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**Living Apart:
Separation and Sociality amongst the Ashéninka of
Peruvian Amazonia**



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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the Ashéninka, an indigenous Amazonian group of eastern central Peru. While situating the Ashéninka ethnographically within Amazonian anthropology the project specifically seeks to understand the nature of Ashéninka society, notions of sociality and forms of self-identification. It also examines how these forms of thought and practice shape the Ashéninka's continuing interactions with Peruvian national society.

My research first seeks to understand the underlying mechanisms that help Ashéninka householders to maintain their independent lifestyles. In common with other Amazonian groups, the Ashéninka are most concerned with how to achieve a peaceful existence and 'live well'. Unlike other groups, however, they believe that this is best achieved by living apart from each other, in autonomous households. Attempting to illustrate what this means in practical terms, my thesis notes the importance of social gatherings centred on the consumption of *masato* (manioc beer) in maintaining flexible links between disparate individuals and households. I argue that these gatherings, which are open to everyone (including strangers), provide the Ashéninka with a bounded and defined area in which general sociality can occur without infringing on individuals' autonomy. Analysis, based on ethnographic descriptions from fieldwork, is related to wider theoretical debates centring on Amazonian notions of the person, society and relations of affinity and consanguinity.

My thesis also seeks to understand how these ideas affect the way the Ashéninka interact with the rest of Peruvian national culture. It examines the Ashéninka's reactions to the government's promotion of formal education, land rights and officially recognised '*Comunidades Nativas*' ('Native Communities'). It also examines the reactions of Ashéninka to the timber industry and their contemporary and historical relationship with Christianity. Rather than examining the Ashéninka's current situation in terms of ideas about 'cultural change' my thesis seeks to understand the intrinsic diversity and flexibility of Ashéninka sociality, and to apply this understanding to the manner in which members of this group are interacting with the non-Ashéninka world.

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Notes on Orthography

Ashéninka terms are transcribed according to Peruvian Spanish orthography. This is in accordance with the accepted form now in general use in the literature (see Heise *et al* and Anderson 1985, 1986a and 1986b). Ashéninka terms have, however, been kept to a minimum.

Glossary of Selected Terms

<i>ayompari</i>	An Ashéninka word that refers to an individual's trading partner. The <i>ayompari</i> system involves two men from geographically distant areas forming an alliance based on the trading of scarce goods.
<i>chacra</i>	(Garden/Field/Swidden) A plot of land cleared in the forest and cultivated for a few years before being abandoned.
<i>compadre/comadre</i>	(Godfather/Godmother) Mutual terms of address used by adults linked by <i>compadrazgo</i> , the spiritual link established at the baptism of a child.
<i>Comunidad Nativa</i>	(Native Community) A settlement inhabited mainly by indigenous people and officially recognised by the Peruvian state.
<i>cushma</i>	The traditional Ashéninka robe woven from cotton and worn by both men and women.
<i>habilitación</i>	The system of debits and credits which is the main form of commercial transactions in Peruvian Amazonia.
<i>ingenieros</i>	(Engineer) The term used in the region to refer to people with technical jobs, particularly those in official government jobs such as land surveyors.
<i>maderero</i>	(Timberman), used to refer to all men who work in the timber extraction industry.
<i>masato</i>	(<i>piarentsi</i> in Ashéninka) Fermented manioc beer.
<i>masateada</i>	Social gatherings centred on the consumption of <i>masato</i> .
<i>mestizo</i>	People of mixed racial ancestry, (with varying mixtures of Andean, Amazonian, and Spanish ancestry).
<i>minga</i>	A <i>mestizo</i> term referring to collective work parties.
<i>patrón</i>	Refers to any person who fulfils the role of advancing goods on credit to another. In my fieldsites such people tended to be <i>mestizos</i> from Pucallpa (see <i>maderero</i>).
<i>pishtaco</i>	Solitary men (usually thought to be white) said to travel around capturing indigenous people in order to extract their fat.
<i>Sendero Luminoso</i>	(Shining Path) A communist guerrilla organisation that destabilised much of Peru throughout the 1980s.

Chapter One:

Introduction

This thesis is an ethnography of the Ashéninka people of the Ucayali Valley in central eastern Peru. The Ashéninka are part of the larger ethnic group now known as the Asháninka¹. It is an account of the manner in which they live and the way in which they interact with the outside world. At its heart are two distinct, observable characteristics of the Ashéninka: their notion that in order to live well it is better to live apart, and their apparent willingness and desire to enter into relations with outsiders. It is the assertion of this thesis that these two apparently contradictory ideas are in fact interlinked and that they have facilitated the continued survival of the Ashéninka in contemporary Peruvian society.

In common with many other Amazonian peoples, the Ashéninka's primary concern is with 'living well'. This notion encompasses their desire for peace between individuals and for a general sense of tranquillity in which people are able to live and act as they wish. Many decisions about where to live, what action to take and how to behave towards others are underpinned by this basic indigenous philosophy. Amongst many Amazonian peoples, this desire leads them to live in integrated communities that contain numerous families. In contrast, for the Ashéninka, this same notion leads them to live apart, in relatively isolated and independent households based around nuclear families. They believe that living in close proximity to others leads inevitably to problems, disagreements and even violence, as jealousies arise over spouses and domestic animals, and distrust grows between neighbours. In areas where only Ashéninka people live, this makes their settlements entirely amorphous and raises the question of how far Ashéninka 'communities' can be said to exist at all. Even where Ashéninka people do live in more defined communities with non-Ashéninka, they build their houses apart from the rest of the community, further into the forest and, above all, beyond the sight of their neighbours. Past ethnographers of the Ashéninka have noted this characteristic, and yet few have tried to understand its underlying logic or assess its wider implications. In contrast, my thesis takes this feature of Ashéninka society as a key issue and seeks to understand the underlying mechanisms that help Ashéninka

¹ This group, in turn, is part of the greater pre-Andean Arawakan linguistic group which includes the Yanesha, Matsigenka, Nomatsigenka and Piro (Yiné).

individuals and families to maintain their independent lifestyles, even as they feel themselves to be members of a wider group.

In the first half of the thesis, I argue that the main mechanism that allows for this independence is the Ashéninka's emphasis on relationships based on what might be characterised as friendship rather than kinship. Instead of attempting to pull all others into specific kinship relationships, I argue that individuals prefer for all ties to remain voluntary, limited and flexible. This observation is in contrast to the work of those anthropologists who suggest that Amazonian Indians are concerned always with increasing consanguineous relations to encompass others and draw them into ever closer relationships (see Overing & Passes 2000). The study of Ashéninka sociality also offers insights into the importance of difference and separation in Amazonian thought. I argue that, while Ashéninka individuals can be understood to be picking out others with whom to form closer connections from the surrounding sea of difference or 'potential affinity' (see Viveiros de Castro 2001), the relationships that they form are not underpinned by an idea of predation or conflict. Rather, by preferring to form 'friendships' with all others, both known and unknown individuals, the Ashéninka can be seen to avoid the dichotomy between establishing relationships based on either consanguinity and shared substance, or affinity and predation.

These friendships are fostered on a local level by the shared sociality of *masateadas* and, on a wider level, by the institution of *ayompari* trading partners, both of which are examined in this thesis. While allowing Ashéninka individuals to maintain their autonomy and independence, such relationships also draw them into wider networks. These networks provide practical access to scarce goods and potential marriage partners. They also keep dispersed families and groups inter-connected and allow for the mobilisation of larger assemblages when united action is needed. This periodic organisation into larger groups that undertake concerted action is attested to in historical accounts of the Ashéninka. They take place under the leadership of particular individuals, who are often outsiders. In such cases, I contend, the Ashéninka are willing to set aside their customary emphasis on the importance of personal autonomy in pursuit of a specific goal or benefit, or in defence of their lives and way of living. Such events can occur against a particular enemy or for a particular aim, but tend to be relatively short-lived, with families soon returning to a more dispersed form of living.

These observations, that the Ashéninka prefer to form flexible and limited relationships with each other and that, while generally defending individual autonomy, they are willing to come together for a specific purpose, point to a certain adaptability in Ashéninka society. This adaptability, I maintain, underlies the Ashéninka's relative success in engaging with the rest of Peruvian society.

In the second half of the thesis I utilise these observations about Ashéninka culture to analyse the Ashéninka's relationships with non-Ashéninka people and with wider Peruvian society. First, taking my cue from Hugh-Jones's emphasis on the social importance of trade (1992), the Ashéninka's interactions with timbermen are analysed in terms of their notions of how relationships between individuals should be conducted. Timbermen can be seen to fulfil many of the economic and social functions once performed by Ashéninka trading partners (*ayompari*): providing goods not available elsewhere, giving a chance for socialising with non-immediate kin, and enabling young men to leave their native areas and seek brides from afar. Further, the Ashéninka's adaptation of the system of debt peonage or *habilitación*, favoured by timbermen in the region, fits with their own ideas of how trade should be carried out by partners who are bound together in long-term reciprocal relationships. This similarity – between Ashéninka and *mestizo* systems of trade, and the Ashéninka's own desire to form 'friendships' with outsiders – has allowed the Ashéninka to acquire agency in their relationships with timbermen. By drawing timbermen into a relationship that entails social and moral obligations rather than hierarchy and domination, the Ashéninka act to reduce the degree to which timbermen can exploit them. In drawing these conclusions I show that the Ashéninka's increased integration into the timber industry, and their desire for manufactured goods, cannot be understood simply as acculturation, but that rather the Ashéninka are themselves attempting to transform the actions of outsiders and use their own cultural understandings to comprehend and control these new relationships.

The Ashéninka's readiness to interact with the outside world is also illustrated by their long history of contact with representatives of the Christian church. In support of this claim, I examine my informants' present relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This sect's apparently rapid and widespread conversion of Ashéninka people in past decades can, in part, be related to the missionaries' position as powerful outsiders

and their control of manufactured goods, aeroplanes and Western medicines. However, I argue that the acceptance of missionaries by the Ashéninka also relates to the latter's own cosmological openness, linked to the unsystematic nature of Ashéninka beliefs and their emphasis on personal experience. Yet, even while the Ashéninka are apparently willing to accept, or at least not reject, foreign systems of belief, I show that they are less willing to adapt to new ways of living. This is particularly the case when new prescriptions on their behaviour seem to go against their own cultural ideas of how to 'live well'. I note that it is the Adventist Church's attempts to limit and control the Ashéninka's behaviour that has led to their gradual rejection of its teachings. This pattern of being drawn into interactions with powerful outsiders, apparently converting to new ways of thinking and living but then rejecting both the new ways of living and the outsiders, appears to have occurred repeatedly in the Ashéninka's past.

A final area in which the Ashéninka are obviously being affected by the outside world is illustrated by their willingness to live in *Comunidades Nativas* (native communities). These officially recognised settlements offer a style of living utterly distinct from that to which the Ashéninka are accustomed, encouraging them to live and work in close proximity to each other, maintain and defend communal land and interact with government bureaucracy and the wider 'nation'. Within Ashéninka society these settlements, and their associated schools, have changed social relationships, particularly, in creating differences between schooled and non-schooled children and adults. They have also necessitated the undertaking of communal activities and introduced ideas of individual property ownership. I argue, however, that the Ashéninka are willing to take on many of these new ways of living because of their strong desire to gain a formal education for their children. This desire is linked to adults' wish that their children be able to counteract attempts by outsiders to dominate and exploit them. Hence, the choice to live in *Comunidades* can be understood as another example of individuals choosing to give up some of their personal autonomy in the interests of some wider benefit. Yet it is also apparent that, for the Ashéninka, living in official *Comunidades* is not a fixed state: they are willing to continue with it as long as it works to their advantage but, as it ceases to do so, they can also choose to return to living apart. Importantly, being 'civilised' and living in defined settlements are not, in their view, necessarily linked. This reaction again illustrates the manner in which the Ashéninka interact with the outside world

according to their own cultural ideas, taking from it that which allows them to 'live well' and rejecting that which prevents this.

It is now generally accepted by anthropologists that no societies live in isolation but, rather, that all communities are part of a wider, interconnected social world. Meanwhile, debate still continues over the relative capacity of one society to dominate another and the ability of, for example, indigenous societies to retain their own internal coherence in the face of unrelenting intrusion from other groups. It is to this wide and complex debate that my thesis offers a contribution. All cultures react to the outside world in their own terms. However, what is of interest in the Ashéninka case is the manner in which Ashéninka culture can be seen to retain its coherence even as it adapts to outside ideas and adopts and interacts with foreign institutions. This occurs, I contend, because Ashéninka cultural prescriptions allow for a wide range of possible ways of living. With its central concern for the 'aesthetics of living', rather than the maintenance of particular cultural practices or social institutions, Ashéninka culture can be seen as distinctly flexible, allowing individuals to adopt new ways of living while still feeling themselves to be Ashéninka. This allows the Ashéninka a freedom to confront and solve new problems and relationships, without feeling that they are abandoning their own values and ways of living.

It is this view of Ashéninka culture that informs my research. In line with this, my emphasis in the second part of this thesis will be to elucidate the Ashéninka's own understandings of their encounters with the non-Ashéninka world. My aim is to identify how the Ashéninka transform both alien institutions and their own way of living to adapt to the world that they encounter, while remaining true to their own particular underlying ideas.

Forbearers and Theoretical Approaches

In the last three decades, the study of indigenous societies in lowland South America has developed to a point where the body of literature now available forms a firm foundation upon which contemporary researchers can build. There are undoubtedly still gaps in this work, with many groups and issues still only touched upon. However, the scope and density of the available literature means that researchers are no longer confined to describing each group in isolation, unable to compare it with others. Instead, we now

have the opportunity to assess our analyses of individual groups in terms of larger anthropological debates over important issues in Amazonian societies. Throughout this thesis, I try to set my observations about the Ashéninka within this wider context. In doing so, I hope to contribute both to an understanding of the Ashéninka themselves and to a broader analysis of Amazonian societies.

I begin by looking at some of the particular themes within this Ashéninka and Amazonian literature which my work will address.

An anthropology of ‘the everyday’

In their introduction to a recent collection of essays on Amazonian societies, Overing and Passes write:

For many of us who work among the indigenous peoples of Amazonia, the recent critiques of the grand narratives of modernist thought as formulated within the human sciences, and through which anthropology as a discipline was conceived and hatched, have come as both a relief and a liberating breath of fresh air... Most importantly, we are now allowed... to shed the bonds of all those master tropes of Western sociological theory that have militated against a Western understanding... of Amazonian social philosophies and associated everyday practice (Overing & Passes 2000: 1).

Overing and Passes argue that anthropologists should not see Amazonian societies in terms of that which they lack in comparison to other societies (for example, lineages, corporate groups and political hierarchies), or according to abstract structuralist templates. Instead, anthropologists of Lowland South America should focus their attention on the voices and views of indigenous peoples themselves. They further note that such a focus on ‘the everyday’ should not be considered banal or insignificant, since its aim is to capture indigenous peoples’ own preoccupations (*ibid.*: 7).

Overing and Passes identify an Amazonian-wide, indigenous concern with the ‘aesthetics of living’, in which thought and sensuality are conjoined and both moral thought and practical reason underlie the management of affective life *vis-à-vis* other people (*ibid.*: 3). Rather than placing this concern for the richness of everyday life outside of the realm of sociological study, positioning it in the domain of ‘the domestic’ and

hence beyond the boundaries of society, Overing and Passes, following Wagner (1991), argue that ‘we must overcome the effects of a sociological scientism which has ‘nickel and dimed’ human realities to death’ (Overing & Passes 2000: 9).

After spending two years living with the Ashéninka I cannot but agree with Overing and Passes’s conclusions about the preoccupations of Amazonian groups. As I will show throughout this thesis, Ashéninka culture has few of the obvious formal social institutions found in other societies. This does not mean that it lacks coherence or organisation; rather, individuals’ shared concerns about how to ‘live well’ act to bind them together while also underlying the successful functioning of society. Following Overing and Passes, I contend that it is only by taking seriously the Ashéninka’s own preoccupations with how best to ‘live well’ – that is, how to achieve a tranquil and enjoyable life – that a full picture of Ashéninka society can be obtained. Importantly, such an emphasis also allows for a better understanding of the Ashéninka’s interaction with the non-Ashéninka world. By stressing a desired outcome – peaceful living – rather than the maintenance of particular social institutions, Ashéninka culture can be seen to contain a degree of flexibility. This is illustrated most clearly in the Ashéninka’s ability to incorporate and transform alien social forms, as well as their own ways of living, in order to maintain the way of life that they desire.

History and Acculturation

In studying the Ashéninka’s interactions with the outside world I take as a starting point the idea that cultures can contain within themselves the ability to react to, explain and manipulate new phenomena. In *An Amazonian Myth and its History* Gow quotes Lévi-Strauss: “primitive institutions are not only capable of conserving what exists, or of retaining briefly a crumbling past, but also of elaborating audacious innovations, even though traditional structures are thus profoundly transformed.” (1976b: 339, see Gow 2001: 9). Gow writes that:

An ‘audacious innovation’ seemed to me to be the best description of what Piro people had done with the historical circumstances they had endured. They had not simply submitted, or survived, or resisted. They had turned around and invented a new way of living that rendered their recent

historical experiences coherent to themselves, and which they seemed to find both intellectually and emotionally satisfying (Gow 2001: 9).

While my findings among the Ashéninka do not quite mirror the remarkable manner in which the Piro have transformed their own way of living according to the circumstances of the Bajo Urubamba (*ibid.*; see also Gow 1991), nevertheless, Lévi-Strauss's observation of the ability of Amazonian societies to transform themselves in relation to their circumstances offers an important foundation for an assessment of contemporary Ashéninka culture.

Contemporary anthropologists no longer view any culture as an isolated and pure whole, untouched by the outside world and living solely in accordance with its own internal dynamics. Similarly, no culture can be seen as static or unchanging. Rather, all cultures maintain a degree of flux; integrating, inventing and transforming ideas and institutions from within and without. Nevertheless, even as these dynamics are understood, there often remains a tendency to see some cultures as more powerful than others and, in particular, to see indigenous societies and cultures as being homogenised as they adopt, and eventually become part of, Western capitalist economic, political and social structures. In this view, indigenous groups are 'victims' that are powerless to prevent the loss of their culture and that readily fall before the onslaught of Western society. As Hanne Veber has argued:

This construction positions the native in the role of the perpetual object of projects conceived by the dominant other and presents the indigenous peoples as deprived of the capacity of agency. Hence it implicitly denies their role as authors of their own history (Veber 1998: 385).

Above all, even as the variety and specificities of cultural interaction between societies are recognised, studies are still characterised by a refusal to understand these changes as a two-way process and to analyse indigenous peoples' own understandings of what is occurring. Such studies also ignore the manner in which indigenous people seek to control this process and derive benefits from the interaction. In contrast, throughout this thesis and particularly in its second half, I seek to understand which aspects of the outside world the Ashéninka have been willing to adopt, and which they have rejected. Such observable practice is also paralleled by an attempt to understand the reasons for these choices. This approach stands in contrast to much of the anthropological literature

on the Ashéninka, which has tended to portray Ashéninka culture as relatively static in its interactions with the outside world.

Stefano Varese's work (1972 and 2002 [1968]) stands as the first comprehensive chronicle of the Asháninka². It represents the earliest systematic attempt to take Asháninka culture and history seriously and as a coherent whole, while also placing the Asháninka within the contemporary world of which they are a part. In doing so, Varese sought to show how the Amazonian areas of Peru were bound into the social and economic networks of the wider nation state, and into the 'developmental process of the capitalist world' (1972: 159). Varese's work is interesting and insightful and I have made much use of it in my own research. However, his final conclusion was that the outside, 'capitalist world' was preventing the Asháninka from living in the manner that they desired or, in his words, of 'celebrating' their own world (2002: 177). He seems to have precluded any possibility that the Asháninka would be able to counteract the encroachment of Western/capitalist influences, and this essentially static view of Asháninka society meant that he foresaw its decline as inevitable (*ibid.*). Such conclusions were to be echoed by many of the researchers who followed Varese.

John Bodley, working on the Ucayali and in the Gran Pajonal, argued that the Gran Pajonal was becoming severely depopulated as younger Asháninka moved into the lower valleys. He argued that 'severe depopulation makes virtually all traditional social patterns and groupings difficult if not impossible to maintain' (Bodley 1972: 11). Furthermore, in his view, Asháninka were making a choice between becoming permanently involved with outsiders, usually by working for them in order to gain constant access to manufactured goods, or rejecting all advances of the outside world, withdrawing entirely into the forest to escape all contact. As with Varese, he seems to have been pessimistic about the Asháninka's chance of finding some other alternative, or transforming their own culture to adapt in others ways to the situation in which they found themselves. Given his pessimistic assessment of those groups left in the Gran Pajonal and his feeling that those on the Ucayali were being drawn fully into the market economy (*ibid.*: 23), he, like Varese, seemed to hold out little hope for the Asháninka's future as a group with distinct practices and beliefs.

² Asháninka refers to the wider indigenous group of which the Ashéninka are a part. See page 17, for a fuller explanation of my use of these terms.

John Elick (1970), writing at the same time as Bodley, was slightly less pessimistic about the Asháninka's future. His study was mainly concerned with describing the Asháninka's way of life, material culture and beliefs. Like Varese and Bodley he argued that the Asháninka's choice was one of all or nothing and that "to succumb to the temptations offered by the Western way of life, and to depart from the [Asháninka] way, is to lose one's identity and one's place in the cosmic scheme" (Elick 1970: 236). However, Elick expressly saw Asháninka cultural survival as possible: "[Asháninka] culture will continue to provide the sorely needed answers to life's most profound questions, and the phenomenon of [Asháninka] cultural persistence and rejection of Western ways will continue to be seen" (*ibid.*).

This view, which retains the dichotomy between the Asháninka's choice of maintaining their culture as it was or losing it altogether, but which also sees their continued ability to resist outside incursions, echoes another important trend within many studies of the Asháninka.

Throughout history the Asháninka have, at times, rejected outsiders, sometimes violently. These periodic rebellions have been explained by some writers in terms of an Asháninka belief in the future coming of a messiah who will usher in a new world order. This idea was first posited by Alfred Métraux in a brief article written in 1942 about the rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in the 18th century. Since then, it has become something of an accepted orthodoxy. Brown and Fernández have written a book in which they see this belief as the key to understanding the manner in which the Asháninka have reacted to the outside world and resisted the encroachment of colonial and then national powers. They write that:

The Asháninka are a proud people who, when circumstances demand, are capable of fighting for their land and for their way of life. Their story is not one of passive victimization but of active engagement with the colonizer, a passionate search for meaning in the harsh realities of Western power, and the anticipation of a final day of reckoning. Above all, Asháninkas hold tenaciously to a dream of spiritual deliverance (Brown & Fernández 1991: xv).

While their emphasis on the abilities of the Asháninka to actively engage with and challenge those societies that seek to dominate them echoes my own view of Asháninka culture, I take issue with their over-emphasis on the importance of messianism for allowing this dynamism. To put emphasis on a single cultural trait as an explanation of cultural survival seems to me to be overly reductionist; it condenses the historical and contemporary realities of Asháninka society rather than giving a full account of them. While accepting the Asháninka's ability to resist the outside world, this idea still portrays Asháninka culture as essentially static, unchanging in the face of outside influence and unable to adapt beyond reverting to an older spirit of rebellion. In contrast to this idea, I argue that while violent rejection is one possible Asháninka reaction to the outside world, it is only one of many possibilities. Further, in my arguments against the claim that messianism underpins Asháninka beliefs, I suggest that there are few ethnographic, logical or historical reasons for seeing messianism as an important part of Asháninka culture at all (see Chapter Six). In making this argument, which is based on my own fieldwork and reading of the relevant literature, my aim is to examine the Asháninka's own emphasis on what is important to them, rather than to revert to standard sociological theories to explain a specific phenomenon.

In contrast to these views, which see Asháninka (and hence Ashéninka) society as unable to adapt to contemporary circumstances, thus either being condemned to cultural extinction or eternal violent rebellion, stands the work of other anthropologists who have noted the resilience of Asháninka culture. Veber notes that “[f]ew Ashéninka, I know of, would agree to being presented as victims. On the contrary, they would rather be presented as masters of the universe – if I have understood them correctly” (Veber 2000: 18). In her work Veber has described the Ashéninka's reactions to the colonization by *mestizos* and Andean groups of areas of their territory. Of their effective resistance to these colonists and armed incursions by *Sendero Luminoso*³ in the 1980s, she writes that “[t]his utterly unexpected resistance to colonization and its side effect of ‘revolutionary’ terrorism reflected the Ashéninka's readiness to take matters into their own hands rather than wait for the Peruvian state to do so” (Veber 1998: 393). Elsewhere, she has noted that “the Ashéninka appear to have advanced by lending their own cultural meanings and interpretations to the changing situations they either

³ Shining Path, a communist guerrilla organisation that destabilised much of Peru throughout the 1980s.

engineered or became part of.” (Veber 2000: 50). Søren Hvalkof has also observed how Asháninka groups were quick to coordinate a new militia system, ‘*Ovayeriite*’⁴, to combat *Sendero*.

It is interesting to note how [an Asháninka] institution can overnight redefine and adapt itself to a new reality when it is needed. This extraordinary ability for ad hoc redefinition of the significance and value of Asháninka concepts and institutions according to the requirement of a changing social reality is indicative of the dynamic of Asháninka society (Hvalkof 1998: 146-7).

His approach parallels my own. It is this view, that the Asháninka are able both to transform their own cultural institutions and to produce their own cultural understandings of the changing situations in which they find themselves, that I advance in this thesis.

Fieldwork and Methodology

My interest in the Ashéninka stemmed from an initial visit to the Ucayali in 1999 as part of an ethnomusicological project run by the *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú*. Acting as an assistant to the Peruvian anthropologist Alex Huerta-Mercado, I had the opportunity to visit a number of indigenous communities in the Iparia district. These included both Shipibo-Conibo and Ashéninka settlements. It was to these latter communities that I was drawn. While the Shipibo seemed to conform to stereotypical images of close-knit jungle communities, and while their women ostentatiously wore their ‘traditional’ clothing and tried to sell me ornaments, the Ashéninka, even while they dressed in Western clothes and told me of the timbermen they worked with, seemed somehow more circumspect about the world around them. I also learned during that trip of their famed rebellions against various groups and of how they had been involved in all of the major events that have shaped the Peruvian Amazon: from early Franciscan missionary reductions, through the rubber trade, right through to recent civil strife and the cocaine trade. I was struck by the apparent mix between the Ashéninka’s willingness to engage in the wider world even as they kept themselves apart from it, and of their ability to resist outside intrusions, with violence if necessary. This status, as

⁴ *Ovayeriite* is the plural form of *Ovayeri*, a term connected with individual warrior leaders, and later with those who led slave raids (see Chapter Four and Hvalkof, 1998:146).

active yet judicious participants in the ‘modern world’, also attracted me for particular theoretical reasons.

As an undergraduate, I had recently been introduced to the work of Viveiros de Castro and, in particular, his writings on perspectivism (1998). In his seminal article, the Campa/Asháninka are one of the first groups that he refers to as showing a perspectival view of the world. During my brief stay along the Ucayali in 1999, I noted the amount of timber logging in progress. It struck me that here, at the point of interaction between indigenous groups and the outside world, would be a fertile place in which to study the differences between conceptions of nature and culture and, in particular, the character of the relationships that different human societies consider themselves to have with nature. Centred as it was on the exploitation of natural objects for human benefit, the timber industry offered a potentially important opportunity for elucidating these differences. In particular, it offered the chance to study the separation between indigenous ideas based on the shared ‘culture’ of different beings, and hence their underlying equality, and the broadly Western understanding of the division between humans and other ‘natural’ objects, and hence of our right to exploit ‘natural resources’. My aim was to explore these differences and also to see if workers within the industry were being affected by their contact with contrasting cultural approaches to the world. It was with this project in mind that I began to prepare for my PhD research.

