Mountains: Neoliberalism, Land Tenure, Livelihoods, and the New Peruvian Mining Industry in Cajamarca', *Environment and Planning A*, 37: 2 (2005), pp. 221–39.

<sup>11</sup>Eduardo Gudynas, 'The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism', Americas Program Report (Washington, DC: Center for International Policy, 2010), p. 213.

<sup>12</sup>See World Bank data on Peru, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/country/peru>, last access 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>13</sup>'El Banco Mundial dice que el "chorreo" no funciona', *El Comercio*, 1 Oct. 2015, available at <https://elcomercio.pe/economia/mundo/banco-mundial-dice-chorreo-funciona-387795-noticia/>, last access 23 Nov. 2021.

large-scale extraction takes place, nor in hierarchical relations between rural communities and the state.<sup>14</sup> As evidenced by ongoing socio-environmental conflicts,<sup>15</sup> Peru's economic boom has been accompanied by economic and environmental inequality, social unrest and rights violations.<sup>16</sup>

Peru is illustrative of how the governance and institutional arrangements of Latin America's extractive frontier have produced new and reinforced patterns of inequality – rather than redressing existing ones.<sup>17</sup> These arrangements have encouraged individual strategies to escape economic poverty that reinforce broader patterns of inequality locally;<sup>18</sup> these strategies are a marked shift for Indigenous Amazonian societies, often described as based on moral economies of sharing.<sup>19</sup> These individualised strategies arise from a context of fragmented social institutions as extractive development 'undermines the processes that would construct the very institutions needed' for it to have a positive impact on the well-being and livelihoods of the Indigenous and local communities in the extractive frontier.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, following what have been described as regimes of 'neoliberal multiculturalism',<sup>21</sup> the extractive development agenda in Peru has supported the recognition of some rights (e.g. the Law of Prior Consultation and the expansion of collective titles for Indigenous communities) to resolve conflicts with Indigenous peoples over extraction sites and address bottlenecks for the continuation of extractive activities.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the same recognition process excluded rights demanded by grassroots organisations such as full tenure rights over the resources in the forests

<sup>14</sup>Anthony Bebbington and Leonith Hinojosa Valencia, 'Conclusiones: Minería, neoliberalización y reterritorialización en el desarrollo rural', in Anthony Bebbington (ed.), *Minería, movimientos sociales y respuestas campesinas: Una ecología política de transformaciones territoriales* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2011); Izquierdo, 'Well-being among the Matsigenka of the Peruvian Amazon'.

<sup>15</sup>See Alex Soros, 'Local Activists Are Paying with Their Life to Protect Their Forests in Peru', *The Guardian*, 17 Nov. 2014, available at [www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/nov/17/environ](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/nov/17/environ), last access 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>16</sup>Global Witness, 'Annual Report 2019: Protect People and Planet', 2020, available at [www.globalwitness.org/en/about-us/annual-report-2019-protecting-people-and-planet/](http://www.globalwitness.org/en/about-us/annual-report-2019-protecting-people-and-planet/), last access 23 Nov. 2021.

<sup>17</sup>Javier Arellano-Yanguas, 'Aggravating the Resource Curse: Decentralisation, Mining and Conflict in Peru', *Journal of Development Studies*, 47: 4 (2011), pp. 617–38; Denise Bebbington-Humphreys, 'Extraction, Inequality and Indigenous Peoples: Insights from Bolivia', *Environmental Science and Policy*, 33 (Nov. 2013), pp. 438–46.

<sup>18</sup>Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, "'It Makes Me Sad When They Say We Are Poor, We Are Rich!': Of Wealth and Public Wealth in Indigenous Amazonia', in Fernando Santos-Granero (ed.), *Images of Public Wealth in Tropical America* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2016).

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, the contributions to Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (eds.), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>20</sup>Anthony Bebbington, 'Extractive Industries and Stunted States: Conflict, Responsibility and Institutional Change in the Andes', in K. Ravi Raman and Ronnie D. Lipschutz (eds.), *Corporate Social Responsibility: Comparative Critiques* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 97–115; Izquierdo, 'Well-being among the Matsigenka of the Peruvian Amazon'.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Hale, 'Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28: 1 (2005), pp. 10–28.

<sup>22</sup>Roger Merino Acuña, 'The Politics of Extractive Governance: Indigenous Peoples and Socio-Environmental Conflicts', *Extractive Industries and Society*, 2: 1 (2015), pp. 85–92; Iliana Monteroso and Anne Larson, 'Desafíos del proceso de formalización de derechos de CCNN en Perú', Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) InfoBrief No. 220, 2018, available at [www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/6905](http://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/6905), last access 23 Nov. 2021.

and subsoil of their titled communities, as well as participation rights recognised in international agreements such as the right to veto extractive projects that may affect them.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of this often bleak reality, scholarly debates do not portray local peoples as passive agents to the imposition of large-scale resource extraction. Yet, despite the recognition that extractive development has encouraged individual strategies to escape economic poverty, analytical approaches tend to homogenise experiences, strategies and outcomes that individuals set in motion as they seek to construct a better future for themselves and their families. Scholars have engaged with the representative organisations, networks and alliances through which local peoples are carving spaces of action, resistance and re-action as they aim to pursue their desired futures and live dignified lives in spite of extraction-led 'progress'.<sup>24</sup> The multi-disciplinary literature dealing with local responses to extractive development tends to emphasise the responses of communities and their representative organisations, including inter-ethnic and regional movements.<sup>25</sup> A growing body of literature also engages with local responses and conflicts around large-scale resource extraction in terms of their ontological foundations and repercussions, noting the different 'worlds' and conceptions of what is at stake held by the different actors in conflicts over extractive activity.<sup>26</sup> Studies include examinations of how political activity may be motivated by Indigenous people's relationships with the non-human entities with whom they share their territories.<sup>27</sup> These different readings have been criticised for generalising different experiences and engagements

<sup>23</sup>Almut Schilling-Vacaflor and Riccarda Flemmer, 'Conflict Transformation through Prior Consultation? Lessons from Peru', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 47: 4 (2015), pp. 811–39; Esben Leifsen, Maria-Therese Gustafsson, Maria Guzmán-Gallegos and Almut Schilling-Vacaflor, 'New Mechanisms of Participation in Extractive Governance: Between Technologies of Governance and Resistance Work', *Third World Quarterly*, 38: 5 (2017), pp. 1043–57; Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti and Lexy Seedhouse, 'The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Law of Prior Consultation: Obstacles and Opportunities for Democratization and Political Participation in Peru', *Latin American Perspectives*, 46: 5 (2019), pp. 111–27.

<sup>24</sup>On 'post-frontier' politics, see Peter Billie Larsen, *Post-Frontier Resource Governance: Indigenous Rights, Extraction and Conservation in the Peruvian Amazon* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). For Latin America and beyond, see also Richard Peet and Michael Watts (eds.), *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 1996); Joan Martínez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002); Karl Zimmerer and Thomas Bassett (eds.), *Political Ecology: An Integrative Approach to Geography and Environment-Development Studies* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003); Anthony Bebbington and Jeffrey Bury (eds.), *Subterranean Struggles: New Dynamics of Mining, Oil, and Gas in Latin America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup>See, for a review, Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, 'Between Care and Conflict'.