On arriving amongst the Ashéninka however, I came to realise that I had perhaps set myself too large a task for a first fieldwork expedition. In the first place, my language skills prevented me from asking the questions I wanted to, while the Ashéninka’s own reticence meant that, at least at the beginning, I was limited in those areas that I could effectively research. Moreover, while I had avidly read past writers on the Ashéninka and Asháninka, and could see the value of their work, I still felt that more work could be done to understand the nature of Ashéninka culture and everyday life. As such, my work came to focus on the more everyday aspects of Ashéninka social life, the *masateadas* (social gatherings centred on the consumption of *masato*) that they held and attended and the social relationships they formed with each other and outsiders. As time went on, this research expanded to encompass, as I had originally intended, my informants’ interactions with the outside world. However, it is only now, as I reach the end of this work, that I feel myself to be in a position to approach my initial questions about

Ashéninka relationships with nature. Such work on their cosmology and ontology will be the focus of future research.

My initial trip to the Ucayali had given me a brief introduction to the area and some of the people living within it. However, it was not until I arrived for my doctoral research that I found specific communities in which to work. The communities where I conducted my research were probably selected as much through luck and circumstance as by careful choice. However, the two communities where I spent two years (from August 2001 – July 2003), Pijuayal and La Selva (see photos on Plates I and VI and Maps 3 - 7), turned out to be well suited to researching the interaction between the Ashéninka and the outside world.

Pijuayal⁵ and La Selva⁶ are two separate Ashéninka settlements officially recognised as *Comunidades Nativas*⁷. Pijuayal is a purely Ashéninka community, 40km by river from the main Ucayali river. It is centred on a small clearing and a corrugated iron roofed primary school. While a few families live close to this school, the majority of Ashéninka in the area live dispersed throughout the forest. La Selva, in contrast, while having the same number of official community members is much more spatially clustered and socially close-knit. With more *mestizo*⁸ inhabitants, an organised school and church, and better communication with the river and Pucallpa⁹ it is also much more integrated into the local society and economy than Pijuayal.

As I will detail below, many of the inhabitants of the two communities have kinship connections. These stem from when their parents used to live in a third community at Mashantay, halfway between the current sites of Pijuayal and La Selva. Since the break-up of this community in the 1970s these two groups have followed divergent trajectories

⁵ Pronounced with a soft 'j', as Pif-why-al. A *pijuayo*, is a type of palm (*Bactris gasipaes*) the fruit of which, once cooked, is edible and is often added to regional drinks such as *masato* (manioc beer) or *chicha* (maize beer). Pijuayal was so called because of the number of pijuayo palms that grew in the area.

⁶ La Selva, literally means 'the jungle' – something of an uninspired choice of name.

⁷ I will make a distinction throughout this thesis between a 'settlement', broadly defined as an area in which a group of people live and a '*Comunidad*' or '*Comunidad Nativa*', an administro-jural entity officially recognised by the Peruvian government. Meanwhile, the word 'community' will refer to the sociological concept of 'community' and its attendant associations (cf. Rosengren 1987a:1). All three of these concepts were considered and used by my informants.

⁸ *Mestizo* is the term used locally to refer to all people of mixed heritage, of Indigenous Amazonian, Highland or European descent.

⁹ Pucallpa was the nearest city to my fieldsite, connected by road to Lima it is the capital of the Ucayali Department and the economic and political centre of the region.

which are now discernible in the differences between the two communities. It is these contrasts that make a comparison between the two sites of such interest to my research.

During my two years of fieldwork, I split my time between the two communities. While I first made contact in La Selva before being introduced to Pijuayal, I made a conscious decision to spend the majority of my first year in Pijuayal. Here, there were none of the distractions that the presence of *mestizos* and the closeness of the Ucayali offered, and I was forced to join in the everyday life of the Ashéninka. Only once I felt that I had some understanding of this area did I spend increasing amounts of time in La Selva. In both communities, I spent the majority of time with a single family. In Pijuayal this was the household of Jorge and Edith and their six children. In La Selva, I initially stayed with Wilder, the *jefe* (chief) of the *Comunidad*, and his wife Lydia. But given that they were often away at timber camps or on official business, I later decided to move to the house of Wilder's mother, Melita, an older Ashéninka woman born in the area and who was now married to a *mestizo* man, Arnulfo. Her seven children, ranging in age from 4 to 25 and each with markedly different temperaments, offered an interesting vision of the diverse ways in which the Ashéninka can choose to live, from the secondary-school-educated Añer, who wanted to be a hairdresser in Pucallpa, to Edbin, who often talked of cutting his *chacra* at the base of the hills and refusing to see anyone again.

While based in these two settings, I spent as many days as possible roaming to other places. I was a constant visitor to *masateadas*¹⁰ and to other families' households throughout the area. As such, while many of my ethnographic examples come from the two families in which I lived, I feel confident that the behaviour I describe would not have been very different for other individuals in the area. I also spent long periods of time at the timber camp, on the Putaya river¹¹, of Melvin, a *mestizo* timberman from Pucallpa. There I worked with him and Ashéninka men at felling and rolling out timber logs, and at floating them downriver to the Ucayali. Staying at this camp also helped me to meet those Ashéninka families that lived in relative isolation at the headwaters of the Amaquaria river.

¹⁰ Social gatherings, centring around the consumption of *masato* (manioc beer), periodically held by all households.

¹¹ The Putaya is a tributary of the Amaquaria river, the river on which Pijuayal is situated (see Map 6).

Throughout my stay, I always took gifts for those I visited and with whom I lived. The Ashéninka, in line with their own cultural dislike of greed, generally refused to demand anything of me, but they gradually became accustomed to the small gifts I would make and were particularly keen to engage in trade with me. As I detail in Chapter Five, they had their own cultural reasons for both refusing my goods and wanting to enter into barter relations with me. While I often felt morally compromised when exchanging goods with them, since it seemed that I was taking advantage of their generosity, this system seemed to work best, and I always tried to give them the most favourable terms they would permit in return for their chickens, game meat, fish and other goods.

I soon discovered that some people feared I was a *pishtaco* (people, usually thought to be white men, said to travel around the country intent on extracting the fat from human beings). This had more serious implications than I realised at the time. Later, I would learn that many individuals considered killing me, or at least forcing me to leave, when I first arrived. However, beyond a few incidents (see Chapter Four), this belief luckily never caused me major problems. This was in part because I had made a conscious decision not to take any guns, machinery or technical equipment with me when I first arrived. I always thought that the sheer comic figure I must have cut in those first months, before I had mastered any of the skills of living in the jungle, must also have mitigated some of people's fear about me.

In line with my emphasis on elucidating my informants' own ideas about how it is best to live, my fieldwork generally involved participating in the everyday lives of those with whom I lived. Such 'participant observation' was a technique well suited for research among the Ashéninka, for whom direct questions are considered rude and thus for whom more formal interviewing techniques are inappropriate. While the Ashéninka were willing to allow me to join in with their lives, they were never shy in preventing my intrusions. Questions that they did not wish to answer or to which they felt that there was no appropriate response were either hedged or just ignored completely. While such tactics could sometimes be overcome by persistence or rephrasing, there were always points of resistance that could not be surmounted. For a time this made me question my own skills as an ethnographer. However, a careful perusal of the literature suggests that this is a common attribute of the Ashéninka. Weiss puts it well: "Questions [regarding the nature of the soul]... do not number among those which the Campas have cared to

answer” (Weiss 1975: 431). As such, there were some areas of Ashéninka culture that I never fully managed to investigate. I do not feel, however, that the reticence of my informants affected my assessment of those aspects of Ashéninka culture that are the focus of my present study.

I was able to make recordings of various myths and songs, especially with Jorge and a few other men. Unfortunately, however, while myths would be repeated in Spanish I was never able to find anyone willing to help me make faithful transcriptions or translations of songs. While, by the end of my fieldwork I had a basic comprehension of Ashéninka conversations, I never became fluent in speaking the language. This meant that the majority of my conversations were carried out in Spanish. While recognising that this has set certain limitations on my understanding of the Ashéninka, I do not feel that, in terms of the questions that I examine in this thesis, particularly regarding the Ashéninka’s relationships with outsiders, it has seriously undermined my analysis.

Ashéninka – Asháninka (Campa)

Throughout this thesis, I adopt the convention of referring to ‘the Ashéninka’. Such a phrase might be deemed to suggest a bounded, static and definable group of people, negating the very flexibility of Ashéninka culture that I am studying. It might also be deemed to create an image of a group of people that is divorced from their actual reality. While I am aware of these problems, I have decided to use the term ‘the Ashéninka’, along with the term ‘my informants’. Alternatives such as ‘the people with whom I worked’ or overly general terms, such as ‘people of the forest’ or ‘people’, strike me as inelegant and equally unclear.

There are other reasons for deciding to use this term. The history of the naming of indigenous Amazonian groups is long and complicated and, in many cases, still openly debated by academics, members of the public and indigenous peoples themselves. In this, the Ashéninka are no exception.

The Ashéninka are part of a larger ethnic group now known as the Asháninka, and previously referred to as the Campa. This group, in turn, is part of the greater pre-

Andean Arawakan linguistic group which includes the Yanesha, Matsiguenga, Nomatsiguenga and Piro (Yiné)¹².

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) differentiates between 6 subgroups of Asháninka¹³. This is based on linguistic differences between their obviously interrelated languages. The SIL refers to the groups by their geographical locations, which are as follows: Tambo/Ene, Pichis, Pajonal, Alto Perené, Apurucayali and the Ucayali/Yurúa. The people that I worked with are included in this last group. Only the first group, living along the Tambo and Ene rivers, are actually classified by the SIL as ‘Asháninka’ – based on their pronunciation of the word ‘Asháninka’, meaning ‘our kinspeople’. The others are all technically ‘Ashéninka’, again based on pronunciation. However, ‘Asháninka’ has come to be the name used to refer to this group of people as a totality.

Thus, for the purposes of this thesis I will refer to the people with whom I worked as ‘Ashéninka’, ignoring the possible further term Ucayali Ashéninka. Differentiation between them and other subgroups of Ashéninka will not be made except in instances where there are particular and relevant cultural distinctions between the sub-groups. The term ‘Asháninka’ will then be used as a more encompassing term to include both the group with whom I worked and all other groups that are not specifically covered by the terms Yanesha, Matsiguenga and Nomatsiguenga. While this usage might mask some of the differences between these sub-groups, for the purposes of the current study I feel that any further differentiation would be overly complicated. The term Asháninka is retained not only to include those people now living along the Tambo and Ene, but also when referring to older literature where these differentiations were not considered and particularly where other terms, such as Campa, have been used. This use of the terms Asháninka and Ashéninka seems the best and most workable way to simplify an otherwise overly complicated system of classification.

The term ‘asheninka’, in the Ashéninka language is commonly translated as ‘our fellow countrymen’, ‘our kinspeople’ or ‘our family’¹⁴. As such, it did not originally act as an

¹² While the Piro are included in this grouping because of their Arawakan language, there is some debate as to their shared historical origins and past with the other pre-Arawakan groups (see Gow 2002).

¹³ See Heise *et al.* (1995).

¹⁴ The ‘a’ prefix denotes the first person plural possessive and the ‘shaninka’ is the root (see Heise *et al.* 1995 and Rojas Zolezzi 1994:49).

autodenomination. As with other Amazonian groups, this term can also be translated as ‘people’ (rather than ‘the people’), and is used in the sense of ‘people like us’ or to recognise a connection to another person or group¹⁵. It can also be said to stand for the essence of humanness or of shared humanity. Thus, in a myth about the black capuchin monkey, one of my Ashéninka informants described how the monkeys were dancing and drinking as humans do and calling to their family to come and join them ‘*Ashéninka, Ashéninka - jame irakota*’ (‘Our kinsmen, our kinsmen, come and drink’). As Viveiros de Castro has noted, these words that have been taken to be apparently ethnocentric self-designations in fact work in the opposite direction:

Far from manifesting a semantic shrinking of a common name to a proper name (taking ‘people’ to be the name of the tribe), these words move in the opposite direction, going from substantive to perspective (using ‘people’ as a collective pronoun ‘we people/us’). For this very reason, indigenous categories of identity have that enormous contextual variability of scope that characterizes pronouns, marking contrastively Ego’s immediate kin, his/her local group, all humans, or even all beings endowed with subjectivity: their coagulations as ‘ethnonyms’ seems largely to be an artefact of interactions with ethnographers (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 476).

In the past, the Asháninka have been referred to by outsiders by various names, including *Antis*, *Chunchos* and, most recently and extensively, *Campa* (Veber 2000: 9). Such names had the benefit of having no meaning in the Asháninka language and have been commonly used in the literature (see Bodley 1971, Weiss 1972 and 1975, Chevalier 1982 and Gow 1991 and 2001). Since the mid-1980s, however, the Asháninka have increasingly rejected the term *Campa* and demanded that outsiders refer to them as the Asháninka. This demand can be linked to the events of the Peruvian civil war, the actions of NGOs and to the Asháninka’s emergence as a political force (see Gow n.d.b). Whatever the underlying reasons for this change, however, it seems

¹⁵ This flexibility of the term was particularly well-illustrated to me when a young Ashéninka boy, on seeing pictures of other Amazonian people in an ethnography I had, asked me whether they were ‘asheninka’. He was clearly asking me whether they were ‘people like him’, rather than Gringos (the term used for white people) or other unknown types of outsiders. For such reasons I personally find it useful to translate ‘asheninka’ as ‘kind’, in the sense of ‘a race or species (human kind)’ and ‘one’s own kind - those with whom one has much in common’ (Oxford English Dictionary) ‘Kind’ also carries the sense that those who are of one’s own kind will act appropriately (kindly), and echoes the link to one’s closer kin.

appropriate to call the people with whom I lived by the name they now prefer. Thus, while I am fully aware of the deeper meanings that the terms Ashéninka and Asháninka have in these group's own languages, and the logical arguments against their use as denominations, I nonetheless feel caught by the vagaries of history and see no alternative but to use them.

One final point is that, the work of Peter Gow has shown how the concepts of *mestizo* and various indigenous autodenominations are flexible and varied (1991: 85-89, 252-274). I take his point completely and would like to write more extensively on the positions of those people in my fieldsites who called themselves *mestizos*. I also recognise that many of them have definite indigenous backgrounds. For the sake of simplicity, however, and in view of the fact that I am interested specifically in those who still refer to themselves as Ashéninka, I have taken people's autodenominations at face value and separate them in my analysis accordingly.

All-in-all, then, the vagaries of historical contingency mean that the use of Ashéninka and Asháninka are the only terms which accord with usage in the literature¹⁶, contemporary Peruvian society and, most importantly, with my own informants' everyday speech.

General Background

In the following sections, I give a general background of the Asháninka and Ashéninka, detailing the manner in which they live, their geographic location and historical background. I also give a brief account of the history of the immediate area in which I conducted fieldwork. These accounts aim to give readers an initial introduction to the world of the Ashéninka and some of the aspects of their experiences of the outside world that will be dealt with later in the thesis.

Subsistence

All of the people in my fieldsites lived by slash-and-burn subsistence agriculture. New *chacras* are prepared most years by cutting down the largest trees and then burning the undergrowth. Usually this is done in June and July. Planting is generally carried out by

¹⁶ See Brown & Fernández (1991), Espinosa (1993a), Rodríguez Vargas (1993) and Rojas Zolezzi (1994), Hvalkof (1992, 1994 and 1998) and Veber (2000 and 2003).

the whole family and women are then in charge of the upkeep of the gardens: weeding, propagation and harvesting. Manioc, the tubers of which form the Ashéninka's staple food, is the preferred crop. Other crops are interspersed throughout the garden. These include sweet potatoes, maize, rice and various types of legumes and pulses. A separate area might be left for growing coca, the leaves of which are valued for chewing by men. Plantains can also be planted, and these are becoming of increasing importance in more sedentary settlements. Manioc tubers grow in six months to a year, depending on the varietal type. Stems from the main plant are then cut off and replanted in the same place. However, this replanting can only occur once, as after this, new tubers do not grow properly in the depleted soils and the *chacra* also starts to become overrun with weeds. This means that new *chacras* must be cut at least every other year. Plantain *chacras* can last much longer. As each plant produces a bunch, it is cut to allow propagation of its suckers, clones of the mother plant that sprout at its base. Minimal weeding is needed to allow the new plants to grow, and the process can be repeated a number of times. For this reason, many families in La Selva now depend on plantain *chacras* near to their houses for their staple food. Manioc *chacras* are still cut, but these are now some distance from the settlement.

There is some use of wild and semi-wild plants. The location of old *chacras* is remembered, and people will make special trips to one when they know that an old tree will be in fruit. Hunting, fishing or travelling trips will be sidetracked or abandoned if some exploitable resource is found. At certain times of the year, special expeditions will also be made to gather sources known to be in abundance in particular areas. Some crops are now grown for cash, particularly rice and maize, which are traded with local *mestizos* or the occasional passing trader. People also raise chickens and pigs, mainly for trade. Bodley notes the changes that are wrought by cash-cropping: "gardens are larger, more than one is often cleared and planted in a single season, and many may be maintained in production. The result is that mature forest land suitable for planting is rapidly used up in the vicinity of a community and intensive use begins to occur" (Bodley 1971: 160). This relative change could be observed by comparing Pijuayal and La Selva, and I will examine it more closely in Chapter Seven.

The main sources of protein come from fish and game animals. Hunting and fishing is mainly done by men. As with many Amazonian groups, a real meal consists of both

manioc and some form of meat. The most sought-after game animal is the peccary. In my fieldsites, the white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu pecari*) was now extremely rare while the collared peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*) was encountered on occasion. While the tapir and deer (*Mazama gouazoubira*) are now hunted Ashéninka people told me that when they were younger, their parents had refused to kill or eat them. Other game animals include armadillos, tortoises, and various types of monkeys, rodents and birds. Sloths, capybaras, otters and jungle cats are all considered taboo. Hunting is traditionally done with simple traps, bow and arrow. Shotguns have increasingly come to be viewed as the most effective weapon, and all game animals are now killed in this way.

Fishing is mainly done with line and hooks obtained by trade. It is generally done by men, alone in canoes, but women can participate, and younger men will often fish in pairs. Fish can also be caught with a bow and arrow or with spears, but this is generally agreed to be more difficult and can only be done in clear, shallow water. In the dry season, when the rivers are low, people fish with fish poison, made from the roots of the barbasco or huaco plants (*Cubadium* sp and *Aegiphila peruviana*). Once a year a large group will gather to release the poison into the main river but it is mainly done by single families in smaller streams.

Geographic Location and Historical Background

The Ashéninka as a whole are one of the largest indigenous groups left in all of Amazonia. They comprise just under one quarter of Peru's entire indigenous Amazonian population (Rodríguez Vargas 1993a: 62). They are spread over a wide area of eastern Peru from the lower valleys of the Andes across to the Brazilian border in the east (see Map 1) and are present in the Peruvian departments of Junín, Pasco, Ucayali, Ayacucho, Apurímac y Cusco. Population statistics are not entirely reliable, but the 1993 national census gives a figure of 50,791 (Manrique 1998: 212). Their numbers are likely to have grown since then, especially with the cessation of Shining Path activities. As I noted above, the Ashéninka are surrounded by other indigenous groups. Their closely related Arawakan neighbours; the Yanesha, Matsiguenga and Nomatsiguenga, are located to their north west, south west and south east respectively. The Piro (Yiné) are in the south and east, while the Shipibo-Conibo are to the north. Both of these latter groups, forming settlements along the main river courses, tend to be interspersed throughout Ashéninka areas and form important social and economic relationships with

Asháninka individuals and communities. Craig (1967: 234) has posited an earlier migration of the ancestors of the pre-Andean Arawakan groups from West Brazil into the area they now occupy. However, all of the Asháninka groups seem to have lived broadly within the same geographic region that they currently occupy since at least the conquest of Peru by the Spanish in the 16th century.

My own research was carried out in the Lower Ucayali Valley, which is the northernmost point of Peru in which the Asháninka are to be found (see Map 2). The centre of Asháninka territory was traditionally further to the south and west of this region, in the southern parts of the Shira mountains, the region known as the Gran Pajonal, and to the west along the headwaters of the Pachitea, Perené and Ene rivers. It appears that the Asháninka have spread down the Ucayali river over the past few generations. Bodley argues that such sizeable shifts usually occur because of the depletion of game resources (1971: 35-8), but it is clear that there have been numerous social and political factors underlying their dispersion as well. Bodley himself documents movements to the Ucayali valley occurring in the 1960s and notes that individuals knew the area well, owing to the trips they regularly made to take advantage of the abundant fish at certain times of the year. While some of this migration appears to have been voluntary, in certain cases, it was forced upon Asháninka individuals. There are numerous accounts of Asháninka being taken as indentured labourers to work in other areas of Amazonia (see Brown & Fernández 1991, Santos-Granero & Barclay 1998 and 2000). This was especially true during the rubber boom of the 19th and early 20th centuries. My own informants also told me how their parents and grandparents had been brought down to the Ucayali more recently to work on the cattle ranches that were set up after the crash in the price of rubber. Many of these individuals then deserted their *patrones*, or were allowed to leave, and chose to settle at the base of the Shira mountains, away from the main river. Such enforced migration may have marked the initial spreading of Asháninka to this part of the jungle, but they quickly seem to have set up their own autonomous areas of living and to have remained in contact with Asháninka in other areas – particularly with those in the Gran Pajonal and with groups living on the other side of the Shira range, along the Pachitea.

As these movements attest, the Asháninka have long had interactions with non-indigenous groups. The Asháninka's first contact with outsiders from a European

background was in 1595 when two Jesuit priests, Juan Font and Nicolás Mastrillo, mounted an expedition to the area (Varese 2002: 47-54). Only after a further forty years was any systematic attempt to contact and convert them made: this time by Franciscans who started to arrive from 1635. The first Franciscan mission was set up at Quimiri, now called La Merced, near *tsiviari* (the 'Mountain of Salt'), the only source of salt in the region. After two years, however, the missionaries' exhortations against polygamy and their attempts to control the salt trade led to an Asháninka uprising and the killing of the priests (Brown & Fernández 1991: 15-20). Subsequent missions were to meet with a similar fate, with missionaries often being welcomed by the Asháninka only to be killed or forced out when the foreigners' demands or actions annoyed the indigenous groups. The Franciscans finally abandoned all attempts at evangelism in 1742, after the Asháninka, spurred on by increasingly frequent and devastating epidemics, rose up in revolt under the leadership of the self-styled Juan Santos Atahualpa (Bodley 1971: 5-7). These events, and the specifically messianic aspects of Juan Santos's rebellion, are discussed in Chapter Six. After this period, the Asháninka retained their reputations amongst outsiders as a fierce people, and few attempts were made at systematic evangelism or colonisation. This ended in 1870, with the advent of the rubber boom and the influx of traders and rubber merchants.

The dramatic rise in the price of rubber from the 1850s, precipitated by Charles Goodyear's discovery of the vulcanisation process, brought the first major economic interest in the region. As the search for rubber spread up the tributaries of the Amazon from Iquitos, the Asháninka were brought into the industry first as guides and then as rubber gatherers. Some groups also became involved in raiding other Asháninka settlements to capture the women and children who were traded to Caucasians as household servants and labourers (Weiss 1975: 233). The rubber industry collapsed in the 1910s due to the opening of rubber plantations in the Far East. When the traders, who could no longer sell their rubber on the world market, stopped paying their workers, the Asháninka staged various uprisings. Bodley estimates that 150 white people were killed during one such uprising in 1913 (Bodley 1971: 109). While there was something of a resurgence of the rubber trade during the 1940s when the Japanese occupied the Malaysian plantations, it never regained its former significance.

From the 1940s, boosted by the opening of the Lima-Pucallpa highway in 1943, mercantile activity in the region focused instead on the extraction of timber. Bodley noted that in the 1960s the cutting of timber provided the principle source of income in many of the communities he visited, with some men spending as much as six months each year in lumber camps (*ibid.*: 86). While many of the more lucrative species of trees, particularly Mahogany (*Swietenia mahogany*), are now scarce, this industry continues to this day. Some of the wood is used locally in Pucallpa, but the majority of it is transported, by road, from Pucallpa into the highlands or to Lima, where it is sold locally or exported. While the government sets certain controls on how much timber is extracted, and grants licenses to specific individuals, all who worked in the industry assured me that these did little to prevent people extracting and selling as much as they could. The role of the Ashéninka in this industry is examined in Chapter Five.

Attitudes towards indigenous groups have varied throughout Peruvian history. Indigenous Amazonian peoples have tended to form the lowest rung of post-colonial Peruvian society, under the '*blancos*' (white people) of Spanish and European descent, those *mestizos* of mixed indigenous and foreign heritage, and the Andean Quechua-speaking '*campesinos*'. As occurred during the rubber boom, the Ashéninka have frequently been systematically exploited by these other groups. However, this has often occurred in parallel with attempts at assimilation, expressed via a rhetoric of integrating indigenous groups into 'modern' society and of 'helping' them to 'develop'. The basic opposition in such political debates is, broadly, between those who see indigenous groups as holding back the active exploitation of the resources of the forest, and those who champion their rights to the land of the forest and to live as they please. These issues will be examined in Chapter Seven, as will those government laws that affect indigenous groups. In particular, I shall examine the change in the constitution in 1979 which granted legal recognition to the native communities of the Peruvian Amazon (see Smith 1982 and Roldán & Tamayo 1999).

In Peru, the Ashéninka are infamous for the role they played in the wars fought between the national army and *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path, a communist guerrilla organisation that destabilised much of Peru throughout the 1980s). As *Sendero* used the high jungle to make their bases, the Ashéninka became caught in the middle of the war between these 'revolutionaries' and the national government. In the end, the

Asháninka's own counterinsurgency groups were instrumental in *Sendero's* final defeat (Manrique 1998: 218). However, in the years of violence, thousands of Asháninka were killed by both sides (*Ibid.* and Rodríguez Vargas 1993a and 1993b). With the knowledge of these events in mind, I deliberately chose an area which was not directly affected by these problems and hence I do not discuss them at length in the thesis. This is also true of the cocaine production and smuggling that has been present in other parts of Asháninka territory. While some *mestizos* in the area of my fieldwork had engaged in this cocaine trade in the 1990s, none of my informants were greatly involved in these activities.

Having looked at some of the larger issues that have affected the Asháninka in history I now want to give a brief outline of the more recent history of the group of people with whom I worked.

History of the Specific Area

Gaining a factual history of the movements of my informants and their families over past decades proved to be somewhat difficult and what follows does not purport to be a definitive account of the history of this area. Furthermore, it does not reflect the manner in which the Ashéninka themselves understand or view history, rather it seeks only to show some of the general trends in the movements and settlement of people in the recent past. In particular it establishes and demonstrates a feature of Ashéninka sociality that will be examined more closely throughout the thesis, namely the recurring shifts between fixed settlements and more dispersed forms of living undertaken by the Ashéninka.

The earliest memories of my informants stretch back to the first half of the 20th century, a time when the major impact of outsiders was experienced through the influence of powerful local elites rather than through the authority of the Peruvian state. The most renowned figure in the immediate area was the grandly named Manuel del Águila de la Rosa, remembered as a '*gringo cauchero*' (white rubber boss) who came to the mouth of the Amaquaria and set up a large cattle ranch there. His grandson, Fernando, who still lives in Amaquaria, told me that his grandfather had been a *cauchero* until the price of rubber fell, after which he had moved into cutting timber and setting up his ranch. He brought Ashéninka labourers with him from up-river and also started to attract Shipibo

workers from down-river. On his death, the ranch fell into the hands of one of his sons. When he too died, his only son, Fernando, was too young to take over the ranch. Subsequently, the livestock were slowly sold off or eaten and the grasslands disappeared back into the jungle. Any Ashéninka who had been working there drifted to the headwaters of the streams where fellow-Ashéninka already lived, while the Shipibo stayed to form the community of Amaquaria (see Map 7).

This historical outline explains the appearance of the riverine communities in the immediate area. It seems clear that after their experience of living in the settled *hacienda* form the Ashéninka returned to the way of living that they had practiced beforehand. At this northern extremity of their territory, and bounded by the inhospitable Shira range on one side and the unwelcoming Shipibo by the river, the few Ashéninka that had settled in the area seem to have led a relatively secluded lifestyle. Some of my informants told me that at around this time government representatives came to find them. They told the Ashéninka that they should move to the *mestizo* community of Margarita, so that their children could go to school and they could become ‘Peruvians’. When individuals refused, they were threatened with intervention by the *policia* who, they were told, would put them in jail. A group of families did move to the riverside, close to Margarita, in response to this coercive action by the state. However, within a short time many Ashéninka there grew sick and died of ‘*el gripe asiático*’ (a term used by my informants to refer to all severe forms of influenza). Moreover, my informants told me how they did not like to live near the dirty water of the main river with its infestations of mosquitoes, and so those that survived quickly decided to move back to the upland regions.

The next notable gathering of Ashéninka in the area centred on the formation of a settlement on the Mashantay tributary. I was never able to gain a full account of the original formation of this settlement; however, it seems that by the early 1970s an ILV (Instituto Lingüístico de Verano)¹⁷ teacher was permanently based there and a school, church and landing strip had been constructed. My informants, who were children or teenagers at the time, described the lack of game in the area and how people started to fall out. When the teacher stopped coming altogether, the settlement was slowly

¹⁷ The Summer Institute of Linguistics/Wycliffe Bible Translators.

abandoned¹⁸. People stated that, owing to the lack of fish and game, many families decided to move to the Amaquaria river, close to the present site of Pijuayal. It was with great nostalgia that older men and women recounted to me the abundance of fish and game that they had encountered there when they first arrived. Some families remained in Mashantay and a few of their descendents still live in the area. Another part of the community moved to the upper waters of the Ariapo river.

At some point in the late 1970s, another evangelical missionary appears to have worked in the Ariapo area and encouraged disparate families to settle in the space now occupied by La Selva. Yet again, after the death of this preacher, the Ashéninka dispersed. At this point however, a group of five men (Venancio, Santos, Daniel, Amadeo and Crisobel) decided that they should apply for a teacher to be sent to them, and to set up an official *Comunidad Nativa*. With the help of *mestizos* in the area, this title was duly applied for and La Selva was officially titled in 1984. Similarly, in Pijuayal two young men Agustín and Germán, with the help of their timber *patrones*, had the land around them titled as an official *Comunidad nativa* in 1985 and a school was established.

As can be seen from this brief historical account, the current agglomeration of Ashéninka in La Selva is not a new phenomenon. Rather, the history of the area shows that Ashéninka have been coming together and dispersing in a seemingly constant flux throughout the recent past. It is this flexibility and change that this thesis sets out to understand.

¹⁸ The teacher's departure may have been linked to the educational reform carried out in 1972 in which control of SIL schools was transferred to the local government (see Gow 1991:56).

Part One: Ashéninka Society and Sociality

Part One offers an examination of Ashéninka society and sociality. It begins with a comparison of Ashéninka notions of how to ‘live well’ with those held by other indigenous Amazonian groups. In particular it shows how the Ashéninka, rather than drawing others into tight-knit settlements based on consanguineous kinship relationships, prefer to live in autonomous households. These households are centred on nuclear families that minimise their kinship connections with others in the area and instead try to form equal but restricted social relationships with all local and visiting Ashéninka. Chapter Two places this ethnographic description within the context of the anthropological literature on Amazonian kinship and society. In particular, it positions the Ashéninka’s emphasis on equal yet limited relationships in contrast to studies that argue for the primary importance of either kinship or affinity in Amazonian thought. Chapter Three continues this discussion by presenting more fine-grained ethnographic examples of peoples’ attempts to reduce kinship relations while encouraging those based on pure sociality. Specifically, it examines Ashéninka kinship rules, and the institution of *masateadas*, or parties centred on the shared consumption of *masato*. Chapter Four looks more closely at Ashéninka notions of autonomy and personal freedom. While showing how these ideas underlie how Ashéninka individuals interact with each other, the chapter also shows how particular individuals can gain influence and authority in certain contexts. It argues that individuals are willing to give up their personal autonomy when they will gain some benefit from doing so.

Chapter Two:

Ashéninka Society and Sociality: An Overview

Drinking Together, Living Apart

On the very first page of my fieldwork diaries, written during my first day in La Selva, is an entry that reads:

Ashéninka

<i>piarentsi</i>	=	<i>masato</i> [fermented manioc beer]
<i>shinki taki</i>	=	drunk

– the first two words of Ashéninka that Wilder tried to teach me.

From that moment on I was seldom allowed to forget the importance of *masato* in the life of the Ashéninka. For them its consumption lay at the heart of socialising. Any visitor expected to be offered *masato* upon arrival at a house, and usually left quickly if none was available or offered. However, *masato*'s most important role was at the centre of large social gatherings, known locally as *masateadas*, that were held regularly by individual households, and that anyone could attend and which, I shall argue, were the primary mode of socialising. Thus the acts of offering, accepting and drinking *masato* together were seen as vital for any social activity. Indeed its consumption – and enjoying its consumption with others – were seen as core elements of being human itself.

Those first few days, however, revealed another important and seemingly contradictory characteristic of the people I was to work with over the following two years. On my first arrival in La Selva my Shipibo guide, who had shown me the way from the riverside *Comunidad* of Amaquaria, had taken me to Wilder, the *jefe*'s (chief's) house. He, I had been assured, was Ashéninka. As Wilder showed me around the centre of the village that day however, I quickly started to wonder where all the other Ashéninka inhabitants were. All of the houses around the central square were inhabited by people who told me that they had moved there 'only recently' from Pucallpa and would soon be leaving again¹⁹, and all of them were quick to say that they were not Ashéninka but *mestizos*²⁰. When I asked Wilder where the other Ashéninka inhabitants were he would laugh and

¹⁹ 'Recent' in these cases was a relative term with many of the people having lived in La Selva for more than a decade. The phrases, however, were idioms showing that these people still counted themselves as 'civilised' people from the town, distinguishing themselves from the 'native peoples' of the forest. For fuller accounts of these terms and the relations between 'native' and '*mestizo*' people see Gow (1991 & 2001).

²⁰ '*Mestizo*' is the term commonly used in Peruvian Amazonia to refer to people of mixed heritage. It is used in contrast to '*gente nativa*' people of indigenous descent.

wave his hand off towards the river in a gesture that seemed to suggest some indeterminate distance away. By the way some of the *mestizo* people laughed about how all the Ashéninka liked to live '*lejos*' (far) I began to worry, in the anxious manner of a new fieldworker, that Wilder and his family might prove to be the only Ashéninka I would ever meet.

My attempts during those first few days to leave the immediate environs of the *Comunidad* were frustrated by the fact that everyone was busy preparing for the *fiesta*²¹ that was to be held that Sunday. During the *fiesta* itself I had a good opportunity to meet lots of people, but still I always seemed to find myself talking to *mestizos* while Ashéninka individuals kept a wary distance. Therefore, after a day of recuperating from the side effects of all the *masato* drunk during the *fiesta*, I decided that I must follow the paths that led out of the *Comunidad* and off into the jungle towards the hills. It was to these that people pointed whenever I asked where everyone else lived. Still no one was willing to accompany me, informing me that they had things to do, and openly questioning why I would want to go wandering off like that for 'no reason'. As I would subsequently learn, it is usually better to have a specific reason or an invitation to visit someone, especially someone you know – not least so that they can have *masato* to serve you. Unaware of this, and keen to talk to people, I decided that to make any progress I would have to set off alone.

First I had to cross the river, which luckily at that time of the year rose only as far as my knees. Then I set off along the path that led first through plantain groves and then into secondary forest. Every so often I would notice smaller paths leading off from the main path, seeming to head into *chacras* (the Ashéninka's cultivated fields). I ignored them, not wanting to get lost, and decided instead to stick to the main path. After about twenty minutes I came across a first house, close to the path, but it appeared to be completely empty and a little run down. I sat there for a moment and contemplated how '*lejos*' these houses really were going to be, and then set off again. Finally after another ten minutes – time that seemed to pass very slowly as I walked in the humidity of the unknown forest – there was a house that contained people, right next to the path.

²¹ This was to celebrate the 13th anniversary of the official founding of the *Comunidad Nativa de La Selva*.

‘Ivan,’²² came a call as I stepped out of the bushes into the lightness of the house’s garden. ‘Come and drink. Help me finish what is left from the *fiesta*’. I vaguely remembered having, on Sunday, met the man who uttered this command and I was relieved at his expression of hospitality. His wife served me *masato* and then he asked what I was up to. I told him that I had wanted to see where people lived on this side and thought that I would visit them. ‘Welcome,’ he said, ‘Here is where we live.’ Then he added; ‘Close to my father-in-law’ while pointing off back down the path along which I had just come. ‘Where does he live?’ I asked puzzled. ‘Just there’ he replied, pointing again. Then he chuckled as he saw my confusion. ‘And you passed my brother-in-law’s house, Fermín, before that and then Silverio’s, by the path, and then there was Manuel’s by the river.’ As I looked more and more confused he and his wife started laughing. ‘They are not like me, they don’t like to live on the path, they all hide from everyone, that is what the Ashéninka are like. Garrapata is the worst, he lives really far away at the very end of this path’.

The man I was talking to, I would subsequently learn, was Adelio, a *mestizo* from the Pachitea (the river on the other side of the Shira hills – see Map 2) who had come here with a timber gang and then stayed to set up a house with Rosa, an Ashéninka girl born in La Selva. Theirs was the only house built on the main path itself; all of the others were built well back from the track, behind a thick layer of plants and trees. It was to these that the smaller paths I had seen led. Much later, I would slowly unravel the full extent of the network of paths which allowed anyone to get anywhere either with or without being seen by others. Moreover, I would understand that the layout of the houses was a conscious strategy of my informants to allow them to live a peaceful life in the manner which they thought best. In fact the distances between the houses in the area around La Selva were nothing in comparison to those I would get to know during my time in Pijuayal, the fully Ashéninka *Comunidad* which I was to visit for the first time the following week. In Pijuayal there were only two houses on the central square in front of the school and I would sometimes have to walk for an hour or two to get from one household to the next. Even at the end of my time in Pijuayal I still had difficulty working out how to get from one house to another (see Maps 3 and 5).

²² After struggling to find a pronunciation of my name with which all were happy, my informants and I managed to settle upon ‘Ivan’ (pronounced *ee-ban* in the local Ucayali Spanish).

Over time I came to understand how these two distinctly Ashéninka characteristics – their love of drinking *masato* in large communal gatherings and their desire to live in peaceful isolation – were inter-related and mutually constitutive and formed an important axis upon which their society turned. I also started to analyse these inter-linked features in terms of wider theoretical debates within Amazonian anthropology. It is with these that the present chapter is concerned.

Introduction

In recent years two distinct approaches have emerged amongst anthropologists writing about Amazonia. On the one hand there are those anthropologists who see sociality, conviviality and ‘love’ as the key concerns of Amazonian peoples (see Overing & Passes 2000). Viveiros de Castro has labelled this analytical style ‘the moral economy of intimacy’ (1996: 189). In contrast, Viveiros de Castro himself is one of the chief proponents of a view of Amazonian sociality that he characterises as ‘the symbolic economy of alterity’ (*ibid.*). According to this group of anthropologists, affinity and the metaphor of predation are the key shared concepts of Amazonian societies. As with many such academic debates the apparent lines of contrast between the two positions are often drawn more for effect than based on substantial difference. The debate also echoes older anthropological discussions over the relative importance of alliance and descent in kinship systems (see Lévi-Strauss 1969, Dumont 1953, Fortes 1949, and Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940). However the significance of the two views and their contrasting yet interlinked nature continue to maintain the discussion’s relevance and importance. Set against the backdrop of this wider debate, in this first chapter I will discuss the two contrasting characteristics of the Ashéninka that I outlined above, namely their desire for undisturbed seclusion and their love of *masato*-fuelled social gatherings. In doing so, and with the aim of making a contribution to this debate, I will show how the particular style of Ashéninka living offers interesting insights into wider Amazonian conceptions of sociality and social reproduction.

Whereas for most Amazonian groups the ‘good life’ is achieved by drawing a specific group of people into a kinship network, characterised by constant reciprocity and the shared consumption of substances, I argue that my informants, time and again, both explicitly and implicitly, demonstrate their understanding that in order to live peacefully and well one must *not* live with others from beyond the immediate nuclear family group.

This observation leads me to assess the approach of those anthropologists who stress the importance of difference (alterity and affinity) and separation in Amazonian thought and practice. While appreciating the logic and depth of this school of thought I suggest that it is an insufficient basis, on its own, for a comprehensive understanding of a behaviour. In particular, I argue that ‘potential affinity’ and native ideas surrounding the fecundity of unknown others have little to do with the motivations of young Ashéninka men and women when confronted with the reality of forming relations with outsiders. Instead, following recent work by Santos-Granero (n.d.), I suggest that the study of Ashéninka notions of friendship, rather than kinship, may offer a way to see beyond arguments centring on the importance of *either* consanguinity *or* affinity. By emphasising the importance of generosity to others, and by constraining the social links that can be created, the Ashéninka seek to counter the dangers and problems involved in dealing with others, while still being able to benefit from interaction with them.

To understand this, it is first necessary to outline the importance of personal autonomy and responsibility in Ashéninka culture.

Personal Autonomy and Responsibility

Above I briefly described the separated manner in which my Ashéninka informants choose to live. While those Ashéninka living in La Selva still make a point of distancing themselves from others and making independent, discrete households, those households are nonetheless quite close together. In Pijuayal, as I would learn by long experience, the distances between households was by contrast much greater (compare maps 5 and 6 and their scales). Where in La Selva 217 people were spread over 15 square kilometres, in Pijuayal the houses containing 205 people were spread over 120 square kilometres. In practical terms, this meant that most houses were at least a 20-minute walk apart, with some up to an hour from their nearest neighbours. Localised clusters can be discerned from among the whole group, with the houses of married children remaining in the general area of that of their parents. However, it is noticeable that over time even households interconnected by close kinship ties move further and further apart as each new relocation occurs in their agricultural cycle. As such, the main unit of Ashéninka society must be considered the nuclear family: one married couple with their unmarried children.

Time and again I was struck by the self-sufficiency of the households in which I lived, along with their members' determination to solve all problems within the household's confines. A child's illness would be diagnosed and treated by its parents using their own knowledge of herbal treatments and shamanic practice; disputes with other individuals or households were dealt with by the individuals involved, without recourse to any outside authority or mediation. Even attempts to influence 'higher order' things, such as the weather or luck in hunting, were made by individual men themselves.

At the level of material reality, the family was also able to provide for all of its own subsistence needs. While communal parties might be called to help with agricultural activities, as I shall argue in Chapter Three, this was less to do with a need for extra labour than to do with the enjoyment of sharing others' company. All agricultural activities, from felling the forest to harvesting, could be done by a single adult couple. Men preferred to hunt and fish alone, so the communal undertaking of such activities was rare. At certain times of the year, individual households could go for up to two weeks without any contact with other people.

In such circumstances adult individuals' closest relationships are undoubtedly those with their spouses. Given my status as an outsider and the Ashéninka's extreme reluctance to discuss emotional and personal matters, it was difficult to ascertain the full nature of such relationships. There was, however, a close bond between spouses. This was characterised by mutual care and concern which, even if not vocalised, was evident in the various daily acts that each carried out for the other, and the laughter that would often be shared between them. Yet, while my informants showed a commitment to maintaining their spousal relationships over time, they also showed a distinct pragmatism about them. I was often questioned how I could claim to have a 'wife' if she was not actually with me. For the Ashéninka, there is the idea that relationships need to be lived and constantly affirmed in order for them to continue. Thus, while there were undoubtedly strong emotional bonds between couples, as evidenced in statements about feelings of loss during periods of absence and after death, there was little indication of any Western notions of 'romantic love' or the maintenance of a relationship through pure feeling.

It was also unquestioned that all individuals will and should enter into such relationships. When boys and girls reached puberty it was assumed that they would begin to have relationships with the opposite sex and that this would lead to more permanent bonds and then to having children. Members of either sex who eschewed this norm were treated with some suspicion and were increasingly subjected to ridicule. Young people seemed to completely imbibe these cultural ideas, and from the age of puberty are alive to the idea of entering into relationships with young people of the opposite sex with whom, eventually, they will form long-term relationships and have children. I will discuss courting practices below. Here, however, I want to emphasise the ‘naturalness’ of these relationships for all Ashéninka, young and old, and the fact that these conjugal pairs are meant to become economically and politically self-sufficient.

With this cultural emphasis on the self-sufficiency of nuclear families comes a deeper sense of the importance of personal independence and autonomy. This is inculcated in children from a very young age. From the time they are able to walk and move unaided, Ashéninka children are gradually taught increasing self-reliance. Such children are often left to do small tasks on their own and are given only minor supervision. I frequently saw toddlers using knives or old shortened machetes to dig in the earth in imitation of their mothers and older siblings. Where my instinct was to either take the dangerous implement away from them or teach them how to use it properly, their parents would watch surreptitiously, nodding in appreciation both that they were learning how to do everyday tasks and that they were taking the initiative to do it themselves.

As children grow older they are constantly introduced to new tasks and aspects of life. For example, while the older daughters in my household started to help in the gardens, planting, weeding and harvesting, the four-year-old daughter, Wilmer, would be left on her own to tend to her one-year-old sister. When they are encouraged to do a new task children are given no formal instruction. Rather, they are left to imitate and experiment for themselves. Having never been told what to do, even by their own parents, children grow to resent any instruction from others²³. In conjunction with this increasing self-reliance comes a respect for the individuality of others. By the time young couples marry

²³ Johnson describes this form of education as ‘gradual raising of expectations’ (2003: 102). See Allen Johnson (2003) and Orna Johnson (1978) for a fuller description and analysis of this style of child-rearing amongst the Matsiguenga (another member of the Asháninka meta-ethnic group).

and form their own households they have both the ability and the self-belief to care for themselves and their families with no outside assistance. Indeed, the desire to display this ability seems to be part of the reason for the gradual movement apart of households.

This desire to show their independence seems to be slightly stronger in young men than young women. Once he reaches around ten years of age a boy will make his own small house, separate from that of his parents, but still within their compound. He might then fell his own garden, perhaps using a sister to help him plant and then allowing his mother and sisters to gather its contents. When slightly older, boys will also go off to other parts of Ashéninka territory in search of a bride. Veber (1997) notes that the desire of young people for partners can still be understood in terms of their desire for independence, as a single individual is unable to fulfil all of the requirements of subsistence on his or her own. Most notably, men cannot make *masato* and women do not normally hunt large game animals (see Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of the relationship between men and women and the inter-dependence of spouses in Ashéninka society). In this context, marriage, while linking two individuals together, allows a child complete independence from his or her parents. While this is equally true for both sons and daughters, and while young men tend to distance themselves from their parents, young women prefer, at least during the first years of their marriage, to remain relatively close to their own mothers. This was the reason, I was told, for the observed matrilocality of young couples²⁴. Although such a pattern might seem to contradict my stress on autonomy, it is soon countered by the couple's arrangement to live separately. After one or two years, and especially as their own families grow, they will either return to the husband's area to set up an independent household or build a separate house away from that of the wife's parents.

This self-autonomy and concomitant respect for others is not taught formally, as occurs amongst, say, the Piaroa (see Overing 1985 and 1987)²⁵. However, in everyday life

²⁴ The closeness of girls to their mothers seems to be based on the fact that daughters spend much more time working with their mothers than sons do with either of their parents. Daughters help their mothers in all of their activities: cooking, childcare, gathering produce, along with the general upkeep and harvesting of the garden. Boys meanwhile, after joining in with such 'female' activities up to around the age of ten, are gradually taught the more 'male' activities of hunting and fishing by their fathers. After a few shared trips, however, the young boy is then expected to hunt and fish alone and begins to lead a life separate from that of the main family group.

²⁵ Overing describes how, when children are six or seven years of age, the Piaroa *Ruwang* ('leading wizard') gathers a group of them together to begin teaching them *ta'kwakomena* (consciousness, will and

Ashéninka children are chastised and even punished for behaviour that transcends this unwritten code. Considering that I never observed a child being castigated for laziness or failure to carry out some task, or for making an avoidable mistake, those times that I did see them reprimanded stood out all the more. The emphasis is always upon promoting self-control – meaning that children’s loss of control, most obviously in displays of violence, brought forth the greatest reactions from watching parents. No distinction was made between the protagonist and the victim in fights amongst children; instead, all were universally condemned for resorting to violence. This pattern was also discernible amongst adults.

In contrast to adults chastising children for their behaviour, adults never reprimanded each other for resorting to violence. Their opinions, however, were usually clear from reactions to violent behaviour, and fights would be gossiped about and commented upon over the following days and weeks. Any violent outburst was considered to be ‘animal like’ and not befitting of a true human being. During my time in Pijuayal, the event that brought forth the largest number of complaints and gossip was when Jorge attacked a boy who was rumoured to be courting Sylvia, one of his daughters. The boy, Alberto, had been hanging around Pijuayal for a couple of months. He had come from Ranuya, another Ashéninka *Comunidad* a day’s walk up-river, ‘just visiting’ in the typical manner of a young man (as I described briefly above, see also Chapter Three). During that time he had spent increasing amounts of time around Jorge’s house and had taken to sleeping in a small hut close by. Jorge, others and finally even I, noticed that Sylvia was spending a lot of time with Alberto at his house. I imagined that this was the normal state of events, as did most of my informants. Jorge, however, took a decided dislike to the boy and started to verbally discourage Sylvia from seeing him. I was quite surprised to observe such didactic behaviour, even more so when Jorge started to direct it towards Alberto himself. This led to increasing tensions between the young man and the father. Finally one night, after Jorge’s calls for Sylvia went unanswered and he had grown angry at his own wife’s silence on the matter, he went to Alberto’s hut. There he found Sylvia and her lover in a mosquito net. He demanded that Sylvia return home and then, without further warning, he started to hack at the mosquito net with a machete, all the

responsibility) which will allow them to perform all of the tasks of normal adult living. “They are taught what in our own moral philosophy are called ‘the other-regarding virtues’ (Overing 1985), those that enable one to take responsibility for one’s actions towards others” (Overing 1987: 178).

while ordering the boy to leave Pijuayal and never return. Apparently one or two of the blows fell upon Alberto himself, and certainly the mosquito net and some of his clothes were cut to ribbons.

In re-telling the story people always added the final vignette: that, in his anger, Jorge had hurled what he thought was Alberto's torch into the river, only to realise later that it had been his own. This final part seemed to serve as proof that anger was bad and caused people to do stupid things. Having narrated the story, people then discussed it. Most could see nothing wrong with the relationship in the first place and it was certainly not normal behaviour for a man to show such a marked aversion to the idea of a daughter's courtship. Yet, even if Jorge had had good reason to doubt the boy, people agreed that attacking him was a reprehensible action. Rather, he should have talked and reasoned with him. Discussing the relative evil of physical violence – and of anger in general, they asserted that it was never a good thing. They would then swap stories about other 'angry' or 'bad' men who had lived in the area. Generally, these were men who had left the area over the years, in part because of the opprobrium that their actions generated. For all this aversion to Jorge's actions, however, and in line with the lack of coercion and respect for others, no action was ever taken against Jorge himself. In a society where personal autonomy is valued so highly, there are few active ways in which others' behaviour can be sanctioned. Moreover, no individual has the authority to coerce or control another's behaviour. Chapter Four will examine these ideas more fully in terms of a general lack of coercive leadership. There I will also note that the emergence of coercive authority is further restricted by the lack of individual ownership of material resources and the lack of control over the labour and its products of others (see also Overing 1987, Clastres 1977). Here, however, I note that the importance of personal autonomy and the web of associated social norms is not unique to the Ashéninka, but rather is echoed in other Amazonian societies.

Shared Amazonian Characteristics

Overing and Passes (2000) describe certain common 'social characteristics' that they contend can be seen in most Amazonian societies. These include the characteristics of the Ashéninka that I have just been discussing:

- [The idea that] the self who belongs to a collective is an independent self, and that the very creation of the collective is dependent upon such autonomous selves.
- An antipathy to rules and regulations, hierarchical structures and coercive constraints.
- A shortage of anything Western theory might deem as ‘societal structure’, or even ‘social structure’ (Overing & Passes 2000: 2).

Overing writes that “from the Piaroa point of view, it is through the skills of its members for personal autonomy that the ‘community of similars’ is created. Each person is ultimately responsible for mastering within the self the capabilities that allow for a human type of social and material existence” (Overing 2003: 300)²⁶. As with the Ashéninka, the emphasis is upon being able ‘to live one’s life in one’s own way’. Overing notes, however, that this is markedly different from the Western sense of individualism in which the individual is seen as acting on, or even against, society. In Amazonian societies instead, “the subject restrains him/herself from imposing the self upon society” (Overing 1987: 190). The individual does not put him/herself outside of society, but rather recognises him/herself to be part of a society based upon personal autonomy. Overing writes that for the Piaroa:

Their insistence upon personal autonomy, their high evaluation of the social, and their affection for custom are not conflicting values, or rather they only appear to be from the point of view of the dominant strand of our own individualism that states the superiority of the disengaged ego. The Piaroa individual is by definition a social and cultural being. It is partly because they do away with the weight of institutional solidity that they have no need to long for the freedom that disengagement might endow (Overing 2003: 310-1).

²⁶ Overing’s position on Amazonian societies is clearly based upon her own observations made amongst the Piaroa of Venezuela. One critique of her attempts to describe Amazonian-wide social characteristics is to argue that her formulations are based too much on the Piaroa model. The work of others, particularly Belaunde (1992) and McCallum (2001), amongst other Amazonian groups goes some way to refuting this, however, it is notable that Overing’s own writings and discussions still centre on Piaroan examples. As a consequence of this much of my discussion here compares Ashéninka society with that of the Piaroa although I am engaging in the wider debate about the nature of Amazonian society.

Overing and Passes further argue that instead of being preoccupied by what we might characterise as ‘law and order’:

[What Amazonian people] *do* talk about at great length is how to live well, happily, in community with others; they talk about how to go about creating ‘good/beautiful’ people who can live a tranquil, sociable life together, and the difficulties of achieving this task; they talk much about how to avoid dangerous anger, and how to love appropriately and to be ‘compassionate’; *their* emphasis is upon achieving a comfortable affective life with those with whom they live, work, eat and raise children, and not upon the building of societal structures (2000: 2).