<sup>26</sup>For example, see the contributions to Cecilie Vindal Ødegaard and Juan Javier Rivera Andía (eds.), *Indigenous Life Projects and Extractivism: Ethnographies from South America* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Casey High and Elliot Oakley, 'Conserving and Extracting Nature: Environmental Politics and Livelihoods in the Middle Grounds of Amazonia', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 25: 2 (2020), pp. 236–47.

<sup>27</sup>Mario Blaser, 'Notes towards a Political Ontology of "Environmental" Conflicts', in Lesley Green (ed.), *Contested Ecologies: Dialogues in the South on Nature and Knowledge* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2013), pp. 13–27; and 'Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in spite of Europe', *Current Anthropology*, 54: 5 (2013), pp. 547–68; Marisol de la Cadena, 'Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond "Politics"', *Cultural Anthropology*, 25: 2 (2010), pp. 334–70.

with nature and resources, and the historical trajectories of such experiences and engagements.<sup>28</sup>

Responding to this emphasis on collective representation in the literature, I present Julián's choice to argue for an analytical emphasis on the strategies that individuals make in relation to these new patterns of inequality at the extractive frontier when they pursue their desired futures at the meeting point of different 'progress' agendas. The common emphasis in the literature on the more obvious collective responses by organisations and social movements may be a methodological issue, as the long-term ethnographic fieldwork on which this article is based allows for in-depth explorations of the lives of individuals as they navigate social change.<sup>29</sup> To develop this argument, the article starts by discussing the context of large-scale extractive activity and discourses of *progreso* in Peru and the Bajo Urubamba valley more specifically. From there I explain the events that led to Julián's death, framed by Asháninka conceptions of jaguars and jaguar-shamans and my interlocutors' experiences of sacrifice in shamanic and everyday practices. This is followed by a section discussing Julián's strategy and pursuit of *progreso*, contextualised with Asháninka understandings of education. The conclusion reflects on the implications of examining individual experiences and strategies that mediate people's desires and strategies in the extractive frontier.

### **Progreso and the Extractive Frontier in the Bajo Urubamba**

Peru's extractive development agenda has been justified by successive governments as the answer to poverty reduction, progress and social investment,<sup>30</sup> as well as the reconstruction of a weakened state, public institutions and rural infrastructure in the wake of its internal war.<sup>31</sup> Yet, large-scale resource extraction and its governance tend to distribute costs and benefits unevenly, increasing inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups at the national level and, more importantly, within Indigenous and local communities; the latter results in a lack of social trust and fragmentation of social organisations.<sup>32</sup> Although Peru has one of the largest real and relative shares of Indigenous populations (13.2 million people or 45 per

<sup>28</sup> Alcida Ramos, 'The Politics of Perspectivism', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (Oct. 2012), pp. 481–94; Lucas Bessire and David Bond, 'Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique', *American Ethnologist*, 41: 3 (2014), pp. 440–56.

<sup>29</sup> Steven Rubenstein's *Alejandro Tsakimp: A Shuar Healer in the Margins of History* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) is an outstanding example. See also the contributions to Suzanne Oakdale and Magnus Course (eds.), *Fluent Selves: Autobiography, Person, and History in Lowland South America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> The Ministerio de Energía y Minas (Ministry of Energy and Mines) is tasked with the 'efficient and effective promotion of [extraction] to contribute to the country's [economic] growth with social inclusion' (see [www.minem.gob.pe](http://www.minem.gob.pe), last access 24 Nov. 2021). The Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social (Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion)'s mission statement makes the same link.

<sup>31</sup> Camila Gianella, 'Peru: Changing Contexts for Transitional Justice', in Elin Skaar, Camila Gianella and Trine Eide (eds.), *After Violence: Transitional Justice, Peace, and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 94–124.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Bebbington-Humphreys, 'Extraction, Inequality and Indigenous Peoples'; Bury, 'Mining Mountains'; Bebbington, 'Extractive Industries and Stunted States'. For elsewhere in the Amazon, see Suzana Sawyer's *Crude Chronicles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

cent of its population) in Latin America, this sector of its population remains impoverished, with higher rates of morbidity and mortality than their non-Indigenous counterparts.<sup>33</sup> In the Peruvian Amazon these differences are exacerbated by Indigenous peoples' experiences of a lack of appropriate educational and health services, an absence of effective and equitable pathways for participation in policy and decision making, and unclear land and resource tenure regimes despite recognised rights to all.<sup>34</sup> The access gap to recognised rights is worsened by the region's growing population, incoming migrations of Andean settlers, urbanisation, increasing environmental degradation and extractive activity with high environmental costs. The unequal distribution of the costs of extractive development is compounded by the fact that extraction sites are often in the vicinity of Indigenous communities and impact the lives and livelihoods of their inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> As the government holds the rights to resources in Peru's subsoil, which are legally *Patrimonio de la Nación* ('the Nation's Heritage'), communities can be dispossessed directly by the open expropriation of their land and the transformation of resources into commodities on behalf of 'national interest'. Communities can also receive indirect impacts due to pollution from extractive activity and the elimination of the possibility of developing economic activities other than mining or hydrocarbon extraction. In the Amazon, this has included deforestation and forest degradation as well as river pollution, with different impacts on local people's livelihoods and diets due to diminished hunting and fishing stocks.<sup>36</sup>

Atalaya's provincial government's slogan in the late 2000s – printed on t-shirts, posters, and repeated in adverts on local radio stations – was '*¡Atalaya, progresando!*' ('Atalaya is progressing!'). This *progreso* was discussed as the opening of a paved road to connect its district capital (also called Atalaya) to Satipo (and Lima) to the west. Mirroring wider discourses in rural Peru linking development and concrete infrastructure,<sup>37</sup> *progreso* was also discussed as the construction of paved roads and paths in town, as well as a plaza with concrete water fountains and buildings to host tourists that never arrived. *Progreso* was simultaneously understood as expansions in timber extraction and the construction of larger sawmills, and the arrival of hydrocarbon companies for exploration and extraction activities; the latter pay part of their royalties directly to the province. Atalaya is a historical centre for formal and informal large-scale timber extraction, leading to high rates of deforestation and degradation that have contributed to making it

<sup>33</sup>International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 'Peru: Scaling Up Note', 2013, available at [www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/40264361/peru.pdf/9fde53a3-695a-4350-aebf-eb21a518fe4a](http://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/40264361/peru.pdf/9fde53a3-695a-4350-aebf-eb21a518fe4a), last access 13 Dec. 2021.

<sup>34</sup>Monterroso and Larson, 'Desafíos del proceso de formalización de derechos de CCNN en Perú'; Sarmiento Barletti and Seedhouse, 'The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Law of Prior Consultation'.

<sup>35</sup>This is common elsewhere in the region. For Ecuador, see Casey High's *Victims and Warriors: Violence, History, and Memory in Amazonia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015) based on work with Waorani people; and Michael Cepek's *Life in Oil: Cofán Survival in the Petroleum Fields of Amazonia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018) based on work with Cofán people.

<sup>36</sup>Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, 'The Angry Earth: Wellbeing, Place, and Extractive Development in the Amazon', *Anthropology in Action*, 23: 3 (2016), pp. 43–56.

<sup>37</sup>Penelope Harvey, 'Cementing Relations: The Materiality of Roads and Public Spaces in Provincial Peru', *Social Analysis*, 54: 2 (2010), pp. 28–46.