Again this set of ‘Amazonian characteristics’ seems to apply to the Ashéninka. As I showed above they are keen to discourage overt displays of anger and violence among themselves and others. They also often talk about the need to ‘live well’ and how that is to be achieved. But it is in the refinement of this idea – of how to ‘live well’ – that the Ashéninka differ most markedly from the general picture outlined by Overing and Passes. Whereas for most Amazonian groups the ‘good life’ is achieved within a specific kin and spatially bound group, my informants, time and again, both explicitly and implicitly, told and showed me that in order to live peacefully and well one must *not* live with others. It is to this issue that I now turn.

Sociality and Conviviality

The *Comunidad Nativa de Amaquaria* is a Shipibo²⁷ village set right on the edge of the Ucayali river’s old course. Nowadays it is a few kilometres from the main river, but the still flowing Amaquaria river means that it has not been completely cut off from river traffic as other settlements have. It is not a particularly big place but it has a secondary school, as well as its primary school and kindergarten, a health post and an air strip. It also has a number of competing shops that seek to control the flow of goods, including fish, timber, livestock and agricultural produce, out of the area. It has around 400 inhabitants, whose houses, as in all of the Shipibo villages that I visited up and down the river, are neatly lined up around the central football field and then along *calles* (streets) that form a grid pattern. Whenever I had to spend a few nights in Amaquaria waiting

²⁷ The Shipibo are an indigenous Amazonian group living interspersedly and to the north of the Ashéninka. They are a riverine group, living by fishing in the main river course of the Ucayali. They form large settled communities along the banks of the Ucayali throughout this region.

for river transport, after the tranquillity of Pijuayal, or even La Selva, it always seemed like a buzzing hive of activity. There were always visitors from somewhere or other: officials on government business, itinerant traders or timber men. Students came from the surrounding villages to attend the secondary school and there were always more than a few drunk people clustered around one of the shops enjoying industrially produced cane liquor. The liveliness of it all pleased me after the stillness of the deeper jungle, but when I started visiting it with Ashéninka friends I noticed their disquiet whenever we arrived. At first I thought it was because they did not know people there, but as we walked around they would often be hailed and I frequently listened in on conversations in which my Ashéninka companion and a Shipibo man would recount their various shared misadventures. Eventually I realised that my Ashéninka friends' discomfort lay in the very form of the settlement itself. They would complain to me how 'there are always people' or 'people are always watching [you]'. The most common dislike was that 'people are always fighting'. In fact, even in La Selva where my Ashéninka informants from Pijuayal felt much more at home, they still contended that people in the settlement disagreed and fought too much. In truth, as months went past and I grew used to the style of life in Pijuayal, I too started to feel upset during my first few days back in La Selva, Amaquaria or Pucallpa. The instances of loud confrontation and even of actual physical violence were much more prevalent in such places than they ever were in Pijuayal. By the end of my time I began to envy the Ashéninka who would find a quiet part of the village in which to squat alone, from which they could watch everyone else without participating.

While, as we saw above, the Ashéninka share many of the moral and social concerns of other Amazonian groups, and even show a comparable concern for achieving 'the good life', the manner in which the Ashéninka believe this to be possible is markedly different. For the Ashéninka 'the good life', in the sense of a quiet life free from trouble, can only really be obtained by living separated from others, with only one's immediate kin for company. Thus, for the Ashéninka, the prized attainment of a 'companionable and congenial mutuality' (Overing & Passes 2000: 17) depends on a mutual understanding of the importance of privacy, separation and even, at times, complete isolation. In this sense, while the broad arguments put forward by Overing and Passes do have some resonance with the Ashéninka, their emphasis on the importance of 'conviviality', with its stress on actual 'living together', is not of such relevance.

One illustration of this is with respect to food-sharing in many Amazonian societies. After reading various evocative descriptions of this practice, I had expected to see something similar occur amongst the Ashéninka (see Belaunde 1992, McCallum 2001 and Rival 2002: 103-5). In fact, the first items of food I saw one man give to another was when *I* grumbled that there was no food after a *minga* (work party) and one man went to fetch some from his own house to pass around. But in general the practice was rare. While the giving of gifts and foods was not prohibited or disliked, it was unusual. Even close family members living separately, such as Jorge's daughter, Luisa, and her husband who lived in a house near to Jorge's own, seldom gave or took food from the main family²⁸. This fits with the ideas of independence and self-sufficiency that I outlined above. It also suggests the manner in which Ashéninka society differs from that of other Amazonian groups, namely the lack of everyday and constant sharing of food, objects and companionship. Conviviality which encompasses a large network of families is, in other words, conspicuous by its absence.

Above, I described the close bond that is formed between a married couple, and the fact that this relationship is maintained by their everyday relations, evidenced by the fact that they questioned the reality of my relationship with a 'wife' who was not present. This close relationship appears to echo the Piaroa's idea of conviviality, albeit reduced to a couple and their children. However, the extremely restricted size of such families and the lack of any desire to extend this sharing to others on a regular basis demonstrates that we are in the presence of something rather un-Piaroa like. There is a definite boundedness to the Ashéninka's sense of conviviality and consanguinity which seems to stand in contrast to the Piaroa and to the wider view of Amazonian societies put forward by Overing and others.

Overing, in this context, argues that, for Amerindians, 'conviviality' is expected to turn into something more, namely actual kinship relations. "Certainly for the Piaroa, the idea is that those who in the first instance are dangerously 'different in kind' (e.g. as in-laws) become '*of a kind*' through the process of living together" (Overing 2003: 300). In her classic text (1975) on the Piaroa, she shows how they suppress affinal distinctions within

²⁸ Craig makes a similar observation, writing that "Once a son marries and establishes his own household, further cooperation [with his own family] seems to be grudgingly given, if at all" (Craig 1967: 228).

the residence group, using teknonyms to stress kinship connections²⁹. She then goes on to show how they do not separate marriage (affinity) and consanguinity. For the Piaroa, rather, 'marriage leads to kinship' (*ibid.*: 70). More recently she has argued that:

People who live together are also continuously involved in a process of mutual creation through a principle relating to the transference of creative powers... People are surrounded in daily life by the powerful products of thoughts created by others. This is the process that leads in time to the creation of a 'community of similars'... The political goal relates to the achievement of harmony in the daily productive and commensal relations of community life (Overing 2003: 308-310).

This is not the case for the Ashéninka for whom, instead, there appears to be little desire to turn others into close kin. While it is true that a man and a woman, when they live together, become closely connected, and while they share a close bond with their children, I contend that there is no desire to extend these close bonds to include any other individuals.

Firstly, my informants did not give importance to the idea that eating and living together brought people closer together. From the youngest of ages, children were aware of who their own 'real'³⁰ parents were, regardless of their current living arrangements. Several young children told me where their 'real' fathers were and categorically said that the man with whom their mother lived was not their father. Others would correct me when I mistakenly referred to the link between two individuals as a kinship one. For instance, I was constantly corrected every time I asked after the 'parents' of one particular girl. The couple with whom she lived were, I was told, her grandparents: her *mother's* parents, not *her* parents, who had died some time in the past. That living together did not lead to closeness or the transformation of relationships, and that only 'real' parents could be thus named, were demonstrated even more starkly to me after a year in the field. One evening, I arrived back at Jorge's house to find a young woman there. I vaguely recognised her as the wife of a man who lived further up-river,

²⁹ Such that a woman refers to her husband as 'father of my child', a man to his parents-in-law as 'grandparents of my children' and to his son-in-law as 'parent of my grandchild'.

³⁰ I use the word 'real' to reflect the way that my informants seem to consider such people – in contrast to those adults with whom they actually lived. Thus a boy referred to '*mi propio padre*' ('my *own* father') suggesting both an emphatic use and the possessive form. So far as I could ascertain, this was used to refer to those who, from a Western perspective, would be considered 'biological' parents.

and whose house I had stopped by briefly with timbermen. When I asked Jorge who she was he motioned towards the kitchen and said, 'She is her daughter'.

'Whose daughter?' I asked completely mystified. There was only Edith (Jorge's wife), the unknown girl and four young children around the fire.

'Hers' he said, again motioning towards the kitchen.

I paused. 'Edith's?'

'Yes' replied Jorge.

After further coaxing I elicited that she was indeed Edith's first child by Chambira (another Ashéninka man in the area), before she had met Jorge. The girl, Marlana, had grown up in Jorge and Edith's house. She had married Samuel a few years ago and moved up river to live. I had never seen her in her mother's house before and her relationship to them had never been mentioned to me, even in passing. Further, Jorge had not counted her amongst his children when I had originally sat down to write a genealogy of his family³¹. The conclusion from this evidence must be that the Ashéninka do not share other Amerindians' view that those who live together become 'of a kind' and form close and enduring bonds.

In further support of this conclusion, and in contrast to other Amazonian groups such as the Piaroa, the Ashéninka have no system of using teknonyms to mask affinal relationships and stress the relationships that have been created through children. Moreover, there is no slippage in the use of parental terms to encompass those adults who actually raise children. This is attested to not only by the terms that children used to refer to adults, but also by the terms of address that they used themselves towards those individuals. Thus, Marlana addressed Jorge as her '*tio*' (Spanish) or '*pawaini*' (Ashéninka) – uncle/father's brother. A literally-minded researcher might suggest that this does not attest to a lack of a close relationship. However, to me my informants' inflexibility in their use of terms seems striking, especially given the widespread presence of beliefs in partible paternity in Amazonia (see Beckerman & Valentine 2002) and the idea that relations are made rather than given (McCallum 2001). Further, having helped to raise Marlana in his own household, the fact that Jorge had never before mentioned her existence to me, even in passing, suggests that the initial separation between Jorge and Marlana was never, in his mind, overcome by their shared conviviality. In later

³¹ Obviously I was somewhat shocked to realise how partial my data was even with this family who were my chief informants, and to appreciate how unconsciously male-centred my approach had been.

conversations Jorge never showed any animosity towards Marlina and her husband, nor hinted at any particular falling out. Rather, it seemed that he had never counted her as one of his children, and that now that she lived some distance away she was out of his mind. If this distance occurs even in cases where there has been prolonged and sustained conviviality, then it must be accepted that the Ashéninka do not conform to Overing's view of Amazonian peoples. Having reached this conclusion I now turn my analysis to those aspects of Ashéninka culture which can be seen to bind them together, in particular to *masato* and its shared consumption at *masateadas*.

Masato and 'The Good Life'

If the Ashéninka do not believe that different individuals can grow together into a 'community of similars' through the sharing of food, drink and sociality, this does not mean that individuals refrain from all contact with others. Rather, the Ashéninka have an extremely open sense of sociality, such that anyone, including non-Ashéninka and even foreign anthropologists, can partake of *masateadas* at any time. In these important social events, echoes of broader Amazonian ideas of conviviality can undoubtedly be seen. It is, though, a bounded and limited conviviality. *Masato* drinking does not merely serve to make visible those bonds that already exist: it actually *creates* bonds that can encompass anyone. Yet although anyone can join in such events there is no sense that the continual sharing in such activities brings people together or makes them more Ashéninka. The proof of an individual's humanity is shown by his or her ability to share in the social activity of drinking *masato* but lasts only as long as the event itself.

On those days when Jorge was hunting, working alone in his garden or pottering around his house, he often commented laughingly on the amount of time that I sat in the house reading and writing. But he never complained or disparaged my activities. As soon as someone visited, however, and especially if there was lots of *masato* in the house, he would be the first to chastise me for my anti-social behaviour if I continued to sit alone. I quickly learned that while individuals were free to do as they wished when alone, everyone was expected to join in whenever guests visited, and certainly when there was drinking to be done. This did not apply solely to me, but to everybody. An example can be seen in a visit I once made to Garrapata, the Ashéninka man who lived furthest from the centre of La Selva. An older man, Manuel, had recently moved in with one of Garrapata's daughters. As Garrapata and I talked and drank *masato* together we

observed Manuel sitting alone in his little house, reading. Garrapata looked at him distastefully and then said to me, in a voice that he clearly intended should carry across the clearing, 'I like it that we are laughing and drinking together. That is the good life'³². He then went on to suggest, in a lower voice, that I had obviously learned a lot in Pijuayal, unlike 'certain' people who lived around here.

Garrapata's comment indicates that the Ashéninka do indeed have this secondary notion of the 'good life' being one in which people are together, sharing in drinking and general socialisation, much as Overing and Passes note in other Amazonian communities. In contrast to the form outlined by Overing and Passes, however, in which Amazonian groups are seen to want these interactions to occur all of the time, Ashéninka sociality lasts only as long as the drinking is shared. The sense of 'community' produced is as bounded and fleeting as the actual social interaction which briefly produces it. From my first day in Pijuayal I was welcome at the drinking and working parties that were held by all in the area. As I will explain more fully below, generosity is a moral imperative for the Ashéninka, and it should encompass all visiting people, no matter how strange they are. Beyond this form of hospitality however, which may even include food and a place to sleep, there seems to be no desire to bring individuals into closer, let alone kinship, relationships. Repeatedly, I was struck by how young men arrived from a long distance away and were easily accepted into the social activities of the area. While it was accepted that such men were looking for suitable women, there was no pressure on either them or on young women to get together quickly. Further, when such relationships proved to be short-lived, there were neither recriminations nor a sense of the loss of a new kin member³³. Even when the relationships endured, it struck me that the young man's position in the area would change little from when he had first arrived. The feeling seemed to be that such a man was welcome to stay in the area, build a house and cut a new garden, but there was no extra status conferred on him for doing so³⁴. There were no extensive exchange networks within which they could be included, no hierarchies nor collective institutions. Such men were free to join any *masateadas* they wished to, and to hold their own, but this was equally true for anyone visiting the area.

³² 'A mi me gusta, que estamos riendo y tomando juntos. Así es la vida buena.'

³³ This is why Jorge's reaction to his daughter, Sylvia's, lover, described earlier, stood out as abnormal and became the subject of so much discussion.

³⁴ In fact, there was no special status for *anyone* in the area.

Moreover, as was reflected in the example I gave of Jorge's relationship (or rather lack of it) with his step-daughter, Marlena, there was little sense that even over a long time the shared drinking of *masato* was bringing people closer together. The power of *masato* appeared to be in the instance of its drinking, in its ability to bring people together in physical reality. It did not, however, have the power to bring fellow drinkers together in any more permanent sense. In line with this assessment, that sees Ashéninka relationships as based on voluntary and limited acts of sociality, Santos-Granero (n.d.), working among the Yanésa, has argued that we might consider 'friendship' to be more important to many Amerindian people than actual kinship. He suggests that at times Amerindian peoples can be seen to transform kin and affines into friends, rather than the other way around (*ibid.* n.d.). I shall develop this idea further at the end of this chapter. For the time being, however, I will note the reluctance I observed among my informants to include outsiders within kinship relations. One particular Shipibo man, named Shanti (the diminutive form for Santiago), was married to an Ashéninka girl who he had taken to live in Amaquaria. Yet, even while everyone conceded his status as brother-in-law, son-in-law etc., there was a definite reluctance to use the appropriate kinship terms when addressing him. In contrast to the lack of use of personal names amongst Ashéninka themselves, Shanti was always referred to by his first name. Such examples, as well as my own experience of how I was integrated into the area, indicate a preference to interact with others in particular and limited ways rather than trying to draw them into relations of kinship.

The fact that kinship was not progressive and encompassing also helps to explain the need for *masato* to be present at *all* times during social occasions. If individuals do not 'grow together' over time then at each meeting their social compatibility must be reaffirmed. This takes place through the sharing of *masato*. As I slowly visited more and more houses through the course of my fieldwork, I gradually realised that I would only be welcome in a house if they had *masato* to serve me. If I turned up unannounced, and there was no *masato* to serve me, then the whole interaction would be awkward and I would inevitably leave after a few short, stilted and unproductive conversations. This is why I had to make those initial visits in La Selva alone: others were unwilling to join me as they knew that it was bad form to turn up in a house uninvited and when the hosts were unprepared to receive you.

Unlike in other Amazonian societies where socialising with others is an integral and unavoidable part of everyday life, for the Ashéninka it is a separate and particular sphere of activity. At first I was struck by the similarity between this attitude and my own English middle-class tendency to limit social interactions to specific times and places. On closer consideration, I realised that while the Ashéninka might choose to be social at specific times while avoiding it at others, this was not related to any separation between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ time. Rather than having a sense of propriety or obligation about either of these, they did things as and when they felt the inclination (see also Rival 2002: 101). Moreover, unlike in Western urban societies where individuals choose to limit their extended social interactions in the face of the multitude of people that are met on any given day (in their work and travel), the Ashéninka can literally go for days without interacting with anyone apart from their spouse and children.

One final interesting point to note is that my informants still seemed to keep in mind the idea that increased sociality was possible. They would tell me that they, personally, disliked the idea of living in a permanent settlement such as Amaquaria (described above), but their comments seemed to be tinged with a certain respect for the fact that the Shipibo were able to live in such a ‘civilised’ way. It is tempting to see such comments in terms of the contemporary world and the pressures that it puts upon the Ashéninka to conform to ‘modern’ notions of what it is to be ‘civilised’ – not least through projection about living in the *Comunidades Nativas* into which the government tries to organise them. Yet, throughout their recorded history, the Ashéninka have demonstrated a sporadic proclivity for uniting into larger communal forms of living, and it would be too simplistic to attribute this merely to the influence of outside forces. Specific aspects of Ashéninka cultural thought and practice, in certain circumstances, mean that individuals are willing to relinquish some of their personal independence and autonomy for particular reasons or likely benefits. I will discuss these ideas more fully in Chapters Four and Seven.

At this stage it might be helpful to restate my main arguments. I have shown how Ashéninka notions of society and sociality compare and contrast with those found in other Amerindian societies. The Ashéninkas’ emphasis on personal autonomy and responsibility echoes an Amazonian-wide notion that society consists of equal beings who belong to collectives that are free from hierarchical structures and coercive

constraints. Their concern with ‘living well’ and achieving ‘the good life’ is equally typical of Amazonian societies elsewhere. Where the Ashéninka differ from other Amerindians, however, is in their idea of how a trouble-free sociality is to be achieved. Here, they do not concern themselves with attaining an everyday communal life in which initially unrelated people become linked together. Instead, they have a very particular idea of sociality that is at once both open to all and bounded in time and space. This form of sociality is enacted through and centred on sporadic *masateadas*.

The Hawks vs. The Doves

As I mentioned in the introduction, Joanna Overing’s position (which has been broadly followed by a number of her students, including Peter Gow 1991, 1997 and 2001, Luisa Elvira Belaunde 1992 and Cecilia McCallum 2001) has been characterised as ‘the moral economy of intimacy’. For these ethnographers, Amazonian cultures are recreated in the everyday life of communities. A particular criticism of this approach is the fact that they seem to take their descriptions of particular Amazonian groups’ ways of living and turn them into a general moral philosophy common to Amazonia. In doing so this group of anthropologists tend to privilege the internal and kinship relations of the group at the expense of interlocal relationships (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 189). They emphasise ideas of ‘love’ and ‘conviviality’ while downplaying or ignoring notions of violence, affinity and predation. I have argued that the Ashéninka do not comply neatly with the model that Overing and her cohorts have laid down. In particular, I have shown how Ashéninka sociality is not concerned with intimate and internal communal relations but rather has an openness that extends to all outsiders.

But how well do Ashéninka conform to other anthropologists’ views of Amazonian sociality? Fernando Santos-Granero (2000) has referred to the adherents of the view which emphasises conviviality and consanguinity as ‘the doves’. In contrast, he names as ‘hawks’, a set of scholars with a contrasting approach³⁵. These anthropologists, by concentrating on processes of symbolic exchange (including war, cannibalism, hunting, shamanism and funerary rites) that cross socio-political, cosmological, and ontological boundaries, have emphasised the importance of difference (alterity/affinity) and separation in Amazonian thought (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 190). For ‘the hawks’,

³⁵ With whom I would number, among others, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1992a, 1996 and 1998) Aparecida Vilaça (2002), Philippe Descola (1994 and 1996) and Anne-Christine Taylor (1996 and 2001).

Amazonian sociality and identity are based on exchange, not consubstantiality (shared substance). They see ‘potential or symbolic affinity’ as the key to sociability (Viveiros de Castro 1995: 14)³⁶. For them, according to Santos-Granero, “the notion of affinity finds expression in the metaphor of cannibalistic predation which, ‘hawks’ contend, is shared universally by Native Amazonian peoples. In this view affinity is the natural relation, whereas consanguinity is a cultural artefact in need of explanation” (Santos-Granero 2000: 269). There has been some debate over how far affinity encompasses consanguinity, but in a recent article Viveiros de Castro has suggested an uncompromising view of the importance of affinity. He argues that local, consanguineous communities must be understood as defining themselves against ‘an infinite background of virtual sociality... extracting themselves from this background and making, in the most literal sense, their own bodies of kin’ (2001: 24-5). Thus in Viveiros de Castro’s view of Amazonia:

[D]ifference precedes and encompasses identity... Just as cold is a relative ‘absence’ of heat but not vice versa (heat is a quantity which has no negative state), identity is relative absence of difference but not vice versa. This is the same as saying that there exists difference alone, in greater or smaller ‘amount’; the nature of the value measured is difference (Viveiros de Castro 2001: 25).

This is shown, he argues, by the emphasis that Amazonian groups put on their relations with ‘others’, all beings who are not like themselves: guests, enemies and trading partners, even animals and spirits. Thus, from his view, it is these beings, which ‘bathe, so to speak, in affinity’ (i.e. in difference), rather than consanguines, that are the most important aspect of ongoing social relations. For without the affinal other, society cannot reproduce itself. Such that the fundamental rule of this theory of being is that there can be no relation without differentiation, as ‘what unites two affines is what distinguishes them’ (*ibid.*:25-6). Taking this even further, Viveiros de Castro argues that since ‘no province of human experience is (given as) entirely constructed [and]

³⁶ Viveiros de Castro suggests that when he writes of ‘affinity as a dominant principle’, it is better to refer to it as ‘potential affinity’, “in order to distinguish affinity as a generic value from affinity as a particular type of kinship tie. This distinction implies that affinity as generic value is *not* a component or part of ‘kinship’ ” (2001: 22 his emphasis; see also Viveiros de Castro 1993). In doing so, he draws a tripartite distinction between the following: *actual affinity*, referring to real affinal kin (brothers-in-law etc.); *virtual affinity*, groups referred to by affinal terms (e.g. cross-cousins in Dravidian kinship systems); and *potential affinity*, which goes beyond actual kinship relations, and refers instead to a wider statement of difference, of ‘otherness’ or alterity, between two beings.

something must be (construed as) given', then in Amazonia 'it is affinity that stands as the given dimension of the cosmic relational matrix, while consanguinity falls within the scope of human action and intention' (*ibid.*: 19)³⁷. This emphasis on affinity contrasts strongly with Overing's emphasis on Amazonian Indians' preoccupation with drawing others into consanguineous relations. If, as I have argued, Overing's model is inadequate for fully understanding the Ashéninka, is Viveiros de Castro's view of Amazonian sociality and the importance of predation and conflict more useful?

Affinity and The Fear of Strangers

Before I started my fieldwork, I had become well versed in Viveiros de Castro's work and was impressed with the manner in which it dealt with indigenous cosmologies. Indeed, my original aim was to study the Ashéninka in terms of Viveiros de Castro's insights into perspectivism and the importance of affinity. During my time in the field, I was often struck by how the ideas of my Ashéninka informants fitted well with Viveiros de Castro's expositions of indigenous Amazonian philosophies. However, I also noted a certain discrepancy between these underlying philosophical ideas and the everyday actions and conversations of my informants. I was particularly struck by this with respect to the relationships into which young people entered with each other. While in Viveiros de Castro's view such relationships are underpinned by Amazonians' wish to seek out those different from themselves, my observations indicated that individuals were also scared of such difference. Thus, as I discuss in the next chapter, while Ashéninka marriage prescriptions certainly emphasise the importance of marrying non-kin and of interacting with unknown others, my objective was to understand how individuals actually dealt with such issues in their everyday lives.

One evening, I was sitting in a timber camp with a number of young men after a hard day's labour. We were drinking *masato* and talking about women. One of the young men, Benjamin, was being teased about the amount of time he was spending around the house of Chambira, another Ashéninka man who had an eligible daughter, Daisy. In response to my earlier queries, Benjamin had told me that, as she was his 'niece' (his male cross-cousin's daughter), he could not have a relationship with her. According to

³⁷ "While the Other in Western social cosmology is rescued from abstract indetermination when we pose him as a *brother*, that is, as someone related to me insofar as we are both identically related to a third, superior term (the parents, the nation, the church etc.), the Amazonian Other must be determined as a brother-in-law." (Viveiros de Castro 2001: 26)

Ashéninka thinking, such a relationship would be incestuous. However, that night, it became increasingly clear that he was intending to enter into a full relationship with her by building them their own house near to her father's. Our discussion then turned to the young men's fears of having to find wives from beyond their immediate social circle. This, they told me, was what had led some of the older men to pursue incestuous unions. Moreover, even when young men did make efforts to go in search of suitable women, the latter often rebuffed them. Such rejection was apparently similarly motivated by a fear of those socially distant.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, the Ashéninka have rules against marrying close consanguineal relatives³⁸. The ideal marriage is with cross cousins (FZD/MBS) who, following matrilineal residence patterns, would be from a different area. In the absence of such a preferred partner, the next prescription is that an individual should 'marry far', that is with someone from outside of immediate kin or residence circles. This prescription can be seen in practical terms as a way of countering the potential isolation of continual cross cousin marriage by forcing individuals to look outwards. It can also be analysed in terms of the importance of affinity in Ashéninka thought. However, conversations like the one I had with Benjamin made clear the difference between cultural logic and everyday practice. While the 'potential affine' might, in Ashéninka thinking (and more generally in Amazonia as a whole) be understood to be fertile and productive, a 'real' individual, as an emotional being who fears the unknown, is not so quick to see the merit of an unknown other. Instead, the young men to whom I talked were searching for someone fundamentally like them; someone, moreover, whom they could trust.

Similar fear of the other can be discerned in the realm of myth and stories about affinity and marriage. These contained many examples of attractive outsiders not being as they seem. This is exemplified in the following story of the Boa:

Story of the Boa³⁹

told by Melita, in La Selva

Once, the Boa wanted to seduce a girl who he had seen on the river bank.

³⁸ M/F/S/D/Z/B/MZ/MZD/FB/FBS.

³⁹ The Boa is both the name for a real snake, the anaconda, and thought of as the master of the river and its fish.

One day the girl was sitting by the river fishing with her line and hook, wishing that she had lots of fish. Suddenly she saw a great wave coming up the river, full of fish: *Shuyo*, *Boca-chica*, *Sábalo*, every type of fish. Then she suddenly saw a young man on the beach (not the Boa, he appeared like a person).

‘What were you doing?’ he asked her.

‘Nothing,’ she replied. ‘I was asking the Boa to give me great amounts of fish.’

‘Really,’ said the man. ‘Do you want fish? If you become my lover then I will supply you with lots of fish.’

(It was the Boa – but she did not know it).

Soon they were kissing – *siki, siki, siki* (you know how the Boa’s tongue is – but she saw a person).

They were there laughing together.

‘Later I’ll bring you fish,’ said the Boa to the girl, and then he left.

So when the girl went back to her mother, she was carrying a huge basket of fish.

‘Look at my fish, mother,’ said the girl.

‘Look how well you’ve fished,’ replied her mother.

‘Tomorrow I will go back and fish again,’ said the girl.

‘Yes,’ agreed the mother.

The next day the girl’s sister offered to go with her. ‘No,’ said the girl. ‘I will go alone.’

And so she went, but her sister followed her and heard her, and saw her with the Boa wrapped all around her, kissing her (but the girl couldn’t see that he was a snake).

The sister ran back to her father and described what was happening.

‘Let’s go,’ he said.

When they got back they could still hear the sister laughing with the Boa.

‘Ha, ha, ha.’

The sister with her father and brothers rushed up to the couple.

‘What are you doing embracing a snake?’ demanded her father.

The Boa quickly uncoiled himself from around the girl and escaped into the water even while the father attacked him with an axe.

Then they all returned home.

Such stories indicate the Ashéninka’s view of how the world and other beings are not always as they seem. In such a world, in which potential partners from beyond the community may turn out to be dangerous beings in disguise, individuals feel that it is safer to rely on one’s own close connections. Thus, while Ashéninka may be taught the fertile power of outsiders, they are also aware of their dangers and even though they are warned about the prohibitions on incest, this can be outweighed by their fear of the unknown. It is therefore unsurprising that individual Ashéninka are unwilling to enter into close relationships, especially those of a long-term sexual nature, with someone unknown to them. In short, to insist that the importance of ‘affinity’ and of difference influences ordinary people’s choices is to forget that in the everyday world, the Ashéninka, like all people, fear the unknown.

The ideas and fears of the young men I spoke to were also echoed in the reactions of young women to the arrival of new young men from afar. The arrival of these potential mates was met by some excitement, as the daughters in my household would tease each other about who liked the new visitor, but there was also an underlying current of fear, fear of what this new person might actually be, and of what he could do to others. It was only over time that the girls would grow comfortable with new visitors, and certainly only after a long period of time (during which the new visitors had interacted with other

known members of kin in the area, drunk *masato* and shared sociality) would girls be willing to be alone with them. Such acts, I contend, are not about the other 'becoming like' self, in some form of consubstantiality, but rather that the other *proves* itself to be like self. Thus, as more time is shared, the fear of the unknown person is lessened. Indeed, it might even be argued that this process continues even after a couple have started spending time alone together, and that it is only once they have truly settled down and had children together that their common humanity or sameness is fully proven.

As the above has illustrated, individuals seek to get to know and share experiences with strangers before entering into more intimate relations with them. An individual is at the centre of his or her own world, and decides who to embrace within his or her own group of relations, friends and acquaintances. 'I' cannot exist as a separate entity in the world unless there is an 'other', but the other must be known and compared with what is known about self. As I have argued above, it is not only that the other must become 'one' with 'us', but that equally the fecundity of the 'other' cannot override individuals' fear of the unknown. Thus, while I agree with Viveiros de Castro's assertion that the outside world, with all of its potential, is 'affinal' in the sense that it is different from self, from the point of view of an Ashéninka individual there is still some part of the world that is self and is *not* affinal⁴⁰. There is, in other words, some part of the world that an individual knows to be himself or herself and to which the rest of the world is then compared and, ultimately, connected.

In reacting to the work of Viveiros de Castro, I do not wish to suggest that consanguinity works in the opposite direction to, and takes precedence over, affinity in indigenous philosophies. As I have shown, the Ashéninka have no desire to include the whole world amongst their kin, nor to draw any but the closest of kin into permanent relations of conviviality. However, what I am interested in is how the way in which

⁴⁰ Viveiros de Castro, in the logical conclusion to his argument, contends that even individuals are thought of as 'dividual' (i.e. made of a body and a soul), with the soul as affinal to the 'consanguineal' body (2001: 33). He bases his argument upon the examples of death rituals which act to separate the soul from its body, and his logic is powerful. However, while, at an abstract level, this idea is extremely provocative and interesting, during fieldwork, I was struck by its abstraction from the everyday lives of my informants. For my informants showed no conception of this corporeal split. While the logic of their cosmology might demand that they see their soul as affinal to their body, to ask them such a question was to be met with incomprehension.

individuals consider their own relationships, and potential relationships, can be seen as distinct from anthropologists' own concerns with deeper ontological questions. Thus, as an alternative to anthropological views that place emphasis on *either* affinity *or* consanguinity, I note that we need to understand the importance of *both* in order to fully elucidate indigenous relationships. For if 'difference' as an ontological category can be seen as underlying Amazonian social creation and reproduction, then 'sameness' still underpins individuals' actual relationships with each other. If affinity produces the necessary raw materials of difference that allow for reproduction, both social and physical, then shared substance produces the similarity that is necessary for actual reproduction. More simply put; if difference offers potentiality, similarity is needed for reproduction to occur.

Perhaps this difference is one between anthropological approaches rather than a clear-cut argument over the nature of Amazonian thought⁴¹. For it is notable that in my reaction to the 'hawk' approach I follow the line of methodology laid down by Overing and Passes (2000), by concentrating on the everyday lives of my informants. Thus, it is not to say that Viveiros de Castro's philosophical arguments are not compelling but rather that such abstract theories can sometimes appear disassociated from the everyday life choices of specific individuals. This points to one assessment of such approaches that sees them as overly abstracting the actual world of Amerindian peoples (see Gregor & Tuzin 2001: 10). Are such approaches that appear to create a complete indigenous philosophy and that are based upon a few observed actions and thoughts, actually representative of how a group of people are thinking about the world?

Such questions echo an older anthropological debate over the relative importance of individual sentiment and structural models in anthropological analysis of kinship decisions (see Needham 1962 and Schneider 1965). This debate also stemmed from a fundamental disagreement over whether social life was animated by consanguinity or affinity, stated in terms of 'descent' and 'alliance'. Again, the conflicting models were developed on the basis of contrasting ethnographic experiences, albeit separated by continent rather than by the smaller distances between different parts of the Amazon.

⁴¹ Santos-Granero (n.d.) offers a more pessimistic view in suggesting that the debate is another part of the wider and perpetual argument between those who believe that humans are essentially nasty and must be tamed by culture and those who think that people are basically nice until they are corrupted by civilisation.

Descent theorists carried out research in Africa (Radcliffe-Brown 1952 and Fortes 1953 and 1959), while alliance theorists worked in Southeast Asia and South America (Lévi-Strauss 1969, Needham 1962 and Leach 1961a and 1961b). This separation leads Holy to conclude that: “It seems therefore to appear that neither descent nor alliance theory can claim to be a universally valid theory of social cohesion but that each of them is merely a generalisation of different ethnographic ‘facts’ ” (Holy 1996: 137).

One conclusion must be that it is important for anthropologists to recognise the distinctions between the conceptual levels at which we are working, so that we do not become so caught up in analysing models and refuting the academic arguments of our fellow anthropologists that we lose sight of our original subjects or, worse, become so mesmerised by logic that everything our informants do is placed within a preconceived pattern, even if they give us other reasons for their behaviour. While anthropological models might hold true at some deeper level regarding cultural ontologies, decisions taken by individuals are also dictated by sentiment. A full appreciation of social reality requires attention to both these levels of analysis. Thus, however logically compelling I find Viveiros de Castro’s arguments, I cannot accept that they give us a complete picture of Amazonian sociality. If my research shows that the Ashéninka, in their emphasis on the importance of living apart, reject consanguinity as an all-encompassing mode of thinking, then their search for *known* others to interact with also suggests a limit to the importance that they place upon affinity.

If, so far, I have appeared to be mainly concerned with the relative importance that anthropologists place on affinity and consanguinity, I now wish to offer a closer analysis of how the Ashéninka themselves appear to escape the dichotomy between the two. In particular I will examine how the Ashéninka use generosity and particular forms of sociality to limit the detrimental effects of both kin and affines while also benefiting from relations with both types.

Generosity and ‘Friendship’ as a Third Way

Above, discussing the role that *masato* plays in Ashéninka social life, I alluded to the moral imperative to be generous. When I first appeared in the area of my fieldsite I was clearly the strangest thing that many of my future informants had ever seen. On first seeing me, many young children would burst into tears and flee to the safety of their mothers. Even adults were secretly petrified of me, and I later learnt that many of them slept with machetes next to their beds, and even considered killing me, when I first arrived. Yet, despite all of this, and even on occasions when a woman was left alone in her house after her children had fled into the forest on first catching sight of me, if there was *masato* present, I was always offered some to drink. Further, if I stayed for any length of time and if there was food in the house I was fed and even reluctantly offered a bed. The strength of the ingrained importance of generosity is attested to by the fact that hospitality was offered to a stranger, even in the face of such seeming danger.

Such observations led me to examine the cultural imperative of generosity among the Ashéninka and, in particular, the idea that generosity is used as a means of controlling dangerous others. I have argued that the Ashéninka neither seek to include all into the realm of consanguineal kin, nor consider that a belief in the potential fecundity of those different from themselves is enough to overcome their own personal fears. Here, then, I suggest that there are two means by which the Ashéninka try to develop and yet also contain relationships with others. One is generosity to all, particularly to those who are outsiders, and the other is the concomitant idea of ‘friendship’ – that is relationships that are entered into voluntarily and are based on fellowship rather than kinship connections. Further, my informants prefer *all* relationships, even with those who can claim pre-existent blood and affinal ties, to be formed in this way.

Descola (2004) has suggested that Amazonian societies can be distinguished according to the dominant form that exchange takes. For him, groups such as the Tukano are characterised by an emphasis on ‘equivalent reciprocity’. He contrasts this with the Jivaroan focus on predation or ‘unilateral taking’. Thus amongst the Tukano, marriage is organised by the exchange of women or goods between different tribes (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1971: 144). Also, hunters must perform a ritual to return the spirit of a killed animal to its own kind (*ibid.*: 82). Amongst the Jivaro, in contrast, brides are taken by capture and the souls of human enemies are retained in *tsanta* (their infamous shrunken

heads) in order for them to be taken by new children within the tribe (Taylor 1993: 671)⁴². The Ashéninka's emphasis on unilateral giving stands in contrast to these two forms of interaction. Proof of this cultural norm can first be found in older literature on the Ashéninka. Weiss writes of 'spirit masters' who are said to control the animals and describes how a shaman must go to the corral of *tasórenci* where this master keeps his peccaries and asks for him to release them. "A single wild pig is released from its corral up in the mountains, and the swineherd, *tasórenci*, pulls hairs out of its rump and blows them into the air, whereupon the wild pigs multiply and descend to the waiting Campa hunters" (Weiss 1975: 263). Similarly Weiss describes how the sacred bird *asíwanti* furnishes Ashéninka with edible insects: "It is the function of the shaman to visit the home of *asíwanti* in spirit and beg *asíwanti*'s wife to permit his 'brothers' to return with him to feed his tribesmen" (*ibid.*: 259). Further, a hunter "before killing a sacred bird, first requests its 'clothing', and on being killed, the soul (*is(h)íre*) of the bird is understood to return to its home where it resumes its human form." (*ibid.*: 260). These examples show that the shaman/hunter depends upon the generosity of the animal masters in providing for human needs, rather than entering into relations of exchange or by preying upon other beings.

This generosity is evident not only in the supernatural realm, but also exists in human relations. In my own fieldwork, the importance of generosity, was also shown in parents' education of their children. If parents' only true castigation of their children centred on demonstrations of violence, their main affirmative preoccupation was with the encouragement of generosity. Every evening as I sat with Jorge's family enjoying our daily food, I would watch as Rosa, the youngest of Jorge's daughters, would take something from her own mouth and offer it to one of us. I always showed some hesitation in accepting such gifts, but her parents and siblings always made a point of praising and encouraging this behaviour. Equally, if one child was given a large bone, or hunk of meat, they were encouraged to share it with their siblings. Once taught however, this generosity is gradually turned outwards, away from close kin and towards strangers. Thus, while older individuals felt no compulsion to give food to their equally

⁴² Descola notes that while these raids and captures may generate reprisals, these are not sought nor thought to obviously follow from the capture. He therefore sees no underlying evidence of an idea of 'exchange' between enemy tribes.

capable peers, visitors, particularly those without access to their own manioc, and hence *masato*, were always offered all that was available⁴³.

Further, while there is an emphasis on unilateral giving, there is little idea of unilateral taking: greed and selfishness are still morally suspect. Hence, even once I learned about the importance of generosity and made a point of offering food to visitors, they always made a show of refusing it. This was true of any object that I offered to people, and I would sometimes just have to leave things rather than pressing others into their public acceptance. People went to great lengths to be neither stingy nor greedy, wanting to be generous themselves without taking from others. A child, such as Rosa, having been taught to give, is then taught not to take unnecessarily from others. While this endeavour is true in the everyday realm of human sociality, as the examples from Weiss show, where animal masters freely give their charges to humans, the same concepts are universalised. Hence, the Ashéninka seem to stand in contrast to Viveiros de Castro's (1992a) view that predation is a central idiom of Amazonian cultures. Rather than taking from the other to assert one's own humanity and either destroying or encompassing those different from self, the Ashéninka universe is characterised by unilateral giving.

In arguing that the Ashéninka believe in the primacy of generosity in all realms, I am not contradicting my earlier assertion that the Ashéninka have some fear of the outside. As *The Story of Boa* and other myths and stories show, 'others' are still considered to be dangerous. Rather, it seems that the Ashéninka (and, according to their beliefs, their spirit counterparts) believe that the best way to avoid intensified antagonism is to be generous to others. No being, whether spirit, animal, or human, should demand too much of another. Yet it is also recognised that some things can legitimately be demanded, and that these should then be freely given. Thus, the Ashéninka do not believe that the only interaction that can occur between different beings is a prey/predator relationship, as has been described amongst other Amazonian groups

⁴³ This generosity is apparent in relation to everyday items such as food, *masato* and certain objects which are easily made or obtained such as paddles, gourds and baskets. For scarcer and more expensive goods – mainly manufactured and goods acquired from outside of the area – there is a stronger sense of ownership and a concurrent idea that they should be exchanged with others – particularly *ayompari* trading partners (see Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of this practice).

(see Rival 2002: 53 on the Huaorani). Instead, the Ashéninka consider that such forms can be avoided by acts of generosity and by a refusal to be predators of others.

This ideal of generosity lies at the heart of Ashéninka relations with others. Further, while it is most conspicuous in their interactions with unknown others, the same idea can be seen with known others. It is my contention that the Ashéninka are not concerned with forming close relationships with *either* close kin (conviviality) *or* affines (to counter predation) or making members of one group become part of the other (drawing affines into consanguineal relations, or seeing all beyond the self as affinal). Instead, the Ashéninka prefer to treat everyone in the same, equal, voluntary and yet limited manner, based on unilateral generosity. While basing relationships on generosity, the Ashéninka also seek to limit their scope.

Having heard other anthropologists' heart-warming tales of being accepted into local families and being called by kinship names such as 'daughter' or 'brother', I looked forward to hearing such terms used by my informants for me. I was, however, to be denied this clear proof of close acceptance. At first I thought that it might reflect badly on my own character, but I slowly realised that it was not specific to me, but rather indicative of a general avoidance by the Ashéninka of using kin terms when referring to unrelated and especially non-Ashéninka in-comers. The term they used instead was '*ayompari*'. The provenance of this term is unclear with some authors suggesting that it derives, perhaps via the Quechua word *kumpari*, from the Spanish *compadre* (Schäfer 1991: 50). However, in the past it was particularly associated with a system of trade partners that stretched across Ashéninka territory binding pairs of men together and allowing for their free passage throughout the area (this institution will be more fully described in Chapters Three and Five). Beyond the practical aspect of providing individuals with access to goods from other regions, Bodley argues that the key to the system was to provide strangers with 'a legitimate non-kin, non-enemy identity' (1972: 595). Schäfer also notes that the relationship between trading partners is characterised by warm affection (1991: 54). In my own fieldsites the term *ayompari* was used interchangeably with the Spanish term *amigo* (friend) (see Chapter Five).

Rather than being preoccupied with drawing individuals into consanguineal relations, or viewing them as real or potential affines who must be exploited (whether through

trade, wife-taking or predation), the category of *ayompari* remains as a distinct, separate and enduring category. This form of relationship, which, following my informants' use of the Spanish term '*amigo*', might be glossed as 'friendship'⁴⁴, allows both sides to benefit from the relationship while also avoiding the deeper complications that come from drawing others into kin relations. Thus, by maintaining a distinct relationship category from that of kinship or affinity the Ashéninka can be seen to create an escape from the dichotomy of the affine/consanguine duality and a means of circumventing the problems associated with a definitive categorisation of people as 'similar' or 'other'. In this way, individuals can get to know one another over time in a neutral relationship, while still benefiting from the other.

Viveiros de Castro has suggested that in Amazonia relations of 'formal or ceremonial friendship' should be considered as 'para-kinship' relationships using as they do the 'conceptual and practical symbols of affinity' (1995: 14). Countering this position, I follow recent work by Santos-Granero (n.d.) amongst the Yanesha, where he argues against Viveiros de Castro that, because such 'friends' are not then incorporated into webs of affinity or kinship, friendship should be seen as a distinct category. He goes further to argue that Amazonian groups want, on special occasions, to turn certain kin and affines into formal friends such that the link of formal friendship takes pre-eminence over pre-existing kinship ties, thus showing that the relationship has moved onto a higher plane of trust and intimacy (*ibid.*). Santos-Granero further holds that by entering into formal friendships, even with those who might be considered consanguines or affines, Amerindians emphasise both the freely chosen and consensual nature of these relations (against the predetermined state of kinship relations) and the fact that these relations must be constantly maintained by repeated demonstrations of affection and trustworthiness (*ibid.*). Amongst the Ashéninka this idea can be seen to go even further. Such associations, established on voluntary and limited relations are, or are desired to be, the basis of *all* relationships. In the process Ashéninka try to limit individuals' claims on other forms of relationship.

⁴⁴ I follow both my informants and Santos-Granero (n.d.) in using the term 'friendship' to categorise *ayompari* relationships and, later, those formed through the shared consumption of *masato*. The term 'friendship' and the wide range of relationships that it is used to describe have received little concerted study in anthropology (see Bell & Coleman 1999). For this reason the concept of 'friendship' is difficult to define and thus to analyse. Unfortunately, I do not here have the space to remedy this situation. Instead in using the term 'friendship' I refer to relationships that, rather than being based on kinship connections are formed voluntarily between individuals who, in terms of the relationship, see themselves as essentially equal, and as bound together by camaraderie, fellowship and shared experiences.

As I will illustrate more fully in the following chapter, it is the *masateadas* that allow for this particular form of sociability, as these events' bounded and limited nature mean that the sharing of *masato* need not draw individuals into endless and intimate exchanges. As I suggested above in showing how even young men who marry into the area do not become more accepted than others, it seems that these relations, based on amicability rather than on kin relations, are the preferred form for the Ashéninka. *Masateadas* not only limit socialising to a particular time and place, but also circumscribe the types of relationships that can form.

It is important to note that, in creating such relationships or 'friendships', my informants can still be understood to be picking out individuals from the surrounding sea of difference (of potential affinity) with whom to make closer connections. In this sense my work amongst the Ashéninka does not negate that view of Amazonian cultures which sees difference as an underlying condition. What it does suggest however, is another way in which indigenous Amerindians consider interacting with these other beings, beyond the previously defined dichotomy of either consanguinity or affinity. The Ashéninka try to draw others into relationships that are not based purely on predation or conflict, but equally that are removed from the closeness of consanguineal relations.

Conclusion

This chapter began with two striking characteristics of Ashéninka society: the isolated and independent nature of their living, and the importance they place upon holding social gatherings centred on the consumption of *masato*. I began by examining these practices and the cultural and moral codes that underlie them. In particular, I noted the importance of personal autonomy and responsibility in Ashéninka culture. While in this the Ashéninka may be seen, following Overing and Passes (2000), to be similar to other Amazonian groups, the manner in which this autonomy is manifested in their separated form of living is unique. They are not trying continuously to increase the sphere of consanguineal relations. Instead of believing that social harmony can be achieved through the sharing of substance and sociality all of the time, the Ashéninka prefer to limit their sociality to particular times and places. The rest of their time is spent living in self-sufficient, nuclear family units. I have taken this observation to argue against Overing and others who see conviviality at the heart of all Amazonian societies.

In distinction to Overing's view, Amazonian societies can also be understood as being based on the premise that affinity is the overarching and all-encompassing aspect of Amazonian thought (see particularly Viveiros de Castro 1992a). While accepting the philosophical power of this position, my aim in this chapter has been to show how my informants interact with others, both known and unknown, in their everyday lives. Thus, while individuals may be seen to understand the fecundity of the 'other', I have shown that that does not mean that they are not afraid of them. Finally, I suggested that the importance of generosity in Ashéninka morality and the Ashéninka's emphasis on forming other types of relationships, other than those based on real or fictive kinship, provides an alternative to the dichotomy of the affine/consanguine duality. Rather than being preoccupied with drawing individuals into consanguineal relations, or viewing them as real or potential affines who must be exploited (whether through trade, wife-taking or predation) the Ashéninka are willing, and indeed prefer, for individuals to be regarded, and to remain, as 'friends' – equals, with whom voluntary relationships can be formed. This form of relationship allows for both sides to benefit from the relationship while also avoiding the deeper complications that come from drawing others into consanguineous or affinal relations.

Having examined some of the theoretical implications of Ashéninka modes of relating to others, the next chapter will show how these ideas are played out in everyday life, and the manner in which Ashéninka social relations are formed and sustained.

Chapter Three:

Flexible Forms of Sociality: Kinship, *Ayompari* and *Masateadas*

Introduction

In the last chapter I outlined the ways in which Ashéninka society could be seen to differ from other Amazonian societies, arguing that anthropologists' preoccupations with describing Amerindians' relations in terms of affinity and consanguinity were overly prescriptive. Instead, I suggested an understanding of Ashéninka sociality in terms of the emphasis that my informants placed on forming voluntary and limited relationships based on fellowship rather than kinship connections. This chapter further examines these ideas, giving more specific ethnographic examples of Ashéninka social relations and how they are played out in the everyday lives of my informants.

I begin by briefly showing the emphasis people put upon their desire to live apart rather than in tighter-knit communities. While echoing my initial discussion in the previous chapter, here I use ethnographic examples to more closely understand the connections between associated households. Following from this, I will look at Ashéninka kinship structure and the rules governing marriage and residence and discuss the links that are created between individuals. Later, I illustrate the flexibility of the system while also recognising that the very strictness of the prescription to marry cross-cousins acts to encourage exogamy. This is in keeping with the Ashéninka's secondary marriage prescription that individuals should 'marry far'. In the context of such a discussion, I look at how *ayompari* trading partners provide outside social connections for young men seeking unrelated brides. Drawing from the discussions in the previous chapter on the Ashéninka's emphasis on unilateral giving, I will argue that while marriage should not be seen as an 'exchange', the movement of sons and daughters in marriage across large geographical areas does act to create widespread networks. Finally, having shown how kinship links are present but limited, the central importance of *masato* production and consumption in Ashéninka social life is considered. Here, I contend that it is the reciprocation of *masateadas* and attendance at them that is central to the cohesiveness of Ashéninka society. It is this institution that can be understood as the focus of Ashéninka sociality, and that allows individuals to form equal and voluntary relationships rather than those based on pre-existing ties of consanguinity or affinity.

Living in the Forest

As I briefly mentioned in the last chapter, Pijuayal, one of the Ashéninka areas in which I conducted fieldwork, was characterised by the dispersed nature of its households (see Maps 3 and 6). My informants' continued refusal to move closer to the central clearing and school was much to the annoyance of Wagner, the *mestizo* teacher who had been working there for the previous two years. He continually exhorted Pijuayal's *comuneros*⁴⁵ to build their houses closer together, seldom with much success. On one occasion I remember sitting with Agustin, one of the founders of the *Comunidad* and its *de facto* head, and discussing Wagner's latest plans to lobby for a project from the Ministry of Education to come and construct a cement school for the *Comunidad*. Agustin and I had been talking about the various different wooden schools that had been built – and had fallen down – over the years. He agreed that a concrete school would prove to be much more durable. He also, however, started to wonder what the point of having such a long-lasting building would be. 'It will outlast me or any *Comunidad*' he said. Then he joked that after he had died and the people had dispersed the school would become a place for the monkeys and other wild animals to play in. It was known that my pet monkey often followed the children from my household to school and appeared to sit and watch the lessons so we joked that he would be the teacher and keep the others in line. Others joined in our increasingly fantastic renditions of such a future until we were all laughing. As the laughter died down Agustin stood up to return to work saying '*Así estará*' ('That's how it will be'), and the others around me all nodded in agreement. In this case, as in other numerous incidents and conversations I was to have during fieldwork, no one showed any embarrassment in joking about a future 'regression' to the jungles in this way. The humorous banter seemed to reveal a deeper truth about the ephemeral nature of concentrated settlement.

Such examples, and the very manner in which the Ashéninka build their houses apart, attest to the underlying value of living in separate and dispersed households – and how they hold more tightly defined settlements to be unsustainable in the long term. Later in this thesis I will examine how and why people have been drawn into more spatially and socially integrated groupings, and look at the nature of contemporary *Comunidades Nativas*. For now I concentrate on the social interactions of people living in the area in

⁴⁵ 'Official' members of the *Comunidad Nativa*.

which I worked and try to draw out some of the characteristics of Ashéninka sociality on which I began to touch at the end of the last chapter.

As I noted in Chapter Two, people seemed to have no sense that the sharing of food brings them closer together and creates binding connections between them. The immediate bonds between parents and children are recognised, and can be seen to be maintained in the microcosm of the household and in everyday conviviality and commensality, but these do not spread beyond the confines of these closest of relations. Thus, while sons-in-law and daughters-in-law are not excluded from the house of their parents-in-law, they also cannot be seen to become integrated into it over time. Instead these households tend to drift apart both socially and geographically. At first the newly-married daughter will spend most of her time with her mother and sisters in the family kitchen house, but as time goes on and she has her own children she will spend more and more time in her own house. After a few years both the father's and the son-in-law's households are likely to move to new sites to cut and plant a new *chacra*. At this point they may or may not choose to move together. In this way a pattern emerges over time in which an original household spawns new ones that then move away from it across the landscape. Each new shift takes them further apart.

If one couple has many daughters, or if a father induces his sons to return once they are married, a network of households may build up. These secondary houses may have their own connections, through affinal relations of one of the spouses, such that each house belongs to a loose network of people. Yet, these households have little or no influence or control over each other and may, in fact, have little interaction. Men are always careful to build their houses away from main paths and they always cut a number of paths outwards from the house that allow them to avoid meeting other people. Bodley notes that in his fieldsites such households did not assist each other with *chacra* labour and only combined for treks and long hunting trips, while “drinking parties are the most frequent form of interaction between distant households within the local group” (1971: 79). In contrast, in Pijuayal I found that labour parties, known by the Spanish word ‘*minga*’, were often held, inviting other households to help with various activities. People talked of the importance of reciprocating attendance at such events and of how important it was for households to make their own manioc beer, *masato*, to hold their own. As such, the significance of *minga* appeared, at first, to lie in its facilitation of the sharing and

reciprocation of labour. As time progressed, however, it became clear that *masato* and the opportunity that *mingas* afforded for socialising was the key to understanding these events. The importance of *masato* was further linked to the Ashéninka's emphasis on unilateral giving and relationships based on friendship rather than kinship. While these ideas will be further discussed at the end of this chapter, it is enough to note at this stage that these *mingas* were not about shared labour *per se*, and thus that it is reasonable to see Ashéninka households as essentially self-sufficient and hence independent.