Peru's second-most-deforested province.<sup>38</sup> The impact of logging was recognised in the World Bank's selection of Atalaya as Peru's first Forest Investment Programme initiative.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, since the granting of the concession to Pluspetrol at Camisea and other hydrocarbon concessions in the area to Repsol and Petrobras, Atalaya has become an active 'in between' site as all the materials necessary for extractive and exploration activities pass by it. Currently, extraction concession blocks overlap half of all titled Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon,<sup>40</sup> and there are strategic points for hydroelectric dams throughout the region, including three within Asháninka territory: Tambo 40, Tambo 60, and Pakitzapango. Julián's village, as most others in the Bajo Urubamba valley, is next to a forestry concession held by a private company; more than nine million of the 17 million hectares of forestry concessions in Peru are superimposed on titled Indigenous communities.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the real and potential impact from the extraction site at Camisea, villages in the Bajo Urubamba only received payments from Pluspetrol for *disturbios fluviales* ('fluvial disturbances') in recognition of the decreased fish stock caused by the increased boat traffic to supply the site. Yet, these payments did not cover the costs of having to buy food, and the negotiations for how much each community received were highly unequal.<sup>42</sup> For example, Julián's village, Nueva Esperanza, had just over 700 inhabitants and received US\$3,500 for the 2009–12 period – around US\$5 per person. Over the past decade, I have witnessed and discussed different strategies through which Asháninka people have dealt with the imposition of extractive projects in their territories and their impacts on their lives and livelihoods. These strategies range from violent opposition demanding the retreat of companies in exploratory stages, to negotiations to reach the best possible compensation deals from long-standing projects.<sup>43</sup> Grassroots organisations in areas with ongoing projects consistently demanded funds from hydrocarbon companies and subnational governments – who received part of the royalties from extraction in their region – to develop productive projects to address diminished food availability and provide them with cash incomes, including fish farms and cacao and coffee gardens, as well as medical centres. Other grassroots organisations sought monthly wages from companies as compensation for each of the families in the villages they represented. Still other individuals took jobs in exploratory teams for hydrocarbon concessions or left their villages to live in urban areas or in the forests of the Asháninka Communal Reserve. My Asháninka interlocutors posed that extractive activity in forests and the increased river traffic to keep it going have led to a marked context of lessened hunting and fishing, for humans and the other beings

<sup>38</sup>Ministerio del Ambiente (MINAM), 'Apuntes del Bosque N.º 1: Cobertura y deforestación en los bosques húmedos amazónicos 2018' (Lima: MINAM, 2020).

<sup>39</sup>Programa Bosques, 'Banco Mundial donará US\$ 400 mil para diseñar proyecto FIP que combatirá deforestación en Atalaya', available at [www.bosques.gob.pe/notasdeprensa/banco-mundial-donara-US-400-mil-para-disenar-proyecto-fip-que-combatira-deforestacion-en-Atalaya](http://www.bosques.gob.pe/notasdeprensa/banco-mundial-donara-US-400-mil-para-disenar-proyecto-fip-que-combatira-deforestacion-en-Atalaya), last access 10 Dec. 2021.

<sup>40</sup>Matt Finer and Martí Orta-Martínez, 'A Second Hydrocarbon Boom Threatens the Peruvian Amazon', *Environmental Research Letters*, 5: 1 (2010), pp. 1–10.

<sup>41</sup>Monterroso and Larson, 'Desafíos del proceso de formalización de derechos de CCNN en Perú'.

<sup>42</sup>Sarmiento Barletti, 'Between Care and Conflict'.

<sup>43</sup>Sarmiento Barletti, 'War by Other Means at the Extractive Frontier'.



with whom they share their territory. Most of Nueva Esperanza's older inhabitants would tease me when I first arrived, saying that a couple of decades earlier there had been so much game that even I would have been a good hunter. However, this part of the Bajo Urubamba is known in other areas of Asháninka territory for its comparative game and fish shortages. One of the consequences of this recognised shortage has been a redefinition of the terms through which people in villages relate to each other.<sup>44</sup> As I was told, in the past everyone was treated as *noshaninka* ('my fellow Asháninka') and thus expected to receive from and give game or fish to those living in their kin-based settlements. As Kendis, a father of five children, explained, the larger amount of people living together in the same village in a context of diminished food availability had forced him to rethink who his *sanori* ('real') family was and differentiate it from those to be treated 'like' family and others who were just *vecinos* ('neighbours') or *comuneros* ('villagers'). These distinctions were common in everyday interactions. Further evidencing fish and game shortages, men in their 40s and 50s told us younger men that to marry their wives they first had to show their prospective fathers-in-law that they were good hunters. In the late 2000s, they expected young men wanting to marry their daughters to show them that they could earn money to feed, clothe and educate their children as they explained it was impossible to live solely off farming or hunting.

Julián's strategy was embedded within this context of diminished hunting and fishing and unequal relations with extractive companies. His decision to raise cows was uncommon in the Indigenous communities of the Bajo Urubamba valley, where informal logging was the most common economic strategy. Formal timber extraction is so highly regulated by the Peruvian government, and the process to extract timber legally is so complex and expensive,<sup>45</sup> that it forces communities to sell their timber at a cut price to companies that pass them as logs extracted from a formal concession. Whenever we discussed logging, my Asháninka interlocutors complained about their deals with timber bosses as they were paid little for the timber and bosses cheated them in their accounts or demanded more timber than what was originally agreed.<sup>46</sup> Cacao and coffee were increasingly popular sources of income, but still had to be supplemented with income from logging due to both cash crops' fluctuating prices and potential issues with harvests.

Cattle were expensive to buy and maintain and were also difficult to deal with because there were conflicts between neighbours over destroyed gardens every time the animals escaped their enclosures. Yet, Julián had worked throughout his late teens and early twenties at a cattle ranch and knew how to raise them, and the constant demand from urban areas for cattle and beef made it a profitable option. Julián told me that he had saved money for years by selling animal skins in Atalaya and had taken loans with shop owners to buy his first cows. Julián and his wife Inés had three cows, a bull and two calves by the time the incident with the jaguar took place in 2010.

<sup>44</sup>Sarmiento Barletti, 'The Angry Earth'.

<sup>45</sup>Monterroso and Larson, 'Desafíos del proceso de formalización de derechos de CCNN en Perú'.

<sup>46</sup>Evan Killick, 'Godparents and Trading Partners: Social and Economic Relations in Peruvian Amazonia', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 40: 2 (2008), pp. 303–28; Sarmiento Barletti, 'Between Care and Conflict'.

## Julián's Choice

Julián was born in the Tambo valley but moved to the Bajo Urubamba in his youth looking for work, which he found on a cattle ranch. He then moved to the Yine village of Santa Clara, also in the Bajo Urubamba, and finally to the Asháninka village of Nueva Esperanza. I met him there in August 2007 and the events surrounding his death took place in May 2010. Julián visited me the evening before his death as he wanted to borrow my watch to set an alarm to wake up early the next morning. He explained that over the past fortnight, two of his calves had been killed and partially eaten by a jaguar. Julián explained that he had built a *tarima*, a narrow platform about two metres tall, near to where his grass field met the forest. He planned to lie waiting for the jaguar over the next few nights and shoot it when it showed up. I took my watch off, set the alarm and handed it over but was left confused as he left. Julián had assured me – so many times – that the jaguars that come close to villages are jaguar-shamans, either reincarnated shamans or living shamans powerful enough to transform. There are warnings against killing them because their soul would kill their killer.