In the last chapter, I recounted my informants' aversion towards other settlements, such as the Shipibo community at Amaquaria. There they told me of how they did not like the fact that people could always see each other, and their dislike of the number of violent arguments that occur in such places. This aversion manifested itself a number of times during my time in Pijuayal. In particular, the strength of my informants' desire to live apart was emphasised to me in the timber camps where numerous families were forced to live in close proximity. In one camp where I spent a month, I watched as each Ashéninka man who arrived built a shelter for his family apart from the main camp, with each making sure that the sight line between each camp was broken by intervening foliage or a bend in the river. Once, on the cramped space of a timber raft I watched as an Ashéninka woman kept pestering her husband to set up a separate fire that she could use independently of the camp's cook.

My informants gave me a number of different reasons as to why they lived apart. The most common one was 'so that we can raise animals'. The reasoning behind this was twofold. The first was that dispersed living allowed individuals to raise chicken and pigs in peace without fear of the animals being molested and stolen, and that the animals would not interfere with others' gardens and households and thus cause problems between families. The underlying logic that it was to avoid confrontations was more explicit in the second reason given to me, which was 'to avoid fighting' or, rather, so that people who had fought in drunken brawls could avoid each other. Living apart allows animosities to die down naturally over time as individuals are not forced to see each other every day. In this way, dispersed living was claimed to be more 'peaceable' than living in large settlements.

The importance of independence was shown in other ways as well. An adult Ashéninka man will seldom go to another for advice or help in any matter. I was repeatedly struck by how both men and women would deal with all facets of life without consulting others. All work can be done by single individuals. A man can build a house, cut his *chacra*, make a canoe and hunt and fish alone. Equally, a woman can tend to the garden, look after her children and even give birth on her own. Even in spiritual and medical matters, while some might be respected as knowing more than others, individuals usually started by attending to matters themselves. Women would produce herbal remedies on their own, and I often watched Jorge performing the simple healing acts of blowing smoke on his ill children or sucking at their bellies. In my experience, families could go for days on end without seeing any other individuals and each family unit is self-sufficient in its subsistence needs. In this way Ashéninka social organisation can be seen as centred on the nuclear family, which in everyday life forms the centre of an Ashéninka's world and provides for all of their basic subsistence and social needs.

Such characteristics of Arawakan groups⁴⁶ have led some writers to describe them in terms of negatives: no villages or fixed notions of territory, an absence of clans, lineages or moieties, lack of communal meeting places or communal activities etc. (see Rosengren 1987a: 3), or to analyse them as a 'family level society' (Johnson 2003). However, as Rosengren notes, following both Clastres (1977) and Rivière (1984), "the attention we pay to the absence of [such] characteristics... is often the outcome of our expecting to find them" (Rosengren 1987a: 3). Further, while Ashéninka groups obviously lack any of the overt social institutions visible in other Amazonian groups, such as unilineal descent groups or moieties, to say that the Ashéninka only recognise themselves as members of a small nuclear family would be to misrepresent their view of society. While their everyday subsistence activities centre on individual households, and while macro-social institutions have no formal existence, my informants certainly felt themselves to be part of a wider group of kin, local Ashéninka, and a wider regional Ashéninka – or even Asháninka – group.

In the previous chapter I argued that my informants try to downplay affinal and consanguineal relationships, and rather try to base their relationships on friendship –

⁴⁶ The larger ethnic group that includes all sub-groups of the Asháninka, the Matsiguenga, Nomatsiguenga and Yanesha.

relations characterised by their voluntary nature. Here I analyse some of the forms that keep Ashéninka together. Later in the chapter I will describe the *masateadas* that, I argue, are the centrepiece of Ashéninka sociality. First however, I want to examine in more detail the Ashéninka's ambivalent feelings about kinship. Although kinship relations shape individuals' decisions and interactions, both kinship's formal structuring rules and individuals' personal choices act to produce an essentially flexible system that can ultimately be superseded by relationships of other kinds.

Kinship

Bodley writes that “In my own research I find that the modern Campa are little interested in descent” (Bodley 1971: 65). This echoes my own experience and that of other anthropologists working with Asháninka groups. There are no traces of formal descent groups nor any interest in tracing extended ancestral or genealogical connections. Furthermore, genealogical knowledge in general is best described as ‘shallow’. Bodley argues that this can be seen as a result of the mobility of Asháninka populations and of low life expectancy (*ibid.*). Gow, writing of a similar characteristic among the Piro, argues that rather than seeing this as a ‘failure to accumulate information in deep genealogies’ it is more profitable to view it as a result of the stress that Amazonian peoples put on personal experience in their epistemology. He therefore argues that for Amazonian groups “Kinship is about relations between living people” (Gow 1991: 151). In accordance with Gow's emphasis I want to examine the way that, for the Ashéninka, the importance of connections with people is in lived relationships, based on kinship as well as beyond kinship, which have little to do with tracing long ancestries.

However, it should also be noted that, given the flexibility of the relationships formed between people and in distinction to what has been described in many other Amazonian societies, my informants were always very clear as to how they were related to close family members. None of my informants ever discussed the possibility of ‘partible paternity’ (cf Beckerman & Valentine 2002), and young children would categorically state who their father was, often emphasising that he was not their mother's current husband. Furthermore, my informants were always clear as to their position vis-à-vis close kin and therefore of the marriage prescriptions which would apply. Even if people downplayed relationships based on kinship, they were still aware of these connections. It

is for these reasons that I find it profitable to begin my discussion of kinship by examining the formal structure of the Ashéninka kinship system. My informants spoke of wanting to adhere to the ideal of cross-cousin marriage; as is common elsewhere, there is some degree of negotiation over who can be made to fit into this ideal relationship category. However, in the vast majority of cases, Ashéninka individuals are keen to avoid the social and moral problems that might arise from instigating relations with other kin, and thus fall on a secondary marriage prescription, which is to ‘marry far’.

Table 1 shows the kinship terms used by my Ashéninka informants. It is in general accordance with those published elsewhere (Chevalier 1982: 260, Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 92). In common with many Amazonian kinship systems, the Ashéninka terminology can be classified as a Dravidian type. I have included descriptions of the different individuals to which each term can be applied (see Appendix I for a pictorial outline of these terms).

Table 1.

Kinship terms of address used by male ego

Generation	Consanguine	Affines
G⁺²	charine (FF, MF) isheni (MM, FM) + all of that generation	
G⁺¹	(p)apá (pawa) (F) naana (M) pawachori (FB, MZH) nanaini (MZ, FBW)	konki (MB, WF, FZH) iyoini (FZ, WM, MBW)
G⁰	yeeye (B, MZS, FBS, FZDH, MBDH) choini (Z, MZD, FBD, FZSW, MBSW)	noina (W) ñani (ZH, MBS, FZS, FBDH, MZDH, WB) iinaini (BW, MBD, FZD, FBSW, MZSW, WZ)
G⁻¹	tyomi (S, BS, ZDH) shintyo (D, BD, ZSW)	ñotzi (DH, ZS, BDH) aniryo (SW, ZD, BSW)
G⁻²	charine (FF, MF) isheni (MM, FM) + all of that generation	

Kinship terms of address used by female ego

Generation	Consanguine	Affines
G⁺²	aapi (FF, MF) ameeni (MM, FM) + all of that generation	
G⁺¹	(p)apá (pawa) (F) naana (M) pawaini (FB, MZH) nanaini (MZ, FBW)	kokoini (MB, HF, FZH) ayiini (FZ, HM, MBW)
G⁰	aari (B, MZS, FBS, FZDH, MBDH) eentyo (Z, MZD, FBD, FZSW, MBSW)	noime (H) eemeeni (ZH, MBS, FZS, FBDH, MZDH, HB) atyoini (BW, MBD, FZD, FBSW, MZSW, HZ)
G⁻¹	tyomi (S, ZS, BDH) shintyo (D, ZD, BSW)	ñotzi (ñotzineri) (DH, BS, ZDH) aniryo (newatayero) (SW, BD, ZSW)
G⁻²	aapi (FF, MF) ameeni (MM, FM) + all of that generation	

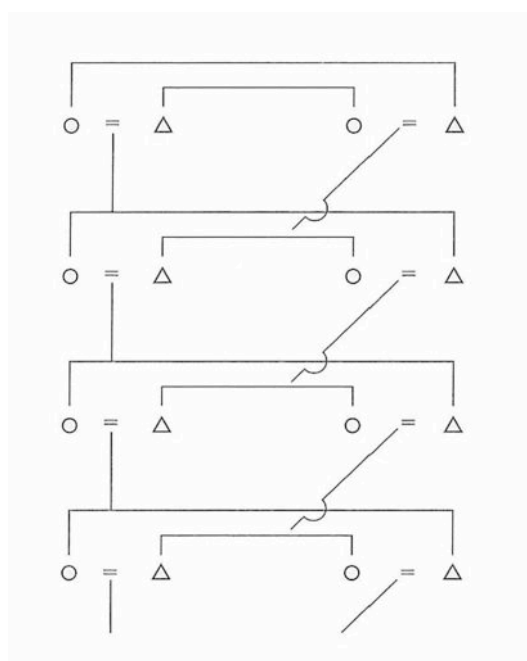
From these tables some common Dravidian characteristics can be observed. First only five generations are recognised: ego's own and the two above and below, with the two furthest generations sharing terms⁴⁷. The fact that no distinction is made between 'affinal' and 'consanguinal' grandparents means that two individuals cannot trace their connections through kinship beyond the second generation, which acts to impose only 'shallow' marriage proscriptions. Further, the similarity of the terms for 'father' and 'father's brother' and 'mother' and 'mother's sister', and the use of the same terms for brother/male parallel cousin and sister/female parallel cousin, reflects the closeness of these relationships. The latter shared terms also point to the most important aspect of Dravidian kinship systems that are characterised by the distinguishing of cross and parallel relatives in ego's generation and the generations immediately preceding and

⁴⁷ Johnson observed during his fieldwork that "In a rather nice bit of symmetry, the kin-term system wraps around after the second generation up or down. That is, grandmother's mother is called 'daughter' because, after all, grandmother = granddaughter, and daughter is the mother of granddaughter" (Johnson, 2003:162). Unfortunately, my fieldsites offered no opportunity to confirm this interesting detail.

following (Keesing 1975: 107). Keesing notes that it is also “often marked by the terminological equivalence of in-laws with those consanguinal relatives who would be identical if cross-cousins consistently married one another” (*ibid.*). As Johnson puts it, “from the outside [the system’s] most striking feature is that it tends to create a symmetrical exchange structure consisting of two families intermarrying endlessly across the generations” (2003: 163).

Figure 1

Two intermarrying lines: the ideal hamlet



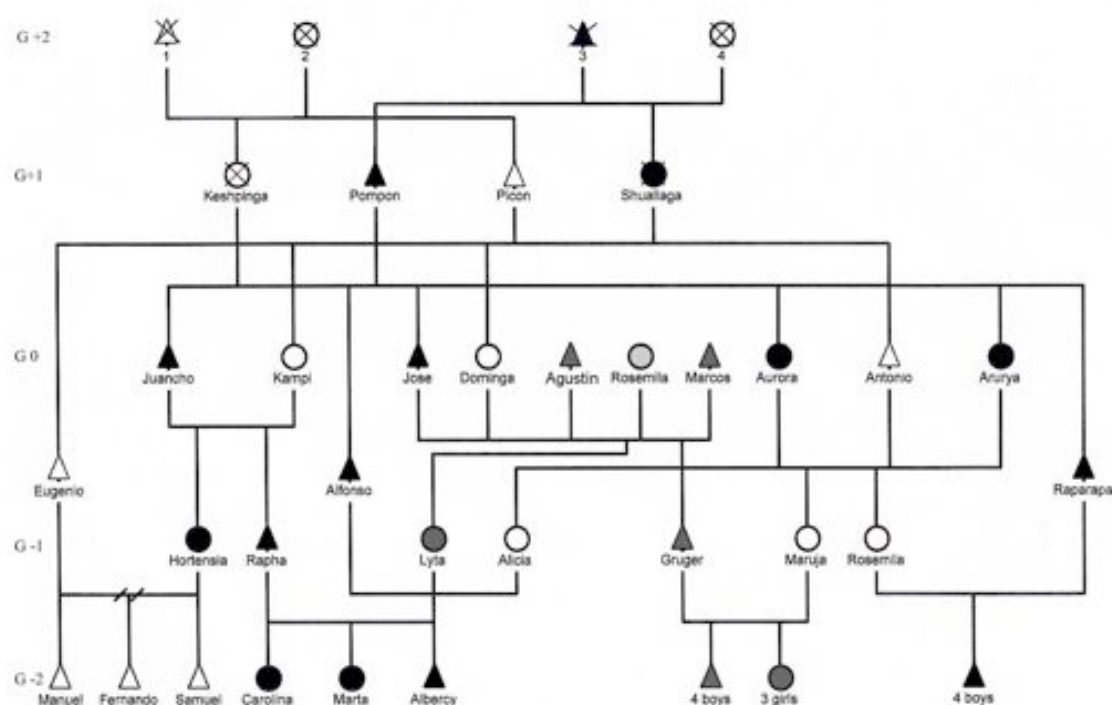
(from Johnson 2003: 163)

Thus, a girl addresses both her MB and FZH as *kokoini* as, according to the system, they should be the same person. The fact that this term carries both connotations of ‘uncle’ and ‘father-in-law’ was illustrated by the fact that my informants would use the Spanish terms ‘*tio*’ (‘uncle’) and ‘*suegro*’ (‘father-in-law’) interchangeably, calling their father-in-law ‘*tio*’ even when that man was not their real uncle. Even when *mestizos* ridiculed this usage, my informants found it difficult to make a distinction between the two terms. In the same manner, *yeeye*, and the Spanish term *hermano* (‘brother’), were used by men for all male siblings, parallel cousins and husbands of cross-cousins, while *ñani* and *cuñado* (‘brother-in-law’) are used for all cross-cousins, and husbands of sisters.

Other writers have noted that while cross-cousin marriage is the ‘ideal’ form, it only occurs in a minority of cases. For Bodley, it occurred in 1% of the 800 marriages he studied (Bodley 1971: 71). In my own fieldsites, of the 93 relationships that I was able to study, 7 were between cross-cousins. Of these, four were within two intermarrying lines that over three generations had become very close to the ideal laid out in Johnson’s diagram (compare Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 2

Genealogy of the Picon and Rojas families



(Shading shows descent followed through the male line: Picon – white, Rojas – black)

As can be seen, the two couples in the +1 generation exchanged siblings⁴⁸. In the 0 generation, two men from the Rojas line⁴⁹ (Jose and Juancho) took wives from the Picon line, while one male Picon (Antonio) took two Rojas sisters as his wives. In the following generation (–1), however, the system started to break down and three men from the preceding generation (Eugenio, Alfonso and Raparapa) took their sisters’ daughters

⁴⁸ This may well have also been a cross-cousin exchange but I had no way of determining the pre-existing relationship between the couples in the +2 generation prior to the marriage of their children.

⁴⁹ I use the surnames Picon and Rojas to delineate the two lineages. These were the Spanish surnames used by the younger generations although they were not entirely consistent in their usage, according to European conceptions.

(cross-nieces) in marriage. The father of two of these girls, Antonio Picon, lamented to me that it was 'bad' of his brother-in-laws to have done this. However, these unions did seem to be generally accepted. Chevalier notes that in Puerto Davis cross-niece marriages were acceptable (Chevalier 1982: 299) and my informants' tolerance of the relationships was certainly in contrast to the much stronger negative reactions I encountered towards any suggestions of possible unions with parallel nieces, i.e. classificatory 'daughters'.

In this family, we can see the apparently ideal kinship relationships being played out. Two families are involved in a long-term relation that, in effect, makes them one shared family. In this case, marriage seems to fit Lévi-Strauss' axiom of being both 'bilateral' and 'symmetrical' (1969: 130). Practically, this means that both men and women can remain close to their natal homes. And yet this family also shows why this system can never work perfectly or, at least, not for very long. After just one generation the prescriptions must be enlarged to include cross-nieces and then, within two generations, the whole becomes too unruly and the prescriptions too overlapping to foster the continuation of the system. Thus the majority of children are forced to seek their marriage partners from outside of the kinship obligations altogether.

In the preference for cross-cousin marriage and then the actual choices of these marrying uncles and nieces, we can again see how the prescription to 'marry those different from self' interacts with individuals' own fears of the unknown (see Chapter Two). Cross-cousins offer the best solution to this problem, for even as they fit indigenous conceptions of difference, the fact that a couple's parents are siblings means that the children hold something in common and are likely to already know each other. The fact that personal preference underlies these apparently prescribed choices is further illustrated by the fact that where actual cross-cousins are not available, and even in the face of social stigma, individuals manipulate normative behaviour to marry those they know, rather than face the prospect of finding unknown individuals. As I showed in the case of Benjamin and Daisy in Chapter Two, young men, who are expected to leave their natal area to find suitable brides, find such a prospect daunting. However, even these attempts to manipulate marriage rules can only work for so long, before the inter-relations become so overlapping, and the relationships so close, that individuals are left with no choice but to find suitable partners elsewhere.

The possible complications of the situation are evidenced in the Rojas-Picon families by the relationship between Lyta and Rapha in the -1 generation. Lyta's parents are Rosemila and Agustin. Agustin has a second, younger wife called Dominga. Lyta should call her *nanaini* (mother's sister) which means that she should also address Kampi (Dominga's sister) as *nanaini*. Following this logic, Lyta's marriage to Rapha would be considered incestuous (a woman should not marry her parallel aunt's son). Unfortunately I never took note of what term Lyta actually used to address Dominga. However, the fact that Lyta and Rapha's relationship was accepted shows the limits to the logic of the system. Rather than seeing this as the breaking down of a Dravidian system, I instead want to argue that such problems connect with the Ashéninka's secondary marriage prescription, which is 'to marry far'. They should also be seen in the light of the Ashéninka's broader downplaying of kinship relations. Before we turn to this idea, however, I want to expand the discussion to include the less formal and more negotiable aspects of Ashéninka kinship.

Lived Kinship

[The genealogical construction of the Matsiguenga] can be considered a 'pure' logical elaboration of the Dravidian model only when divorced from practice; in fact, it exists, and goes on existing, by virtue of its modes of elaboration, incorporation, and operation, which are peculiar to a specific social body in the real world (Renard-Casevitz 1998: 244).

If, as we have seen, kinship ties can be regarded as 'shallow', they are also 'wide'. Many times I watched a visitor to a *Comunidad* being waylaid for a conversation which would centre on where he had come from and what kinship connections he had both in his own area and in the one he was visiting. Inevitably, some link between the resident and the visitor would be found and the correct terms of address decided upon. These terms would depend firstly upon whether they were affinally or consanguinely related and then on what relative generations they belonged to. Finally, one of the men would say something like '*estamos cuñados*' (we are brothers-in-law) and the matter would be settled. This decision was less one of logical precision than one of pragmatic negotiation. Thus, men of the same age, even if they were technically two generations apart, would find a way to connect themselves through their membership of the same generation, while any logically incestuous connections would be ignored in favour of less morally problematic

terms. When the visitor was then introduced to other people in the *Comunidad* he could start from this already negotiated point to work out what to call other people⁵⁰.

Renard-Casevitz argues that the differentiation of male and female perspectives on kinship relations further facilitates such negotiation of kinship lines. In particular, she argues that it provides potential spouses with two ‘constantly privileged parallel paths’ through either of which they can choose to draw their pre-existing kinship relation (*ibid.*: 247). She gives an example of one couple for whom the ‘neutralized’ anthropologist’s version of their relationship deemed it to be a ‘cross-generational incestuous relation’. Renard-Casevitz argues that “this neutralized version does not exist for them” and the two individuals trace their relations in such a way as to classify themselves as marriageable.

In this case, it is no exaggeration to speak of the relativity of incest. That is to say, in several cases, it exists only from a point of view that is irrelevant for the society and that the anthropologist introduces, thereby disregarding the double language that socially constitutes the domain of kinship (*ibid.*: 249).

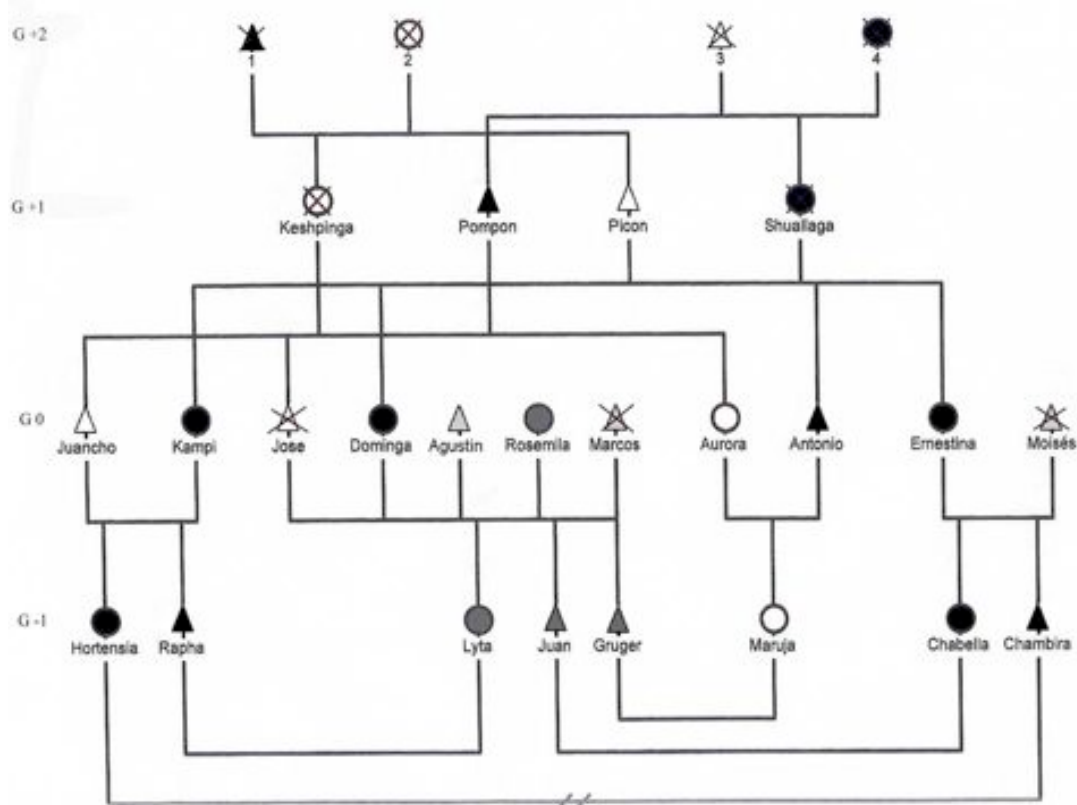
Figure 3 shows some of the same individuals as Figure 2. However, I now wish to emphasise some of the problems which the multiple kin relations between the two main families causes as regards kinship terms. In the centre of the genealogy are three siblings: Lyta, Juan and Gruger. They are maternal siblings. Juan and Gruger’s father, Marcos, was an outsider who died when they were young. Their mother, Rosemila, then married another outsider, Agustin, with whom she had Lyta and four other children. Some time later, Agustin took a second wife, Dominga – a daughter of the Rojas line. Prior to Agustin’s second marriage, Juan and Gruger had no kin relations with either the Picon or Rojas lines (their mother’s family having moved into the area relatively recently as well). As such, their choice of marriage partners in the area was not much proscribed. Juan first chose to marry Chabella Rojas. At this point, and following kinship logic,

⁵⁰ This desire to find a kinship connection, related to the fact that my informants disliked using or disclosing personal names, appears to be an Asháninka-wide phenomenon. Johnson (2003: 9-10) makes a similar observation amongst the Matsigenka. While it also attests to the fact that individuals were aware of kinship connections, once agreed upon, these terms made little difference to how individuals were actually treated. The use of kinship terms was thus not related to attempts to pull a visitor into a web of kinship obligations. As I noted in Chapter 2, and will maintain below, my informants rather tried to link outsiders into relations based on friendship.

Gruger might have married one of Chabella's sisters. This would have made relationships between the two brothers and their wives straightforward. However, Gruger instead married Maruja from the 'Picon' line. This choice, from the anthropologist's point of view, makes kinship between the two couples and their surrounding families rather complicated. Juan must call Maruja *iiñaini* (sister-in-law) and her parents should therefore be *konki* and *iyoini*. However, Antonio, Juan's 'father-in-law', is also Ernestina's, (his 'mother-in-law's') brother, whom he should address as '*pawachori*' (parallel uncle). In reality, however, all of these logical complications were completely ignored in everyday life. Each brother called his brother's wife *iiñaini*, but then traced all other relations through his own wife, thus effectively ignoring the other consanguinal relationships that could be drawn.

Figure 3

Genealogy of the Rojas and Picon families drawn through the female line



(Shading shows descent followed through the female line: Picon – white, Rojas – black)

Lyta's relationship with Rapha followed similar lines as, initially, it fitted well with Juan's relationship to Chabella, Rapha's parallel cousin, but not with Gruger's to Maruja. These relationships were, however, made even more complicated by Agustin's relationship with Dominga. I shall examine this pairing further in Chapter Four when I discuss polygamy and leadership. Here, I wish to dwell on the complications that this marriage again appears to cause amongst the pre-existing relationships. In effect, it now makes Juan and Lyta's relationships logically incestuous (between parallel cousins, given that Rapha's and Chabella's mothers, Kampi and Ernestina, are Lyta's stepmother's (Dominga's) sisters)⁵¹. Again, however, the implications of all of this were tacitly ignored and individuals called others by the most obvious and immediately acceptable kinship term. For example, Dominga was called *nanaini* by all of Agustin's children, who thus ignored her kin relations to their spouses⁵². What all of this rather detailed discussion points to is that while such anthropologically specific analysis is based on the logic of the system as outlined by my Ashéninka informants, in fact most of the time they choose to ignore such detailed specifics and instead pragmatically concentrate on the social aspects of the relationships themselves. As Rosengren writes amongst the Matsiguenga, "[kinship] rules... are primarily not employed to attain regularized ideal social relations but rather to articulate and legitimize already existing relations" (1987a: 117).

This indicates the flexibility of kinship relations that has been well established in anthropological theory (see Schneider 1980, Strathern 1992a and 1992b, Carsten 2000 and 2004). There is, however, some limit to these renegotiations. In Figure 3 this is shown by the relationship between Chambira and Hortensia (on either side of the figure in the -1 generation). Both of these two individuals were in marriages with outsiders with whom they had a number of children. However, there was a recurring rumour that they often engaged in sexual relations and that Hortensia's baby, born during my fieldwork, was in fact Chambira's. It was this fact that was said to have precipitated Hortensia's husband to move their household to a more distant location. While one might have assumed that the problem was one of marital infidelity, and from Hortensia's husband's point of view this was indeed the reason for moving her away,

⁵¹ Conversely, it could be argued that it was actually Agustin's relationship to Dominga that was incestuous, as he was marrying his daughter's mother-in-law's sister, who he should technically have called *choini* (sister).

⁵² Unfortunately, I never observed the terms that Rapha and Chabella used towards Dominga, i.e. *iyoini/ayiini* (mother-in-law) or *nanaini* (maternal aunt).

when I questioned other people about the problem with this relationship, asking why Chambira and Hortensia did not just move in together, they invariably told me that it was because ‘she is his sister (parallel-cousin)’. As can be seen from Figure 3, this is unambiguously the case as their mothers are sisters. Here, then, we find the limit of the Ashéninka’s willingness to negotiate with kinship terms and rules⁵³. And yet even in this clear-cut case, no social sanctions were ever obviously imposed on these two and they would still often meet in larger social settings.

Rosengren similarly describes a case of brother-sister marriage in which no action had been taken against the transgressors and which instead people excused by saying that the couple had been forced to commit incest because they lived in isolation. Instead of overt social sanctions, Rosengren argues that ‘the feeling expressed was rather that of horror for the fate awaiting them’ in terms of supernatural sanctions (Rosengren 1987a: 122). Rosengren thus argues that, in contrast to Lévi-Strauss’s assertion that with regard to incest ‘a person cannot do just what he pleases’ (1969: 43), “apparently, a Matsigenka can do just what he or she pleases, however, at his or her own risk” (Rosengren 1987a: 121). This explanation seems to account for Chambira and Hortensia’s relationship, above, and fits with Ashéninka notions that it is up to individuals to make their own decisions and choose to live as they please.

However, even with this apparent flexibility, the majority of my informants still expressed anxiety about entering into such relationships themselves. Older people, while never publicly questioning a couple’s relationship, would nevertheless discuss its incestuous nature at length with others, as Antonio Picon did with me over the marriages of his own daughters. Furthermore, young people themselves often told me whom they should not marry. On many occasions I sat with young men as they lamented over the lack of young women available to them. When I suggested seemingly appropriate girls, they would tell me about the kinship connections between the girl and themselves and thus their incompatibility. On at least two occasions after such a conversation as in the case of Benjamin and Daisy discussed earlier, a partnership ensued, but the young men involved suggested that it was only ‘until I find another

⁵³ This also shows the limits on the flexibility offered by the privileging of either maternal or paternal kinship ties that was mentioned above and as noted by Renard-Casevitz (1998:247). The fact of Chambira’s father’s outsider status was not enough to mask the actual sibling relationship between Chambira’s and Hortensia’s mothers.

woman’. At this point, it is important to turn from studying the Ashéninka’s attempts to fit the ‘ideal’ marriage rule of cross-cousin marriage to focus instead on the types of relationships that characterise the majority of actual marriages. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the 93 marriage relationships that I was able to study. Of these, only 19% were formed between two individuals with any known prior kinship. Half of these were considered to be non-incestuous by my informants, meaning that only 6 relationships actually fell outside of preferred marriage rules. Finally, the vast majority (81% of all partnerships) were between unrelated individuals, 50% of the total being to partners from completely outside local kin and social networks. This is similar to Bodley’s findings that “there is no strict local group exogamy ‘law’ but instead a *de facto* exogamy” (Bodley 1971: 73).

Table 2

Analysis of Ashéninka marriages in terms of partners’ prior relationship⁵⁴

Outsider		Unrelated Ashéninka	Related Ashéninka			
Non-Ashéninka Outsider	Ashéninka Outsider	Unrelated	Affinally Related	Related	Cross-Uncle	Cross-Cousin
6	40	29	5	2	4	7
7%	43%	31%	5%	2%	4%	8%
50%		31%	19%			

(Total of 93 relationships)

This evidence suggests, firstly, that Ashéninka individuals are keen to avoid ‘incestuous’ relations and, secondly, that the emphasis on cross-cousin marriage can be said to act as a proscriptive rather than prescriptive marriage rule. By limiting the number of available ‘ideal’ candidates and by prohibiting marriage with other available partners, the system works to encourage individuals to look beyond the immediate confines of their social world.

Thus, this apparently ‘prescriptive’ marriage rule, which earlier anthropologists (cf Lévi-Strauss 1969) might have seen as affirming an ongoing exchange alliance between two families, can actually be understood as working against such long-term and essentially

⁵⁴ In making a distinction between ‘related’ and ‘unrelated’ Ashéninka, I class as ‘unrelated’ all those couples for whom no specific kinship relationship was noted.

unstable relationships, instead putting emphasis on the gaining of *new* affines. As the affines of ego's parents are not simply his affines but also his maternal uncles and paternal aunts, the system can be seen to encourage the seeking of new relationships with what might be seen as 'true' affines: those whose relationship of affinity is not masked or neutralized by consanguinity (Viveiros de Castro 2001: 24). With this observation we return to the importance, noted by Viveiros de Castro and others, of affinity – 'virtual affinity' (*ibid.*: n38) or difference – in Amazonian thought, and how it shapes cultural practices. The apparently prescriptive cross-cousin marriage rule, rather than promoting an on-going and closed exchange relationship between a select group of families, can instead be seen to promote exogamy. By narrowing the prescription so tightly on who can marry whom, subsequent generations are soon left with little choice but to find new marriage partners outside of the immediate area. At this point, the secondary marriage prescription comes into play. My informants told me that when no one suitable was available in the immediate area then a person '*debe casarse lejos*' ('should marry far') (see also Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 91).

It is this rule that the majority of my informants had actually followed. As I noted above, in fully 50% of all of the marriages I studied one of the partners had come from a completely unrelated family. If this attests to the importance that indigenous Amazonians place on difference in conjugal relationships, then I believe it also links to the argument I made in the previous chapter, that the Ashéninka seek to reduce their consanguinal relations, rather than draw others into ever close bonds based on kinship. For my informants, reinforcing kinship relations was seen as likely to lead to increased problems and potential conflict between individuals. Thus, while on the one hand there is an ideal that two families should be able to exchange their children over succeeding generations, there is equally the pragmatic view that such closeness is likely to lead to problems.

In this first part of the chapter I have shown how the Ashéninka do recognise kinship relations. In particular such relations are important for young individuals deciding on prospective marriage partners. The 'ideal' marriage partner is a cross-cousin and a few couples in Pijuayal conformed to this prescriptive marriage rule. However, in a close analysis of the relationships between individuals from the two families involved in this apparent 'exchange', it became clear that such prescriptive rules acted to prevent many

couples from marrying. This was because the inter-marriage of members of families in preceding generations meant that the current generation of prospective partners found themselves to be too related to marry. In this situation many of my informants had fallen back on the secondary marriage rule which is to marry far: to find partners from outside of immediate kinship and social connections. This imperative fits well with the Ashéninka's preference to downplay close kinship connections, shown in the last chapter, and means that there are a large proportion of outsiders in any given group of households. It is these in-marrying, usually male, outsiders for whom the shared sociality at *masateadas* is important and who there form relationships between each other based on equality and voluntariness, rather than on pre-existing affinal connections.

I shall move on to a closer analysis of *masateadas* in a moment but first I will discuss an institution that is vital in giving young people access to unknown areas and people, and hence the ability to 'marry far': the system of *ayompari* trading partners.

Ayompari

In the past, the main mechanism for allowing young men access to suitably distant brides was the system of *ayompari* trading partners. This system involved two men from geographically distant areas forming an alliance based on the trading of scarce goods⁵⁵. For example, one man, who might live close to *tsiviari*, the mountain within Asháninka territory that contained natural salt deposits, would offer this rare commodity perhaps asking for pottery, tools or a *cushma* (a woven, cotton robe) in return. Early missionary accounts from the 17th century attest to the antiquity of this system and suggest it was of pre-Columbian origin (Tibesar 1981). They also show that the network seemed to encompass huge areas of Asháninka territory, stretching out from *tsiviari* in the Chanchamayo valley, down the tributary rivers of the Pachitea and Ucayali as well as up into the high jungle where the presence of bronze axes and other Incan artefacts attest to relations with the Inca (*ibid.*). This widespread network can be understood to have kept widely dispersed Asháninka peoples relatively well connected, thus maintaining a degree of cultural homogeneity throughout the population.

⁵⁵ There seems to have been a degree of specialisation in this network of exchange with groups of people in different areas known for their ability to manufacture or obtain particular objects. Such trade networks and specialisation have been described throughout Amazonia (Hugh-Jones 1992:59 and Fisher 2000:20) and have been discussed in terms of the relationships that it draws separate groups into allowing interaction even between those that are otherwise hostile (see Descola 1996:160).

As I noted in the previous chapter, the status of *ayompari* granted individuals ‘a legitimate non-kin, non-enemy identity’ (Bodley 1972: 595). Bodley further suggests that this made it possible for individuals to travel ‘through potentially hostile regions’ (Bodley 1971: 51). During my fieldwork I was often astounded by the distances travelled by seemingly random visitors. A number of people made the three day trek over the hills from the Pachitea valley (see Map 2) and many more arrived having canoed and walked down from the upper reaches and side tributaries of the Ucayali. Of these, most tended to be unmarried young men who, while they would not specifically admit to me that they were looking for possible partners, were often teased about such things. Often they would have never been to the area before, nor did they know anyone directly, but they usually knew *of* someone for whom they would ostensibly be searching. This was generally some acquaintance of their father’s who could be understood as the equivalent of his *ayompari*. In contemporary Pijuayal, where timbermen have become the main sources of goods, formal *ayompari* relationships were no longer in evidence between Ashéninka men (I discuss this further in Chapter Five, where I also suggest that the timbermen themselves have taken on some of the roles and functions of *ayompari* trading partners). However, the idea can be seen to have lived on in the fact that long-distance travel was still undertaken and incoming strangers were similarly accepted. As I noted at the end of the previous chapter, the Ashéninka have a cultural code of generosity to strangers and this is relied upon and enacted to facilitate these movements. If searching for ‘friends’ of their fathers gives young men an accepted reason for travelling, then they can also rely upon the generosity of others to provide for their needs wherever they arrive.

The *ayompari* relation, based as it is on friendship rather than kinship connections, thus offers young men the perfect solution to their problem of finding unrelated women from far away, with whom they nonetheless have some connection. *Masateadas* in each area then offer these young couples a chance to meet and get to know one another before forming an enduring and independent conjugal pair.

More generally, what the *ayompari* system and kinship rules suggest is that in contrast to the conclusions of such writers as Johnson (2003), Ashéninka groups, even while they place importance on independence and self-sufficiency, do participate in wider social institutions beyond their immediate family. Kinship can be seen to shape marriage

choices, and thus to lend some structure to a seemingly disordered society. As I have shown, however, rules encouraging cross-cousin marriage in fact limit such choices. Individuals are therefore forced to look beyond all local acquaintances to seek out completely unrelated partners. This idea of ‘marrying far’ acts to draw new individuals into an area. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, people were not concerned with drawing incoming outsiders into consanguineal-like relations, but rather preferred to keep all relations at a certain point of remove. Hence, Ashéninka society can be seen to work at levels beyond the immediate family, and to do so by forcing local groups to make connections with those from further away. If the *ayompari* system can be seen as a way of drawing potentially threatening others into relationships based on friendship, then local *masateadas* can be understood as doing the same thing for both outsiders and actual kin. It is to this institution that I turn next.

Masato and Sociality

In all my time with the Ashéninka, the likely presence of *masato* in a house was always my biggest concern. Towards the end of my fieldwork it became the biggest constraint on my research as I grew increasingly loath to visit houses, knowing that if there was someone at home I would probably be invited to share a drink. I had realised early on in my fieldwork the significance of *masato* for sociality amongst the Ashéninka and the importance of accepting it in order not to offend. Meanwhile my informants never understood my ambivalence towards it and quickly learnt all my tricks for trying to avoid it. The worst scenario, from my point of view, was when Edith, the mother of the house, started to prepare large quantities of the beer as I knew that this heralded a *minga* or *masateada* in our house from which I would have no means of escape (see photos on Plate III of a *masateada* in progress).

Edith and her daughters would start preparing the *masato* a few days in advance. First they carried basketfuls of the manioc tubers from the garden back to the house where they proceeded to peel and wash it. Then they cut it into chunks and boiled these in a large pot over the fire. Each successive load of manioc was then mashed together in a large wooden trough and allowed to cool a little. At this point, the women and girls scooped up globs of the paste to put in their mouths and chew. The well masticated paste was then spat back out and replaced by more. This process continued for some time and then the trough, full of masticated manioc mash, was covered with banana

leaves and left for several days to ferment. It was technically drinkable immediately but the optimal time for its consumption was usually after three or four days, when it had developed a tall, foamy head and before it became too acidic. At this point, a space was made in the mash into which water was poured. This water was then mixed around with the fermented mash and then a basket pushed into it. The basket acted as a strainer, to filter out the more solid parts of the mix, and a bowlful was then drawn from its centre to be served. This was repeated again and again until the liquid drawn lost its taste and potency. The remnants were then discarded.

If a *minga* was planned then people who had been told in the preceding days would start arriving early, soon after dawn. Upon arrival, they were immediately served several bowlfuls of *masato* until they had had their fill. As each new person arrived he or she was served immediately and then a round was made of those already there. Only a limited number of bowls, and sometimes only one, would be used. The server thus went to each person in turn proffering a bowl and then waiting until that individual had drained it before offering them more or moving on to the next person. Food might or might not be served, depending on the luck of the man of the house in the previous days' hunting and fishing⁵⁶. After an hour or two, at around 9am, the working party would move off to engage in whatever activity the host wanted them for. The majority of *mingas* were held for men in the *chacra*, usually preparing a new plot by cutting undergrowth and felling trees. A male *minga* might also involve house-building or log-rolling. Where only men were working they would often have been accompanied to the house by their wives and children and the women would then stay behind at the house talking and drinking all day. Only the wife of the host's household or two of the oldest daughters would accompany the men to serve them the beer throughout the *minga*. If it was a *minga* for women, generally held to help weed a *chacra*, plant or harvest, then husbands were less likely to accompany their wives to the host house, leaving the women to drink together. Occasionally, a joint *minga* would be held in which both men and women were involved. These would invariably be the most sociable of events.

⁵⁶ Unlike some Amazonian groups, such as the Barasana (Hugh-Jones 1995), there is no restriction amongst the Ashéninka on eating and drinking *masato* at the same time. This reflects the deeper difference that, for the Ashéninka, *masato* is not considered to be different from other everyday food items.

Throughout the work, *masato* was regularly passed around, with one person, usually a woman from the host household, designated as the server. She passed from person to person with a bucketful of the beer, serving them a bowlful each. In addition, breaks occurred every so often with people sitting and chatting while more beer was served. In the hot sun of a cleared *chacra* and under the physical strain of the work, the *masato*'s effect was potent and many would start to show signs of drunkenness quite early in the day. In this manner the work rate decreased and some individuals would stop work altogether and just sit chatting. Sometime in the afternoon the work would be halted and all would return to the house to continue drinking. Again, food might be served but the emphasis was always on the quantity of beer. People might grumble over a lack of food, but they would not even attend if there was not enough *masato*.

This part of the day was the most important as people could get down to the serious task of getting drunk. Weiss wrote that “the ideal psychic state of the [Ashéninka] is one of inebriation” (1974: 397), and my informants certainly would have agreed with him. At this point, any sense of restraint was abandoned. There was now no respite from the servers, who made continuous rounds of the house and patio on which everyone was arranged. The servers demanded the emptying of the large bowls that they presented to each person, ridiculing them loudly if they did not finish it quickly and making it impossible for individuals to drink more slowly, or to avoid it altogether⁵⁷. Eventually someone would find a drum or cane flute and start playing, or increasingly commonly, a young man would be sent off to get his stereo and deals would be struck as to who would provide batteries for it. In this way, the drinking was accompanied by endlessly repetitive melodies and beats, or the distorted and wrangled sound of cacophonous popular Andean music. Some might be induced to dance in rhythmic step with the beat, as other people succumbed to the drink and crumpled into sleeping heaps. As the evening wore on some started to slip away, while others merely left to void the contents of their stomachs in order to enable them to return and drink more. Sometimes the evening might end as the beer became too weak, stereo batteries ran out or people just decided not to continue, but generally it could go on well into the night until everyone

⁵⁷ There seems to be some variation in precisely how manioc beer is made and distributed among Asháninka, and other neighbouring groups. In the Pajonal, women serve men, who then pass the bowl to the man next to them. Piro women always directly serve their guests, who drink as slowly as they want before they handing back the bowl (Gow, personal communication). These variations seem to suggest deeper differences in social and political terms and would be an interesting issue for future study.

but the children had fallen into a drunken stupor. They might even awake in the pre-dawn of the next day and continue on.

More straightforward '*masateadas*' were also held, with the holder always denying any special reason for holding one. In these, the behaviour was the same as during *minga*, except that people might arrive a little later in the morning and, as there was no work to be done, the drinking started in earnest from the outset. Veber notes that the intent of drinking is 'to get solidly drunk to the point of falling into a stupor and then staying there for as long as possible' and how this can be contrasted with the notion in Western societies, 'that a person should be able to control him/herself at all times, know when to stop drinking and never get intoxicated to the point of losing his/her good manners' (Veber 2000: 24). For me, such events quickly became tiresome, as all sensible conversation became impossible and it was increasingly hard to keep up with the heavy amount of drinking (cf. Campbell 1995: 103, Descola 1996: 257). I believe however, that these *masateadas* and *mingas* offer important insights into the nature of Ashéninka sociality.

The Idea of *Minga*

My impression during my first few weeks was that the shared labour during *minga* was its defining aspect. As such, I started to consider analyses of it in terms of the spreading out and sharing of specific labour-intensive activities and to focus on the obvious act of reciprocity in terms of the labour itself. According to my ideas, the Ashéninka would have long practised such reciprocal work parties, with only the name *minga* being a recent import. Later, however, I realised that while many of these arguments fit well with the way that *minga* is carried out amongst some, mainly *mestizo*, members of La Selva, in Pijuayal it is the labour that has been added onto the older institution of *masateadas*. Older ethnographies make no reference to shared agricultural labour activities, saying that informal groups only occurred for long treks and large hunting parties. In those cases, the main social gatherings occurred as 'monthly nocturnal feasts where they drink *masato*, sing, and dance in the central clearings' (Varese 2002: 26, see also Bodley 1971: 79). In the past, these seem to have occurred on the evening of the full

moon and to have lasted a number of days, until the food and beer supplies ran out⁵⁸. The infrequent nature of these gatherings and their informal character may explain their relative lack of discussion in past ethnographies, which only ever make cursory mention of them, without offering a fuller analysis. For example Weiss writes that “it is the intense, albeit transitory, institution of the manioc beer party or festival that we find the reigning diversion of the recreational organization” (Weiss 1974: 397). Yet, while recognising the importance of this institution, he refrains from discussing it further.

With respect to this issue, it is important to note that *minga*, rather than being important in terms of shared and reciprocated labour was, in fact, just a new transformation of the old *masateadas*. My first evidence that this was the case occurred a few months after I first arrived in Pijuayal. I was looking through vocabulary lists that I had earlier written up to help me learn their language. At one point I came across an entry that gave the Ashéninka for ‘*minga*’ as ‘*piarentsi*’. This, I now knew, was actually the Ashéninka word for *masato*. At the time, I crossed the words out in frustration at my informants, but later, as I questioned them about the ‘real’ translation of the word ‘*minga*’ and often got the same amused answer, I realised that this really was a fair translation. Usually when a man made the rounds of the other houses to invite people to his house, he expressed it in terms of ‘drinking *masato*’. On being questioned, he would often refuse to admit that anything other than drinking would occur. A number of times, I was caught out, turning up to a house without my machete to find everyone preparing for work, or turning up with a machete to find that no work was expected. Equally, there was never any ill feeling if someone turned up for a time to drink and then did not work, or turned up after the work had finished. Instead, the biggest complaint was when people did not come at all, or when they did not stay long enough to enjoy in the shared libations. If this central importance of shared drinking rather than shared working is accepted, then my second task is to show why *masato* and its associated *masateadas* are of such importance in Ashéninka society.

Although the role of manioc beer as a ‘special substance’ has been discussed for other Amazonian societies (see Hugh-Jones 1995 for the Barasana and Descola 1996 for the

⁵⁸ Weiss questions whether such ‘festivals of the moon’ ever actually existed as such, and rather suggests that ‘there is evidence to suggest that it was the missionaries who limited these festivals among their converts to once a month at the time of the full moon’ (Weiss 1975:468).

Achuar), amongst the Ashéninka, the only extended reference is Santos-Granero's important study of the Yanesha people on the Palcazu and Perene rivers. In this work he seeks to reconstruct what he refers to as 'the [Yanesha] priest/temple complex' (1991: 121). One important aspect of this religious institution was to perform rituals in which specially brewed manioc beer was offered to the Yanesha divinities and, in particular, *Yompor Ror* who was believed to have breathed life into all beings. Santos-Granero argues that this ceremony can be seen as an act of reciprocity where "while the divinities feed the Yanesha in a physical sense by having created and by perpetuating all kinds of nourishment, the Yanesha feed their divinities in a metaphysical way by sharing their food with them every time they eat." (*ibid*: 142). While amongst the Ashéninka there is no evidence of such elaborate rituals, *masato* can be seen to have a high degree of symbolic importance as a substance that can be shared. I have already described how Ashéninka households are independent and self-sufficient and how, unlike in other Amazonian communities, food is seldom shared between separate households. When a man returns from a successful hunt he may send out meat to certain households but there is neither a sense of expectation nor censure if sharing does not occur. Men were also often at pains to reject offered meat caught by another man and would leave a house when food was being prepared⁵⁹. Instead of food becoming the exchange good *par excellence*, for the Ashéninka it is the sharing of *masato* that helps to maintain social bonds. In a society in which there are no ritual or ancestral institutions binding groups together, I would argue that the sharing of *masato* performs the vital function of forming connections between disparate households. However, owing to the voluntary nature of attendance at *masateadas* it also allows individuals to choose how, when and with whom, they want to form connections. This fits with my argument in the last chapter that the Ashéninka prefer to form equal and voluntary relationships with others, rather than those based on kinship ties.

A brief perusal of the literature on reciprocity and 'the gift' shows the important links between institutions based on reciprocity and the maintenance of societies. Sahlins writes that:

⁵⁹ This often put me in a difficult position when Jorge, the head of the household where I lived, would refuse to eat meat that I had exchanged with another man, even when he had not eaten meat for a number of days. This would force me to sit and chew on large bones while Jorge sat beside me eating only manioc. Luckily, his wife and daughters showed much less compunction and would readily help me to finish any meat I had obtained.

A great proportion of primitive exchange... has as its decisive function this latter, instrumental one: the material flow underwrites or initiates social relations. Thus do primitive peoples transcend the Hobbesian chaos... So peacemaking is not a sporadic intersocietal event, it is a continuous process going on within society itself (1972: 186).

Sillitoe, in his ethnography of the Wola of Papua New Guinea, argues that “exchange plays a fundamental part in maintaining order in this otherwise too flimsily structured society” (Sillitoe 1979: vii). Sillitoe notes that the Wola, like the Ashéninka, value independence and self-sufficiency. The problem this presents for their effective social organisation is solved through reciprocity: “in the absence of established sociological mechanisms for encouraging co-operation in an acephalous society, it is the exchange of wealth which gives order to Wola social life” (*ibid.*). Sillitoe further argues that “To give and to receive are sociable acts which require order and co-operation – no social exchange means no interaction, which means no social relationships and hence no society.” (*ibid.*: 170). Amongst the Wola, as in many Papua New Guinean societies, reciprocity takes on an institutionalised and specific form where particular goods are exchanged in specific formalised settings. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the prestige gained from giving away much and of therefore making apparent one’s wealth. Amongst the Ashéninka, in contrast, this formalisation is absent. However, the importance of the *masateadas* is precisely in their shared and reciprocal nature. Here there is a parallel with the Sherpa of Nepal, a similarly ‘atomised’ society, for whom Ortner wrote that “Hospitality is the most generalized form of ‘being social’... Enacted time and again... hospitality is the central ‘ritual’ of secular social relations” (1978: 62).

For the Ashéninka, I have shown that kinship cannot be seen as creating enduring bonds that are enacted in everyday life, but that rather relationships based purely on kinship are always downplayed. Instead, it is the sharing of *masato* and the endless holding and attendance at *masateadas* that must be understood as forming the central link between disparate nuclear families. For example, when an Ashéninka couple holds a *masateada* or *minga* the man will go around neighbouring households inviting others to come and drink with him. No one is excluded from this invitation, and the inevitable limits on invitations owe more to the physical distances between houses than to social separations. Following the general rule of unilateral generosity amongst the Ashéninka,

anyone arriving at a *masateada* will be welcomed. Underlying this generosity to all is the expectation that it will be reciprocated by all other households over time – and that individuals would similarly be welcomed when visiting other areas. Furthermore, it is not just that invitations should be reciprocated but, given that anyone is welcome to join in the act of drinking, the person attending could be said to be ‘giving’ the holder his or her own social presence. At one level, reciprocation occurs in the very act of being present, which means that hosts are similarly obligated to return their own presence at the *masateadas* of others. This is what had confused me in my analysis of the importance of *minga*, in which the emphasis seemed to be on the reciprocation of attendance. This, I now realise, was not in terms of ‘I helped him with his work, now he must help me with mine’, but rather ‘I was sociable with him, now he must be sociable with me’. For this reason, those who turned up but did little work, a category into which I quickly fell, were always as welcome as those who worked hard. The importance, in other words, was always on the act of sharing sociality rather than on the act of sharing labour.

Here, we can see how the shared drinking of *masato* acts to connect people together, pulling them into webs of association. The important fact is that, owing to the open nature of *masateadas*, the emphasis is on creating and affirming relations between all people, not just those with whom one is already related. In the first parts of this chapter and in Chapter Two I showed how the Ashéninka downplay their kin relations. Now, in my descriptions of the *masateada*, we can see how this institution allows Ashéninka individuals to form bonds that are centred on freely chosen association and equality with anyone they choose. In their voluntary nature, and in the fact that they are based on fellowship centred on the shared consumption of *masato*, these relationships can be seen as distinct from relationships based on consanguinity or affinity⁶⁰.

The Power of *Masato*

In studying exchange and reciprocity, writers often go on to analyse how individuals start to manipulate exchanges for their own ends, thereby gaining power and wealth.

⁶⁰ In reaching these conclusions I note that there is some difference between the position of men and women in Ashéninka society. Specifically, given that after marriage, the majority of Ashéninka couples choose to live matrilocally, adult sisters are likely to remain living in the same area as each other and their parents. This means that at local *masateadas* women are likely to be in the company of their close kin much more than their male partners. While in the present context I have not fully expanded on the nature of these differences between men and women I intend to address them further in future work. However, even while women are likely live nearer to their kin, the underlying pattern of preferring to live in single family households and have contact with others only at *masateadas* remains the same.

Amongst the Ashéninka, such behaviour is seldom apparent and while some households can be seen to gain respect through the frequency of their beer provision, within the wider egalitarian social framework it counts for little (see Chapter Four where I discuss this issue in relation to polygamy). The fact that this reciprocity is centred on *masato* is significant. *Masato* can be seen as the egalitarian exchange good *par excellence*. Since it is producible by all adult couples⁶¹ from their central and daily staple crop, its sharing does not represent a form of redistribution. Moreover, it is impossible to increase its worth or desirability. Generally, it does not lend itself to overproduction, due to the specific manner in which it must be consumed and not wasted. As such, there is little possibility of deviance from a standard model of hospitality and its provision. It is for all of these reasons that *masato* and, by expansion, the social events that revolve around it, can be seen as a central institution in Ashéninka society.

As a substance that is produced in women's mouths and then consumed by others it can be seen as the sharing of a bodily substance, the ultimate sign of good social relations in Amazonia. In Chapter Two I noted the lack of food sharing amongst all but the very closest of nuclear family members. In the institution of the *masateada* we see the opposite: the extension of commensality to all others.