I was woken early next morning by the murmurs of excited conversations. I could hear worry in people's voices as they discussed hearing a shot close to the village earlier that morning. I followed Joel, my host and leader of the village's self-defence committee, who was heading to see what had happened. On the forest path we found José (Julián's son and my godson), who told us his father had shot a jaguar. We reached Julián further down the path, carrying a jaguar skin so large that he was holding it over his head.

Julián came to see me later that day to return my watch. As I was preparing to head downriver to Atalaya, he walked me to the river and told me what had happened when we got there. Premonitorily, as it would be our last conversation, or perhaps recognising my excitement about the topic, he told me I could record him if I wanted to:

I killed the jaguar, *compadre*, I killed the jaguar. I saw it coming but it didn't go for the cows. It stopped in front of me, looked at me, and growled. It wasn't trying to scare me – it was like it was trying to talk to me. I think that it must've been telling me 'Please don't kill me, don't kill me, please.' Yes, that must've been it, it was pleading with me.

I felt very sorry, I didn't want to say anything back and I was thinking of my children and my grandchildren – what will happen [to them] if all the cows end up dead? I took a loan to buy the calves and now I don't know how I'm going to pay for it. Without the cows, how will we buy them notebooks so they can study, how are we going to buy them clothes? How will they progress [*Como van a progresar*] if they don't study?

I shot it; I was so close to it. And it died. (...) I went down to look at it and thought that I might as well take its skin and sell it in Atalaya. A man offered me 400 *soles* [£80 at the time] for a [jaguar] skin once, so I am going to send it to him. When I moved it, I saw it was really skinny but had a big belly. It was a female, *compadre*, and she was pregnant. No wonder she came so close to the village, she was hungry and must've felt sorrow for her children inside her who

were hungry too. I felt really bad. I wanted to cry because I understand the things that we do when we feel sorrow for our children when they're hungry; I have to feed my children and my grandchildren too. You know how hard it is to find game, you've come to the forest with me. Sometimes we have walked for a whole day together, only to come back with a few birds or a small monkey. It isn't like it used to be when I was young, before the [hydrocarbon] companies came. We always ate game back then. There was so much game back then that animals would walk into the village and you could kill them so easily. It must be the same for [the jaguar], she must've been unable to find game in the forest so came to eat in the village and found the cows before finding anything else.

I killed it and took its skin, at least your *comadre* can buy things with that money.

The following morning, now in an Atalaya hostel, I was woken by Gerardo, Nueva Esperanza's chief, who told me that Julián had died hours earlier. He asked if I could spare some money to buy candles, food and alcohol for his wake. I gave Gerardo some money and he told me to wait for him to make the trip back to Nueva Esperanza together. Shocked by Julián's death and feeling that the last thing they needed at a funeral was an anthropologist, I packed my bag and returned to Lima. When I returned to Nueva Esperanza a few weeks later, I visited Inés, Julián's widow, who told me, in Spanish, '*el tigre le ha muerto a tu compadre*' ('the jaguar has killed your *compadre*'). Inés and her oldest sons, Limber and Juliancillo, recounted what had happened. In the afternoon of the day he killed the jaguar, Julián had started to feel ill; Inés had noticed he had problems breathing and was starting to develop what looked like bruises on his face. Julián laid in his hammock for hours smoking tobacco from his shamanic pipe, refusing to eat or drink, and went to bed early. In the middle of the night, he had coughing fits and a high fever as the bruises progressively became more noticeable on his body. He died a few hours later. This explanation was repeated every time I visited someone that I had not seen since Julián's death.

I do not want to try and establish what may have biologically happened to him. Even then, no medical certificate or autopsy would have convinced Inés, her children and their neighbours that Julián's death had not been caused by the jaguar he shot. I had previously discussed jaguar-shaman deaths with Inés and Julián, had many conversations with him about his experiences with jaguar-shamans, and even more on their experiences of the actions of *matsi* ('sorcerers'). In our conversations, the couple made it clear that they felt targeted by *matsi*. Faustino, their first child, had died just before turning seven from what Julián explained as sorcery. His death had led Julián to seek training with Don Mauricio Fasabi, a well-respected jaguar-shaman. Previously, Julián had also spent time in the Yine village of Huao, home of Don Manuel Zapata, another jaguar-shaman.<sup>47</sup> Julián had stopped his practice in the 1990s after his second son, John, died as a boy due to a sorcery attack; Julián explained that the attack had been motivated by the envy that a *matsi*

<sup>47</sup>On the Yine communities of the Bajo Urubamba at the time, see Peter Gow, *An Amazonian Myth and Its History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

felt for his healing success. After failing to save his son, he became hesitant to treat more people but still prepared and drank *ayahuasca*, sang the songs he had learned in his training, and smoked tobacco from his pipe at night.

### Julián's Sacrifice

Julián had carefully planned to kill the jaguar that had attacked his cows, despite knowing from *sheripiari* training and experience that if it was a jaguar-shaman it would kill him. I understand this as a sacrifice that he believed was necessary for his pursuit of his children and grandchildren's *progreso*. My Asháninka interlocutors discussed *sacrificio* ('sacrifice') in different practices related to keeping their children safe, fed and in school. Given Julián's life and the nature of his death, I start with an understanding of sacrifice in shamanic practice, contextualised with Asháninka understandings of *sheripiari* practice and its links to jaguars.

Jaguars are the most powerful and feared predators of the Amazon; they occupy a special place in the cosmologies and oral histories of Indigenous peoples and are an everyday danger for those who go into the forest to hunt or extract timber. Their special role is illustrated in the connections that many Indigenous Amazonian societies make between jaguars and shamans; when it is necessary to kill them, they are killed with weapons that recognise them as more than animals.<sup>48</sup> As Graham Harvey and Robert Wallis noted, 'a full appreciation of the nature of shamans in [Amazonia] requires acceptance that the obvious meaning is intended: Shamans are jaguars'.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff reported 'shamans and jaguars are thought to be almost identical, or at least equivalent, in their power, each in his own sphere of action, but occasionally able to exchange their roles'.<sup>50</sup> The idea that shamans can take the form of jaguars, either when they die or during their lives, is widespread among Indigenous Amazonian peoples,<sup>51</sup> including Asháninka people. Johannes Wilbert, in his study of tobacco and shamanism in South America, wrote that *sheripiari* 'can adopt a jaguar form [...] in the form of jaguars, shamans are jaguars: they see like them and they think like them'.<sup>52</sup> John Bodley recorded a conversation with a *sheripiari* called Inkiteniro, who 'said his tobacco tube was a jaguar, and it took him four years of training to learn how to use it. [...] When I offered to buy his tobacco tube, Inkiteniro refused, warning me that his jaguar would be

<sup>48</sup>For example, Cashinahua people killed jaguars using the same methods and weapons that they used to kill people during raids. See Janet Siskind, *To Hunt in the Morning* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>49</sup>Graham Harvey and Robert Wallis (eds.), *The Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2016), p. 123.

<sup>50</sup>Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs among the Indians of Colombia* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>51</sup>Robin Wright, *Mysteries of the Jaguar Shamans of the Northwest Amazon* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013). See also Carlos Fausto, 'A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakanã of Eastern Amazonia', in Neil Whitehead and Robin Wright (eds.), *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Laura Rival, 'The Attachment of the Soul to the Body among the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador', *Ethnos*, 70: 3 (2005), pp. 285–310.

<sup>52</sup>Johannes Wilbert, *Tobacco and Shamanism in South America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 197.

displeased and it would be dangerous for me.<sup>53</sup> More clearly still, Hans Reiser wrote of a *sheripiari* who told him 'that his soul dwells in a [jaguar] and therefore he kills no [jaguar], since he would thereby commit suicide'.<sup>54</sup>

My Asháninka interlocutors described the jaguars they encountered in the forest as either living jaguar-shamans in jaguar form, or jaguar-shamans that were transformed into jaguars when they died. Bodley noted that for Asháninka people only 'troublesome jaguars are assumed to embody the souls of living jaguar shamans'.<sup>55</sup> As Gerald Weiss wrote, 'Jaguars [...] that come prowling are understood to be the souls of living jaguar-shamans in jaguar form, as well as jaguar-shamans transformed bodily at death into jaguars.'<sup>56</sup> Like Weiss, I found an attitude of 'antipathy and fear mixed with a certain admiration for [jaguars'] great strength'.<sup>57</sup> Jaguars were described through vivid stories about their physical characteristics and how dangerous they were in both forests and rivers. They were singled out for living alone in the forest and, as far as I know, are considered as the only forest animals with no *ashitarori* ('spiritual owner/master'). Asháninka parents use jaguars as warnings for misbehaving children, who are told that if they are too loud a jaguar will come and eat them. I have also been told different oral histories about what happens when people do not take jaguars seriously (they are eaten by a jaguar), or young men fake that they can transform into jaguars to impress women (they are also eaten by a jaguar). Ronald Anderson recorded oral histories of Asháninka families being visited by a jaguar in human form to drink manioc beer, and later return in jaguar form to kill and eat his hosts.<sup>58</sup> In one oral history a jaguar was killed by a woman who stripped his jaguar *kitsarentsi* (the Asháninka tunic) and wore it. The woman became a jaguar and went to the forest to hunt but attacked her children when she returned to her house and had to be stopped and stripped from the jaguar's *kitsarentsi*. A man then wore it with the same result as all jaguars see human beings as peccaries, which is why they kill and eat them. The *kitsarentsi* was then given to a *sheripiari* who burned it.<sup>59</sup>

Like jaguars, *sheripiari* are treated with a mixture of admiration, respect and fear due to their power and skill. Only men train to become *sheripiari*, masters in the use of tobacco and *ayahuasca*.<sup>60</sup> During my first visit to Asháninka communities in 2006, I was told that there were not many *sheripiari* left as young men were reticent to undergo the long and difficult training. Men undergoing training give up the most pleasurable aspects of social life – drinking manioc beer, having sex, living with their kinspeople – and are not allowed to eat many kinds of game and must frequently drink *ayahuasca*, which is physically and emotionally demanding. In villages, *sheripiari* live away from the rest of the families, partly because they need

<sup>53</sup>John Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1994), p. 82.

<sup>54</sup>Hans Reiser, *Indios* (Braunschweig: Gustav Wenzel & Sohn, 1943), p. 188.

<sup>55</sup>Bodley, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 82.

<sup>56</sup>Gerald Weiss, *Campa Cosmology* (New York: American Museum of National History, 1975), p. 289.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>58</sup>Ronald Anderson, *Cuentos folklóricos de los ashéninka* (Lima: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, 1985)

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 88–9.

<sup>60</sup>Women may train in the use of other medicinal plants and vapour to examine, diagnose and treat patients.

silence for *ayahuasca* sessions but also because they are treated as potentially dangerous. As Julián and others explained, *sheripiari* and *matsi* follow the same training but decide how they will apply their knowledge during the last *ayahuasca* session in their training when they see a woman holding two bowls, one with paracetamol tablets and the other with syringes. Those that choose paracetamol become *sheripiari*, and those that choose syringes become *matsi*, as sorcery travels in darts that are as sharp as syringes.<sup>61</sup> Thus, my interlocutors approach *sheripiari* with full knowledge that they know how to heal and how to practise sorcery, revealing the duality of the practice.<sup>62</sup> Julián explained that the potential violence in *sheripiari* practice was also illustrated in jaguar-shamans as those who transform into jaguars during their lifetime may travel to villages and kill people, including their former kin, as they stop seeing them as humans and instead see them as peccaries. Notably, when he recounted the events that would lead to his death, Julián explained that the jaguar had been so close to his village due its hunger and desire to feed its unborn children in a context of game scarcity in the forest. As noted earlier, many of my interlocutors made a link between large-scale resource extraction and a diminished availability of game and fish.<sup>63</sup>

Like the jaguar's attempt to feed itself and its unborn children, the *sheripiari* I know explained their training and practice as a *sacrificio* for their own children; the word in Spanish was used in conversations in Asháninka language. *Sheripiari* told me they trained after the death of at least one of their children at a young age from what they described as sorcery attacks from *matsi*. The sorrow for their lost children, and their desire to protect those that were still alive, motivated them through the hardships of *sheripiari* training.<sup>64</sup> This is a dangerous choice, they assured me, as becoming a *sheripiari* made them targets for *matsi* for reasons including envy for their healing power or wanting to stop them from healing someone they had attacked. Julián agreed when I asked him about this understanding of *sheripiari* practice as a kind of sacrifice. He explained his decision to train as a conscious sacrifice for the attainment of the knowledge and ability to call on spirits to heal and protect his children as well as other people that might need his help.

I have only ever heard or read of Asháninka notions of *sacrificio* in two other contexts, both linked to different aspects of children's well-being. The first was in the recounting of Asháninka people's role against Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) cadres during Peru's internal war (officially, 1980–2000). Mainstream memories of war tell of the *sacrificio* of Asháninka men and women who initially fought

<sup>61</sup>For a similar example, see Peter Gow, *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>62</sup>See also Weiss, *Campa Cosmology*; and Gow, *An Amazonian Myth and Its History*. On the ambivalence of shamanic practice in Indigenous Amazonia, see Joanna Overing-Kaplan, *The Piara: A People of the Orinoco Basin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Stephen Hugh-Jones, 'Shamans, Prophets, Priests and Pastors', in Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (eds.), *Shamanism, History, and the State* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 32–75; Fausto, 'A Blend of Blood and Tobacco'.

<sup>63</sup>See Sarmiento Barletti, 'The Angry Earth'.

<sup>64</sup>Peter Gow, based on research in the village next to Julián's in the Bajo Urubamba, argued that Yine shamans train due to 'the unbearable grief, experienced or simply feared, of losing a child to illness'. Peter Gow, 'Helpless: The Affective Precondition of Piro Social Life', in Overing and Passes (eds.), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger*, pp. 46–63, quotation p. 59.

with bows, arrows and spears against the *kityoncari* ('reds') who had guns and grenades. Their strategies to ensure their children's safety from violence, to prevent Sendero cadres taking them by force to their camps in the forest, and to feed their children at the time were central to their memories.<sup>65</sup> The second, and more common use of *sacrificio* in everyday conversations, was connected to the work in logging or cash crops that parents carried out to feed their children, given the diminishing availability of game and fish and the need for money to cover food and other expenses. Most people explained their work-as-*sacrificio* in terms of their desire to prevent their children from suffering due to hunger or future experiences of being unable to deal in fair terms with shop owners or timber bosses in Atalaya, or not having their rights respected by government and hydrocarbon company representatives.<sup>66</sup> As I explain in the following section, their statements emphasised the need to support their children's education to ensure their *progreso* by equipping them with the knowledge *para defenderse*. This perspective is summarised in something Joel, a respected local leader and former schoolteacher, told me when I asked him about *sacrificio* and parenthood. Joel explained that parents should work hard to make money to feed and educate their children. 'You could live eating boiled manioc and bits of fish or deceiving hunger by drinking manioc beer', he told me, 'but your children won't be able to study and will suffer (...) [T]hey won't know how to defend themselves and will be cheated by [shopkeepers], companies and the government if you don't work hard [to educate them].' The idea of being cheated by extractive companies or the government is framed by the state of large-scale extractive activity in the Bajo Urubamba valley and its impacts on Asháninka lives and livelihoods. The following section expands on the idea of education as a pathway to *progreso* in Julián's strategy, framed by wider Asháninka notions on schooling and education.

### Julián's Strategy

Julián and Inés lost their first two sons (Faustino and John) to what they explained as sorcery. In 2010 they had seven living children – two sons (Juliancillo and Limber) and a daughter (Rosa) in their mid-twenties, and another daughter and three sons (Irma, José, Enrique and Boris) aged between 13 and seven. Rosa was married and lived in Nueva Esperanza and had four children. Juliancillo and Limber were constantly moving between Nueva Esperanza and the town of Sepahua to the east looking for work, during which their wives and children (each had two boys of ages ranging between one and five) stayed with Julián and Inés. The old couple wanted their younger children and grandchildren to complete primary school in Nueva Esperanza followed by secondary school elsewhere as the village, like most in the area, did not have one. The lack of secondary schools made it a great challenge for children to complete their studies as most of them had to either walk or travel by canoe to one of the few secondary schools in the Bajo Urubamba valley. Fewer children had family members in a village with a secondary

<sup>65</sup>Sarmiento Barletti, 'War by Other Means at the Extractive Frontier'.

<sup>66</sup>See Sarmiento Barletti, 'Between Care and Conflict' for an examination of the interactions between Asháninka communities and hydrocarbon companies in the Bajo Urubamba.

school that would be able to take them in for the duration of their studies or had received a scholarship in the boarding school ran by the Catholic Church upriver in the town of Sepahua. A minority of children had parents with enough money to send them to live in Atalaya to complete their schooling. Julián and Inés hoped that some of their children and grandchildren would make it through secondary school and university; they had been working for years on expanding their cattle to be able to cover those expenses.

Most Asháninka parents that I know were adamant that school should be taught in Spanish as Asháninka language should be taught in their homes. Some of my interlocutors complained that their children did not know or have much interest in Asháninka language or traditional subsistence skills (e.g. hunting and garden agriculture) but they did not explain this lack of interest as motivated by the time children spent in classes and thus away from opportunities to learn from their parents and grandparents.<sup>67</sup> Generally, schools (*yotantsipanko*, ‘the house of knowledge’) were perceived in a positive light. In fact, a common motivation for Indigenous Amazonian people in Peru to request collective titles for their territories is to access a school and government-funded teachers.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, schools had a physical centrality to Asháninka social life and were the only or one of the few buildings constructed with concrete in villages, were painted in bright colours (houses are seldomly painted) and were built at the centre of villages (commonly next to its football pitch). Highlighting their importance, schools tended to be used for communal assemblies and to receive different kinds of visitors (e.g. non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors, government agents and hydrocarbon company employees). In my experience, schools were underfunded, teachers were away for months of the school year and they rarely completed a full week of classes. Despite being the most populated village in the Bajo Urubamba, Nueva Esperanza’s primary school only had two classrooms shared by children from different years. This situation is indicative of public education in Peru, a country with some of the lowest scores in Latin America in educational evaluations.<sup>69</sup>

The powerful discursive space held by education among Indigenous peoples in Peru has been well studied.<sup>70</sup> In the Bajo Urubamba, discourses of *progreso* are

<sup>67</sup>The literature on education in the Amazon throughout the 1990s was marked by studies of schooling as ‘deskilling’ in terms of traditional subsistence practices and its impact on Indigenous identities. See, for example, Sheila Aikman, ‘Interculturality and Intercultural Education: A Challenge for Democracy’, *International Review of Education*, 43: 5/6 (1997), pp. 463–79; Laura Rival, ‘Modernity and the Politics of Identity in an Amazonian Society’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 16: 2 (1997), pp. 137–51.

<sup>68</sup>Evan Killick, ‘Creating Community: Land Titling, Education, and Settlement Formation among the Ashéninka of Peruvian Amazonia’, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 13: 1 (2007), pp. 22–47.

<sup>69</sup>Peru was ranked 64th out of 77 countries (8th out of 10 among the assessed Latin American countries) in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). See ‘PISA 2018 results’, available at [www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/pisa-2018-results.htm), last access 24 Nov. 2021.

<sup>70</sup>For the Amazon, see Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*; Sheila Aikman, *Intercultural Education and Literacy: An Ethnographic Study of Indigenous Knowledge and Learning in the Peruvian Amazon* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999); and Camilla Morelli, ‘The Rivers Echo with Laughter: How Children’s Ways-of-Knowing Transform the World of Matses People in Peruvian Amazonia’, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2014. For the Andes, see Marisol de la Cadena, ‘Are Mestizos Hybrids? The



intertwined with discourses of education and ‘civilisation’. As Hanne Veber wrote for neighbouring Ashéninka communities, ‘the notion of civilization is borrowed from settlers but carries somewhat different connotations and meanings [...] “becoming civilized” refers primarily to the acquisition [...] of non-native knowledge that may allow a wider range of maneuver vis-à-vis, and control over, relations with settlers’.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, Evan Killick recounted how an Ashéninka collaborator of his noted that if his daughter kept missing school, ‘she might as well [...] live in the hills, without salt or matches’, both considered as markers of *progreso*.<sup>72</sup> As Peter Gow noted for the neighbouring Yine people, those who are not educated are ‘at the mercy of those who do possess such accomplishments. It is said of such people that *no saben defenderse* – they do not know how to defend themselves.’<sup>73</sup>

Julián once told me that the main difference between his grandparents and himself was that he had completed primary school and learned enough not to be exploited by local bosses. He explained:

My grandparents didn’t know how to defend themselves. They were scared, they saw the *patrón* [non-Indigenous boss] as if he was a god; he was the only one they had to respect but there was no justice for them. If he owed one of them for their work he would just give him a packet of cartridges for a whole month’s work.

For Julián and others, being literate and learning mathematics are valued attributes. Education is described as granting people the knowledge to negotiate with hydrocarbon companies and loggers and to avoid being cheated by them, to have their rights respected by government actors, and to be able to live together in villages after having lived in separate, small, kin-based settlements. At the time of Julián’s death, schooling was perceived as central to be able to engage with government and hydrocarbon agents (and to a lesser extent NGOs) on a more equal footing, hoping for a future where local people may receive fairer compensations from Pluspetrol and other companies for their extractive activities’ impacts on local lives and livelihoods. Schooling was understood as the source of the necessary knowledge to ‘defend themselves’ by making available the possibilities opened up by the non-Indigenous world.<sup>74</sup> This was perceived as the ability to renegotiate their engagement with more powerful non-Indigenous actors, to use the governance structure provided by titling laws to negotiate the conflicts arising from village life, and to negotiate fairer agreements with timber and hydrocarbon companies.

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Conceptual Politics of Andean Identities’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37: 2 (2005), pp. 259–84; and María Elena García, *Making Indigenous Citizens: Identities, Education and Multicultural Development in Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>71</sup>Hanne Veber, ‘The Salt of the Montana: Interpreting Indigenous Activism in the Rain Forest’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 13: 3 (1998), pp. 382–413, quotation p. 384.

<sup>72</sup>Killick, ‘Creating Community’, p. 32.

<sup>73</sup>Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*, p. 233.

<sup>74</sup>See Morelli, ‘The River Echoes with Laughter’. See also Courtney Stafford-Walter, ‘The Sickness: Sociality, Schooling, and Spirit Possession amongst Amerindian Youth in the Savannahs of Guyana’, unpubl. PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2018.

In an important sense, children are expected to act as catalysts in this imagined future.

I cannot think of a situation where schooling was discussed as part of a desire to ‘become’ non-Indigenous actors. Education was explained as a pathway to acquire the non-Indigenous knowledge necessary to be able to mediate interactions and have more agency in a world that is, to a large extent, structured by the rules and knowledge held by non-Indigenous others. For example, most of my interlocutors’ interactions with government agencies, NGO actors, hydrocarbon companies, and sometimes local timber bosses, are in written form. Letters come back and forth, written in very formal Spanish, and with official-looking stamps as they move following a pathway of communications leading to physical visits by representatives for – my Asháninka interlocutors hope – the solution to an issue or the beginning of a project. Documents may act as proof of a promise and that a person or a village representative has completed the steps required by the government (or a company or NGO). For the Asháninka people I have discussed this with, ‘procedures and documents are not merely necessary, but are deemed sufficient, to produce the desired results’.<sup>75</sup> The skill developed by some of my interlocutors with the bureaucratic formality of documents is an example of their awareness of the importance of paper trails when dealing with the Peruvian government.<sup>76</sup> This skill is important as government offices are so physically (and, even more, symbolically) far from their villages. As Gerardo, Nueva Esperanza’s chief, once told me:

We want to live peacefully (...) that’s why I make my children study (...) I advise them to study hard, to learn so that they can defend our territory, so that they know how to defend themselves and won’t be fooled. That’s why education is so important (...) they must learn or else they won’t progress. You have (...) to advise [your godchildren] to study so that they too know, so that they can defend themselves and live well.

Gerardo, Julián and other parents made a direct connection between the idea of being able to ‘defend themselves’ and their struggles to receive fairer compensation from Pluspetrol for its impact on the local availability of game and fish.

My Asháninka interlocutors hold assemblies to discuss issues related to compensations from Pluspetrol as well as their dealings with other outsider actors, including government agencies, NGOs and timber companies. The governance of Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon is legally organised around an *asamblea comunal* (communal assembly) composed of its adult inhabitants. All agreements made at assemblies are recorded in a book of minutes, which also contains the community’s rules and regulations. Each meeting’s minutes are read out loud for every participant to approve, after which they queue to sign their names

<sup>75</sup>Olivier Allard, ‘Bureaucratic Anxiety: Asymmetrical Interactions and the Role of Documents in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2: 2 (2012), p. 235.

<sup>76</sup>For similar links between education and bureaucracy elsewhere in Indigenous Amazonia, see Olivier Allard and Harry Walker, ‘Paper, Power, and Procedure: Reflections on Amazonian Appropriations of Bureaucracy and Documents’, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 21: 3 (2016), pp. 402–13; and Natalia Buitron ‘Autonomy, Productiveness and Community: The Rise of Inequality in an Amazonian Society’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 26: 1 (2020), pp. 48–66.

and write their ID card numbers as proof of their agreement. Villagers are also able to lodge complaints against other villagers in the book of minutes and ask communal authorities to intercede – this is considered as a ‘civilised’ way of dealing with conflicts. The importance of these documents was noted by Gerardo in a speech he delivered during an assembly:

Do you know why the ancestors didn’t live in villages? Because they didn’t know how to. They lived far apart so they wouldn’t fight (...) but now we’re all organised, you can work peacefully and drink manioc beer. Before there were no schools, people didn’t know how to read or write so we didn’t understand (...) now things are changing, we have our [land] title, we know about wages, and they can’t fool us in Atalaya.

Gerardo’s statement represents the idea that education also allowed for more peaceful living in villages. My interlocutors explained this was necessary because they lived in villages with people who were not necessarily kin, whereas three decades earlier they lived in small kin-based settlements that were around a day’s walk away from each other. In the past, the distance set between settlements was not only a way to prevent conflicts, but also allowed each family enough territory to hunt without competing with other groups, yet they were close enough to visit each other;<sup>77</sup> given food shortages, my interlocutors had to rethink the way they related to each other. While I was told that people in the past would move away to avoid conflicts within a settlement, I was also told that people were now unlikely to leave as they wanted to stay close to schools and were reticent to leave their houses which were built from more durable materials, or to abandon their investment in cacao and coffee gardens as these can be harvested for years. Gerardo’s mention of their land title and knowing about wages is also related to the connection that people made between education and rights, under which education tended to be understood for its potential to address the unjust way Indigenous peoples engaged with logging and hydrocarbon companies and government agencies.<sup>78</sup>

As Julián explained it, ‘I work hard so that all of them [his children and grandchildren] will go to school and will be able to progress and live peacefully.’ This pursuit of *progreso* was framed by the challenges on their diets and livelihoods brought about by the expansion of the extractive frontier. Although I never discussed it with him, there is a parallel in perspectives between knowledge acquired through *sheripari* training, and the knowledge acquired through schooling; both can be targeted at defending themselves and their families. *Sheripari* knowledge allows *ayahuasca* and tobacco specialists to protect others from illness and sorcery, while the knowledge from schooling is understood to protect them from interactions with the government and other powerful non-Indigenous actors such as the extractive companies that were impacting on their lives and livelihoods.<sup>79</sup> Julián underwent *sheripari* training to defend his children and believed that his

<sup>77</sup>Killick, ‘Creating Community’.

<sup>78</sup>Sarmiento Barletti, ‘Between Care and Conflict’.

<sup>79</sup>See also Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*, p. 241.

children and grandchildren would only achieve *progreso* if they studied and learned to ‘defend themselves’.

### Conclusion: Sacrificing for *Progreso*

I opened this article by referring to the emphasis on social movements, networks and community response in the literature dealing with local experiences of the extractive frontier in Latin America. As seen in the series of strikes against fines imposed by the Peruvian government on Indigenous communities for their informal extraction of timber and for the re-negotiation of compensation agreements with hydrocarbon companies, the Bajo Urubamba valley has a well-organised network of political organisations and experienced leaders.<sup>80</sup> Other Asháninka organisations in neighbouring valleys have been central to international campaigns to stop the building of hydroelectric dams in the Peruvian Amazon, for which their leaders have received international awards including the Goldman Environmental Prize.<sup>81</sup> Indigenous activism in the extractive frontier has also been examined in terms of how it may be motivated by Indigenous people’s relationships with the non-human entities with whom they share their territories, and who they seek to defend from the impacts of large-scale extractive activity. Notwithstanding the importance of the focus on social networks and on the role of non-human entities in how Indigenous peoples engage with the extractive frontier, I noted earlier that those analytical approaches have been criticised for generalising a wide range of peoples’ experiences and strategies. This criticism is relevant given the evidence noted earlier on how extractive industries have produced new and reinforced existing patterns of inequality throughout rural Latin America and encouraged individual strategies in rural communities to escape economic poverty.

Julián’s strategy tells us the other side of the story of local activism by illustrating the individual experiences and strategies that mediate people’s desires and strategies and that are as necessary to understand as collective responses to the extractive frontier. He did not participate in strikes or meetings and instead spent most of his time either surrounded by his children and grandchildren or hunting and tending his cows. Julián’s strategy and his death are framed by the degradation of the forests in the Bajo Urubamba valley that was driven by extractive concessions in the area, and the wider impact of Pluspetrol’s activity and the Peruvian state’s extractive agenda on local diets and livelihoods. Julián’s strategy for the *progreso* of his children and grandchildren was to support them through school – and, he hoped, through university – so they could pursue a future where they would know how to ‘defend themselves’ and renegotiate their relationship with government and other powerful non-Indigenous actors. This understanding was at odds with the government’s extractive development-led progress, where macroeconomic success driven by large-scale resource extraction takes precedence over the well-being of Asháninka and other Indigenous peoples. Julián sacrificed himself for

<sup>80</sup> ‘Atalaya inicia paro indefinido el 15 de agosto’, available at [www.servindi.org/actualidad/12/08/2018/atalaya-inicia-paro-indefinido-el-15-de-agosto](http://www.servindi.org/actualidad/12/08/2018/atalaya-inicia-paro-indefinido-el-15-de-agosto), last access 24 Nov. 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Uri Friedman, ‘The Woman Who Breaks Mega-Dams’, *The Atlantic*, 30 April 2014, available at [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/the-woman-who-fights-dams/361352](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/the-woman-who-fights-dams/361352), last access 24 Nov. 2021.

his idea of *progreso*; having trained as a *sheripiari*, he was aware of both the power of knowledge and the possibility that killing the jaguar that had attacked his cows could lead to his own death. He had previously sacrificed himself to protect his children when he trained as a *sheripiari* despite its hardships and threats from potential sorcery attacks. The latter had led to the death of two of his sons.

Julián's choice is not a story about the failure of Indigenous social movements. Indigenous organisations and their non-Indigenous allies have been able to put enough pressure on the Peruvian state throughout the past four decades to achieve the recognition of different rights. His choice does evidence some of the Indigenous movement's limitations in achieving redress for the impacts that the expanding extractive frontier and extractive governance have on their livelihoods. Julián's choice is not a story of the undoing of Indigenous peoples' relations with non-human others either; he knew that jaguar-shamans existed and respected them for what they could do. His actions do tease the changing relationships with non-human others in the extractive frontier as Indigenous peoples adapt their lives and livelihoods to the highly unequal and changing context created by the extractive frontier. Julián was not at the wrong place at the wrong time either, as the event that led to his death may have been motivated by a wider context out of his control, but still took planning and its repercussions were fully understood by him.

I have presented Julián's choice as an illustration of an individual's struggle to survive and pursue a life worth living and plan for a better future for his children and grandchildren in contexts where people's lives and livelihoods are being affected by the expanding extractive frontier. Julián's experience is illustrative of what the literature for the region has examined in terms of extractive development leading to pursuits of well-being that may be more based on individual strategies rather than a collective basis. His pursuit of *progreso* was at odds but intersected with the kind of progress predicated by the government and its promise of social inclusion. The examination of Julián's pursuit and its consequences sheds light on the importance of understanding how individuals deal with the imposition of large-scale extractive activity and strategise both their own and their children's pursuits of well-being in these contexts. The individual strategies that people deploy are relevant to understand the bigger picture that tends to be dominated by examinations of local activism and social movements.

Four decades ago, in *Victims of Progress*, Bodley warned that the extermination of Asháninka people in an ethnocidal catastrophe, driven by the kind of progress still pursued by the Peruvian government, was almost complete.<sup>82</sup> Julián's effort illustrates the strategies that people make to pursue dignified lives and *progreso* at the extractive frontier despite the challenges provided by dominant brands of progress that emphasise economic growth. I like to think that from his perspective, his sacrifice was not in vain. Eleven years after his death, Irma, one of Julián's daughters, is a bilingual primary schoolteacher in an Asháninka community in the Ene River valley, and his son José is one of the few Asháninka lawyers. His older children live in Nueva Esperanza with their mother, Inés, and still raise cows to support the *progreso* of their children and grandchildren.

<sup>82</sup>John Bodley, *Victims of Progress* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 1975).

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### Spanish abstract

En mayo de 2010, Julián Miranda, un chamán indígena Asháninka, murió horas después de matar a un jaguar-chamán. Pese a saber que lo podía matar, él mató al jaguar-chamán para proteger a sus vacas, las que significaban una inversión para apoyar el muy deseado ‘progreso’ para sus hijos y nietos a través de la educación. La opción de Julián fue de mucho sacrificio personal debido a la dureza experimentada en la deforestada selva del valle Bajo Urubamba en la Amazonia peruana. Mi examen de su decisión de matar al jaguar-chamán se relaciona con la literatura multidisciplinaria sobre cómo pueblos locales se involucran con la frontera extractiva en expansión en Latinoamérica. El énfasis de la mayor parte de la literatura ubica a los movimientos sociales y – en menor medida – en las características ontológicas de estos conflictos. Esto necesita ser contrabalanceado con experiencias individuales como la de Julián para que exista un mejor entendimiento de las experiencias locales múltiples alrededor de la extracción de recursos a gran escala y las diferentes estrategias por las que la gente persigue sus futuros deseados.

**Spanish keywords:** desarrollo; progreso; educación; pueblos indígenas; Amazonia

### Portuguese abstract

Em maio de 2010, Julián Miranda, um xamã indígena Asháninka, morreu horas depois de matar um jaguar-xamã. Apesar de saber que poderia ser morto, ele matou um jaguar-xamã para proteger suas vacas, um investimento para apoiar o tão desejado ‘progresso’ de seus filhos e netos por meio da educação. A escolha de Julián foi um sacrifício pessoal motivado pelas dificuldades que ele experimentou nas florestas degradadas do vale do Bajo Urubamba, na Amazônia peruana. Meu exame de sua decisão de matar o jaguar-xamã envolve a literatura multidisciplinar sobre como os povos locais lidam com a expansão da fronteira extrativista na América Latina. A ênfase que a maioria da literatura coloca nos movimentos sociais e – em menor medida – nas características ontológicas desses conflitos, precisa ser contrabalançada por experiências individuais como a de Julián para uma compreensão mais profunda das múltiplas experiências locais de extração de recursos em grande escala e as diferentes estratégias por meio das quais as pessoas buscam o futuro desejado.

**Portuguese keywords:** desenvolvimento; progresso; educação; povos indígenas; Amazônia

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