And yet, even as it brings people together, *masato* carries the germ of their inevitable dispersion as well. For in spite of all of the drinking and sociality, inevitably some disagreement, jealousy or feud will arise. Sometimes this is produced by the event itself, as drunkenness makes individuals more lascivious and then their actions cause problems with their own, or another's, spouse. Alternatively, drunkenness brings older rivalries to the fore and two individuals start to argue and then quickly move on to physical confrontation. Such matters are generally dealt with swiftly, but then one or both of the protagonists are likely to leave the drinking, to return to the solitude of their own house. After such a drunken confrontation, two individuals might studiously avoid each other for days or weeks afterwards. This tends to reinforce their separateness and independence. As Harner describes among the Achuar:

The next day may be characterized by a 'hangover' which is social as well as biochemical, when the various participants, embarrassed or angered over

⁶¹ See Chapter Four for a discussion of *masato's* central importance in the egalitarian nature of gender roles in Ashéninka society.

the previous night's events, face each other in the plain light of day... While the early part of the prior evening's party may have given rise to temporary feelings of good fellowship, the later activities commonly tend to result in a 'morning after' whose brooding mood hardly gives the impression that the parties are a clear-cut mechanism for social solidarity (Harner 1972: 127).

With this analysis, it is possible to see that within the most important act of social solidarity lies the seed of the Ashéninka's continued social separation. Santos-Granero similarly concludes that while all Amazonians share an underlying belief in the value of commensality and conviviality.

The ideals... carry the seeds of their own destruction... Like Sisyphus, the Corinthian king condemned for eternity by Zeus to roll a stone to the top of a steep hill, only to see it always roll down again, Native Amazonians are engaged in constant pursuit of the ideal of perfect conviviality. It is a doomed struggle from the beginning, for conviviality begins to wear out as soon as it is achieved (Santos-Granero 2000: 284).

Conclusion

In this chapter, echoing my discussion in Chapter Two, I have outlined the manner in which the Ashéninka of Pijuayal live in independent and disparate households spread throughout the forest. Their everyday life and subsistence activities occur within this small family group, and emphasis is placed on the importance of self-reliance and independence. From such a description of a 'family level society' it is possible to focus anthropological analysis upon what Ashéninka society 'lacks' in comparison to other societies: lineages or moieties, binding political institutions, social hierarchies etc. In contrast to such an approach, I have tried to show how these separate households *are* interlinked and that Ashéninka individuals are still bound by wider social rules and conventions.

In developing such an analysis my first focus was on the form of their kinship structure and regulations. It was noted that marriage in its ideal form should take place between cross-cousins. The inter-marrying of two families according to this criteria was described and it was shown how difficult it was for my informants to adhere to such strict prescriptions. As such, while cross-cousin marriage is still the predominantly idealised

form of marriage, and while my informants went to some lengths to accommodate different partnerships within the idealised scheme, in reality, most individuals conform to a second prescription of marrying ‘far’; beyond the confines of local social and kin connections. Such a regulation acts to bring new individuals, mostly men, into Ashéninka groupings.

This analysis of the realities of lived kinship encouraged me to look elsewhere for institutions that help maintain Ashéninka society. This brought me to an examination of the *masateadas* in which I had participated. Having argued that the modern notion of ‘*minga*’, involving communal labour, should be seen as a development of older drinking parties rather than as a labour pooling activity, I argued that such social gatherings, centred on the sharing of *masato*, should be understood as pivotal in Ashéninka sociality. Following the work of other anthropologists on the importance of reciprocity in maintaining cohesion in otherwise acephalous societies, *masato* can be seen as the exchange good *par excellence*, and the *masateadas* that revolve around its consumption, as the most important social act amongst my informants. Beyond seeing the holding of parties as a reciprocal activity, attendance at the parties, itself, is an act of giving. I concluded by noting that even as these events bring people together, *masato*, and the drunkenness and discord that it leads to, still reinforces the Ashéninka’s continued separation. In making these arguments, I have linked them to my observations in Chapter Two.

The theme that draws Chapters Two and Three together is that while the Ashéninka recognise relations of consanguinity and affinity, and these relationships can and do affect their decisions and actions, in general individuals are keen to minimise the importance and impact of such relations in their lives. Instead the Ashéninka try to form voluntary and equal relationships with all others, whether actual kin or complete strangers. Formally, this is done through the institution of *ayompari* trading partners, which brings distant individuals into relationships best characterised as ‘friendships’. Informally, and more locally, this type of ‘friendly’ relationship is facilitated by *masateadas* where individuals can share sociality and benefit from each others’ company without encroaching on their personal autonomy. These observations form a key foundation to my arguments about the adaptability of Ashéninka culture I outlined in the introduction. In emphasising relationships formed voluntarily between individuals,

and minimising obligatory affiliation and conformity to larger, kinship groups, Ashéninka culture leaves individuals free to make their own decisions and form relationships with whomsoever they please. This will become particularly clear when, in the second part of the thesis, I begin to analyse the Ashéninka's relations with outsiders.

Chapter Four demonstrates how the Ashéninka preference for independent and autonomous living structures the way Ashéninka individuals relate to each other in everyday situations and underpins their general unease with would-be leaders.

Chapter Four:

Autonomy, Leadership and Outsiders

Introduction

In the last chapter I examined the importance of *masato* and of the sharing in its consumption. Given the lack of other communal activities for the Ashéninka and their general desire to minimise kinship connections, I argued that the act of sharing sociality is of central importance in maintaining ties between disparate households. Now, starting from the description of a specific *minga*, I will examine more closely indigenous ideas of personal autonomy and independence. I will show how the emphasis on these two characteristics structures how Ashéninka individuals relate to each other and underpins their general unease with would-be leaders. Supported by a belief that all Ashéninka individuals are free and equal to act as they wish, individuals are loath to heed the commands of one of their peers.

However even as many of the words and actions of my informants make it clear that they do not like the idea of leaders, it is still possible to discern variation in individuals' capacity to influence others. I will examine how certain individuals in Pijuayal have shaped the settlement's form and history and used their individual abilities, particularly their skill at dealing with outsiders, to bring others under their influence and shape events. Any such power must be considered fragile and ephemeral and dependent upon the choice of others to continue to live in a given area. It is clear that there are cultural factors, most notably individuals' mobility, that act against individuals gaining too much power. Yet, in particular circumstances, this emergent hierarchical structure crystallizes and allows individuals to dominate a particular group. This is most likely to occur where a group is faced by some outside threat that must be counteracted, or when a concerted effort must be organised to achieve a common goal. In my own fieldwork, examples of such behaviour were limited, but events in the Ashéninka's past attest to their occurrence.

In the final section of this chapter, I look at the role of outsiders in Ashéninka social organisation. Starting from a close examination of the organisation of labour in a timber camp, I suggest that non-Ashéninka outsiders are able to dominate and control groups

of Ashéninka, in a manner different from would-be Ashéninka leaders. In analysing this phenomenon, I examine the mixture of fear and respect that outsiders command in Amazonian thought. As one example of the fear that outsiders can foster, I outline the Ashéninka belief in *pishtacos*, solitary men said to travel around finding indigenous people from whom to extract fat. Yet, outsiders are also understood to be fecund and powerful individuals offering potential alliances and the promise of wealth. I suggest that both of these, not necessarily contradictory, ideas can be seen to underlie my informants' relationships with outsiders. I also note that by following an outsider, rather than one of their own, Ashéninka men are able to maintain the egalitarian *status quo* between themselves.

I begin with a description of a specific *minga* I attended during fieldwork.

Rolling Timber and Personal Autonomy

We had been working all morning and were covered in black ash that had been smeared off the ground by the wet logs and then rubbed onto our sweating bodies. The sun was glaring in the open space of the garden and the logs were starting to feel increasingly heavy and cumbersome. We had paused for a moment to rest our limbs and drink *masato* as we contemplated the stream gully that lay between us and Mahuco's house. Mahuco had already placed three thick tree trunks to form a bridge over the steepest sides of the stream bed. What we now had to do was roll the logs down the slope, and onto the trunks. From there we would have to carefully balance them as we pushed them across the ten metre gap. Finally it would be a hard push to get them up the slope on the other side and into the open space near to the house.

Felled trees are cut into twelve-foot long logs, a size that is considered manageable enough to be worked without tractors while still being big enough to produce good length planks (see photos on plates IV and V). The largest of Mahuco's logs was chest-high and about four-feet in diameter. There were ten of us that day, and so far we had done reasonably well, moving them 100 metres from where they had originally been felled. During our efforts across the blackened garden I had not paid too much attention to the arrangement of labour. As long as the log was moving forward it did not seem to matter how cohesively people worked together. While there was the odd frustration as the wood caught on tree stumps or fallen branches and we had to roll it backwards and

then turn it before going forwards again, progress was made and that was all that mattered. Faced with a delicate balancing act over the precarious log bridge and the fact that a runaway log would crush anyone in its way, to me the importance of careful coordination was suddenly clear.

Yet after our *masato* break, I watched the same process occur as had happened at the end of each of our previous breaks. Rafael was the first to return to the log, before other individuals slowly joined him, each pushing it where and how they wanted. There was general agreement that the log would have to be lined up just right so that it would roll gently down the slope and then across the three trunks without falling into the gully. The problem was, however, that each person seemed to have their own idea as to which way the log should be lined up and worked to push it into that position. Two men were pushing it backwards at one end while someone else in the middle was trying to start to inch it down the slope. I looked to Mahuco to see if he would react and take charge but he was still standing by his bucket of *masato* just watching. Meanwhile no one else stood out to direct operations. Instead, each offered his own opinion, while only a few actively worked on the log. Finally it was given a last push and, as the men beneath it ran to get out of the way, it slowly rolled down the slope veering towards the left. This meant that when it hit the bridge logs it was off-centre with too much of its weight sticking over the left edge. As it got over the gully itself it wobbled for a moment and then started to slide horizontally to the left. Finally it tipped over and stopped with its left side deep in the bottom of the gulley while the right end was sticking up over the centre of the bridge. As I watched it tip over my spirits sank, thinking of the back-breaking extra work that this miscalculation had cost us.

This was typical of many of the days I spent with my informants, drinking *masato* and working together. No single individual ever takes control of such work situations. Even when this leads to obvious mistakes or to what I saw as the ineffective use of labour, no individual is willing to tell another what to do. They might offer their opinion about something, but they never give a direct order. While Mahuco was the organiser of this particular party and therefore dictated what work was to be done, neither he nor anyone else took charge of how the task was to be carried out. This behaviour, which I saw echoed in countless similar circumstances, points to a deeply-held dislike of subordination and authority on the part of my informants. People were reluctant to

impose on others. In fact, during my fieldwork I never saw one adult man tell another one what to do. Individuals who value their own autonomy know that to tell others what to do is to impinge on their personal freedom.

In many circumstances this lack of specific coordination makes little difference. For example, in the clearing of undergrowth or the weeding of gardens everyone is able to work how and where they like, and there is no real need for an overall strategy. Similarly, even in more complex tasks, such as the building of a house, there are enough different activities to occupy people. Individuals are attentive to what needs to be done at given times. Work might be delayed at certain points while some people waited for others to bring raw materials – bark rope or thatching fronds. Such breaks gave an opportunity for rest and drinking, but made little difference to the overall effectiveness of our labour. Co-ordination was thus achieved by judicious observation rather than overarching management. As Descola has noted amongst the Achuar;

the hierarchical pattern of the division of industrial labour has made us forget the ancient interlocking customs wrought in the process of collective labour. With every appearance of spontaneity, each man would be attentive to the moods and actions of his fellows, thereby precluding the need for anyone to occupy a position of authority (1996: 56).

Yet, while this is true for most subsistence activities undertaken by my informants, it is notable that in certain tasks – from a non-Ashéninka perspective – better organisation would lead to improved efficiency.

As I suggested in Chapter Two, the cultural code of respecting the autonomy of others seems to be inculcated in children from an early age. In Chapter Three I also argued that *minga*, and the idea of sharing labour is, a recent introduction to Ashéninka life. Older ethnographies (Bodley: 1971, Elick: 1970 and Varese: 2002 [1968]), while mentioning *masateadas*, describe how all agricultural and subsistence activities were carried out by members of the household with no help from others. Following these ethnographies, it seems that in the past Ashéninka individuals had little occasion to find themselves in group activities in which leadership and control were an issue. Even now, when there are increasing reasons for individuals to come together to take collective action, their dislike of authority, either being exercised or imposed, still colours their

interactions. As such, any understanding of broader notions of leadership and analysis of individuals who might be understood as 'leaders' or 'chiefs' must be based on an awareness of this everyday dislike of authority.

In our labour on Mahuco's timber, I noted that it was generally Rafael who was the first to move back to work after a *masato* break and the one who instigated new effort. He was also the strongest man present and clearly the most able and enthusiastic worker. Rafael was in his late thirties, a son of Juancho Rojas and therefore a member of the Picon and Rojas families that were understood to have lived in the area for generations (see Chapter Three). Furthermore, he was the son-in-law of Agustín Ramírez, the official *jefe* (chief) of the *Comunidad*. Added to his indefatigable spirit for labour and his family connections, he was also a renowned hunter and had the largest gardens in the area. He was generous, always giving people anything that they asked for and he was also very careful to repay debts to others. In my own thinking, I marked him out as a potential leader, in the mould of Amazonian leaders described in the anthropological literature (see Lévi-Strauss 1967, Price 1981 and Clastres 1977). I closely watched his interactions with others, noticing both his effect on them and their behaviour towards him.

As can be seen in the description of the timber rolling, however, Rafael's influence in this situation appeared to be negligible. He was indeed the first to start work but this had little effect on others doing so. His work rate appeared to give him no authority to control proceedings, even when things were obviously going wrong. His only possible influence was to lead by example with the second log and take more care with its rolling. Yet while the second group of men then copied the technique, there was little sense that they were following Rafael's lead. Rather, it appeared as if they had independently solved the problem in the same way. Furthermore, when I discussed what I saw as Rafael's 'chief-like' qualities with others, no one seemed to understand what I was talking about nor made any appreciative comments about him. The same was true whenever I had similar discussions about others in the area, such as Agustín, the elected *jefe* of the *Comunidad*. Such denial of leadership qualities in others suggests an Ashéninka aversion to viewing other individuals as anything but their equals in normal everyday relations.

Yet, even with this refusal to explicitly recognise differences between individuals, it was nonetheless clear that particular men still occupied important positions within the social networks of people in the area. Agustin Ramirez and Antonio Picon were the two most obvious examples of this in Pijuayal. Their positions of relative influence primarily depended on their ability to attract others to build their houses in the vicinity of their own. Some of Antonio's married sons had chosen to live near to him, instead of following the matrilineal preferences of most Ashéninka. While none of Agustin's sons had yet settled permanently with a wife, his married daughter did live close to him. His real influence, however, was over the family of his wife, Rosemila. Her two sons by a previous husband had both built houses close to the house she shared with Agustin. Her brothers and sisters had left the other areas where they had settled, to come back and form the core of the *Comunidad*. Their children and their children's partners were choosing to stay in the area as well.

In an interesting early ethnography, Elick wrote that in the region of the Pichis Valley in which he conducted fieldwork "authority is exercised by a *pinkatsari*, a charismatic leader who is usually the founder of a particular *nampitsi*... Fame as a shaman, successful hunter, sagacious warrior, were qualities that attracted followers" (Elick 1970: 191). Both Agustin and Antonio's position fit with this older description of influence. They are both respected in the area as intelligent and able men who can deal with problems and are both known to be hard workers and good hunters. They can also be seen as having some influence over where others choose to live.

Hanne Veber has similarly written on the presence of Ashéninka 'strong men'. She maintains that such a person's position depends in part upon his ability to speak well in public (2000: 38). In Pijuayal, this ability was a characteristic of apparent leaders such as Agustin and Antonio. It is not that they tell others what to do, but rather that they are the most persuasive in putting forward an idea about what should be done. Each individual is then able to choose for himself which action it is best to take. This indirect means of persuasion, rather than the use of coercion or direct ordering, maintains the principle of equality between individuals while providing a means to take co-ordinated direct action. In Pijuayal, Agustin's ability at rhetoric can be seen as a counterpart to his skill in interacting with and understanding outsiders. It is this ability to speak to his fellow Ashéninka, paired with his skill at speaking with outsiders which, I suggest, is the

main reason behind his continued influence in the area, and behind people's preference for living near him. Specifically, other families are attracted by the tangible material gain that accrues to his neighbours, most notably in the form of a government teacher and school to which they can send their children, but also in terms of goods and services that passing timbermen give them for working on the *Comunidad's* land.

Centripetal Chiefs

In Chapter One, I briefly described how the two *Comunidades* of Pijuayal and La Selva were both formed after the disintegration of an older settlement at Mashantay in the 1970s (see Map 7). The main group to make the move to the Amaquaria river was the Vásquez family, consisting of one couple with their five daughters and one son. They set up a household on the northern side of the Amaquaria just above the present day site of Pijuayal. At this time there were already at least two families living further west. These were the intermarrying Rojas and Picon families discussed at length in Chapter Three. One of the daughters of the Picons, Ernestina, had married a man, Moisés Macarilla, who had made the journey over the Shira hills from the Pachitea valley. Under his auspices, households started to cluster in the land between the Amaquaria and its tributary the Putaya, in a place known as 'Alta Mucha Piedra'⁶² – near to where his in-laws' house was (see Map 7). Meanwhile, the Vásquez siblings had started to marry. Ernesto, one of the brothers, married Norma, one of Moses and Ernestina's daughters, while his sisters married men from outside of the area. Agustin was one such outsider, who had come to the area working in a labour gang for Don Pablo, a timberman living in Amaquaria. Agustin met Rosemila Vásquez and decided to remain. During this time, each of the couples made decisions about where to settle: in Alta Mucha Piedra with the Macarilla-Picon family or in Pijuayal with the Vásquez.

Both families were keen to set up schools for their children and attract a teacher to come and conduct classes. At first, those in Pijuayal paid a Shipibo man to come and act as a teacher. However, this arrangement did not last⁶³. Instead Agustin and a man named Germán, another in-comer who had married a Vásquez sister, set about trying to get the area officially recognised as a *Comunidad Nativa*. Working with timbermen who were

⁶² This translates as 'Upper Lots of Stones,' named for the pebble-filled river course.

⁶³ The teacher complained that he was never paid properly (he was meant to be paid in rice, maize and livestock), while my informants complained that he was hardly ever there, or held classes.

keen to help, as official native communities are given ownership of the timber on their land, they gained their title in 1985 and a teacher was sent the following year. Moisés in Alta Mucha Piedra attempted to do the same thing but after Pijuayal received official recognition he soon gave up. Consequently, families in the whole area started to move down to Pijuayal, 'so that our children could go to school' (the importance of education and the centripetal power of schools will be discussed further in Chapter Seven). The first to leave Alta Mucha Piedra was Ernesto, Rosemila's brother, but soon all of Moisés and Ernestina's children followed, with Ernestina herself making the move after the death of her husband. The centre of Pijuayal is now made up of the descendants of these two – Vásquez and Macarilla – families, while other descendants of the Picon and Rojas families have remained slightly apart, still on the western bank of the Amaquaria.

In contrast to this increasing interaction with and use of the outside world, Antonio Picon seems to have chosen a different course of action. While he has been willing to work for outsiders in order to gain goods; which include, most importantly, a *peque-peque* motor for his canoe⁶⁴, he has not had anything to do with local government, its bureaucracy or representatives. Furthermore, he does not seem to have encouraged his children to go to school, nor to join in the activities of the *Comunidad*. Neither he, nor his sons, ever attend official meetings, nor help with communal work. Instead, they have kept themselves apart on the other side of the river and only interact with others at individual households' *masateadas*.

The outcome of these different approaches, during the time of my fieldwork, seemed to be leading to Antonio's increasing isolation from the majority of people in Pijuayal while Agustín's influence continued to grow. Agustín's position amongst those living around the school was most obviously shown by the fact that he had been elected as the official *jefe* of the *Comunidad*. Describing the position of *pinkatsari*, Elick writes that:

If the 'chief' also maintained profitable relations with the 'foreigners' in the lower valley, this also served to attract the materially oriented individual. On the other hand, certain *pinkatsari* in the hills were quite anti-foreigner and led groups of Campa who tenaciously resisted the encroachment of outsiders into their territories (Elick 1970: 191).

⁶⁴ A *peque-peque* is a simple form of outboard motor put together locally using a single cylinder 10hp motor and a long '*cola*' ('tail'/shaft) on to which is attached a small propeller.

This difference is echoed in the relative attitudes of Antonio and Agustín. However, it is notable that in the contemporary situation, those who choose to remain more isolated from Peruvian national society are in a minority and are likely to lose support to those more willing to maximise their benefits from the outside world. Hence, Antonio had only a few of his sons now living around him, while increasing numbers of younger couples, keen to have more contact with the outside world, were choosing to live closer to the centre of Pijuayal, even before they had children of school-going age, and thus implicitly within the sphere of influence of Agustín.

Even where individuals such as Agustín can be seen to have gained some prestige and influence in an area, however, as I noted at the start of the chapter, leadership amongst the Ashéninka still does not offer powers of domination. If leadership can be said to exist in any sense, it is that leaders become a kind of focus point for others, so that the one thing that characterises a ‘chief’ as such is his ability to keep other people living near him. This accords with the view of Hvalkof and Veber (forthcoming) in other areas of Ashéninka territory and the work of anthropologists in other Amazonian societies, such as Lévi-Strauss (1967), Price (1981) and Clastres (1977), to which I briefly referred above. Thus while Rafael could be seen to show many of the attributes of a potential ‘chief’, the fact that no one chose to follow him meant that he carried no extra authority over others in the area. With Agustín, however, even if individuals refused to refer to him as anything other than their equal in conversations with me, the fact was that their decisions to live near to him and to take advantage of his ability at interacting with outsiders meant that they were allowing him to act as the focal point of the area.

In Chapter Seven, I will examine more closely the importance of government-provided teachers and schools in drawing families together both spatially and socially. Here, I note how Agustín used others’ interest in interacting more with outsiders and with educating their children as attractors to pull them within his sphere of influence. Agustín often explicitly spoke of his own importance in the area. One example of this was in an episode I described in the last chapter. In commenting that a cement school would last until long after he had died, and hence after people had dispersed, Agustín explicitly linked his own presence to the existence of Pijuayal. He thus seemed to have little sense that Pijuayal existed as an entity in itself of which he only happened to be the leader for a specific period of time. This equivalence of a community with a specific person was

also attested to by the fact that, as I will recount below, when individuals talked of leaving the area, many of them specifically told me that they were leaving because of their dislike of Agustin and the fact that he controlled the area. Hence, even while individuals refuse to recognise leaders in everyday interactions, in other discussions and actions it becomes apparent that some individuals can come to have more influence than others.

Uniting for a Purpose

In Pijayal, the power of Agustin is clearly limited by the fact that people often choose to leave the area. Others, such as Antonio Picon, refused to engage with him in the first place. However, the historical record does show that, at certain times, powerful Ashéninka and Asháninka leaders have emerged with coercive powers over their fellow people. Veber notes that:

The political order of Ashéninka society seems to oscillate over time between a pattern of localized convergence around relatively few very strong and powerful leaders... on the one hand, and a total diffusion of leadership devolving onto practically each individual head of family, on the other (Veber 1998: 398).

For Craig, this presents one of the ‘most puzzling aspects of Campa culture’:

Superficial evidence indicates they are greatly disinclined to associate in any type of cooperative tribal organization beyond the immediate bounds of their own close relatives. However, the historic record of the area shows that the Campa have banded together on various occasions to carry out large-scale military campaigns (Craig 1967: 229).

An examination of the historical record suggests that such leaders usually emerge in response to an outside threat or to lead a rebellion against an outside regime that, for the Asháninka, is becoming increasingly repressive. Thus, leaders rose up to push out early Franciscan mission stations and during the worst excesses of the rubber boom (see Brown & Fernández 1991). More recently Asháninka have undertaken coordinated action against *Sendero Luminoso* (Hvalkof 1994 and Espinosa 1993a and 1993b). Some of my informants also referred to the fiercely isolationist ‘*guerreros*’ (*ovayeri* in Ashéninka) that used to exist in the Gran Pajonal (Rojas Zolezzi 1994:227).

The idea of a separate ‘military’ leader has been described by anthropologists working amongst other Amazonian groups as well. Price noted their presence in more northerly Nambiquara groups, arguing that this was probably the result of conflict with neighbouring Tupian groups (1981: 696). Clastres also noted the presence of ‘war chiefs’ among the Cubeo, Tupinamba and Jivaro. He argued that, for them, “The model of coercive power is adopted... only in exceptional circumstances when the group faces an external threat” (Clastres 1977: 22). It is the presence of a specific threat, either to individual lives or to an indigenous group’s way of life, that seems to encourage individuals to look beyond the defence of their individual autonomy and agree to subordinate themselves to an individual whom they see will deliver them from the threat.

Descola describes a similar alternation occurring amongst the Achuar:

Oscillating between the gentle anarchy of ordinary times and the factional solidarity fomented by one man whose authority remains limited by circumstances, the Achuar have established a form of political organization that safeguards each man’s independence without bringing about a total dissolution of social links (Descola 1996: 293)⁶⁵

Something comparable seems to occur amongst Asháninka groups. Individuals are willing to suppress their desire for independence in order to achieve some common goal. In my fieldsites, this is evidenced by my informants’ willingness to gather around Agustín to benefit from the school and teacher that he has managed to procure. However, it is also possible to imagine Ashéninka families coming together for more imperative endeavours, such as the protection of their lives and way of living.

This, I contend, is precisely what has occurred at particular times in the past as individuals have rallied behind charismatic and capable individuals and joined together to take concerted action – usually against a specific outside threat. Other writers have considered these episodes to be the paradox of Asháninka history and looked for specific explanations to account for them. The main argument has been to see a latent form of messianism at the root of these conglomerations and subsequent uprisings. Asháninka

⁶⁵ Rosengren makes the point that while a Matsiguenga settlement group would unite for the purpose of defence given an attack on the community, in contrast to groups such as the Achuar, ‘it would never unite as a group in order to attack another settlement group’ (1987b:349).

groups are portrayed as having an underlying belief in the coming of a mythical saviour who will usher in a new world order (Brown 1991, Brown & Fernández 1991, Varese 2002[1968] and Métraux 1942). Personally, I find little evidence of such a belief in either contemporary Asháninka society or in the historical record. Nor do I believe that such a search for overarching explanations is needed. Instead, it is possible to understand the formation of such large uprisings solely from the contemporary actions and ideas of Asháninka people. For while they value their own individual and group independence, they are willing to gather, at least temporarily, under the leadership of charismatic individuals in order to work towards a common goal. Furthermore, where the threat was large enough, the networks of *ayompari* partners that spread across Asháninka territory made it possible for information and recruits to move rapidly from one area to another and turn a local uprising into something much larger. I shall return to these arguments against seeing Messianism in Asháninka culture in more detail in Chapter Six. Here, I merely wish to show that Asháninka leaders can appear in certain circumstances.

However, even while this option of joining together against a common enemy or for a common goal is ever present, in everyday life there are mechanisms that act against individuals gaining too much power. In the last two chapters, I discussed my informants' desire to downplay relationships based on formal kinship ties while emphasising those based on a looser and more voluntary form of association. While not denying the existence of kinship bonds, my informants instead seemed intent to negate their importance by forming relationships based on fellowship and the shared consumption of *masato*. In a similar manner, the Ashéninka, even while their actions attest to the possible emergence of differentiation between individuals, generally act to negate difference and hierarchies as far as possible. Hence their usual refusal to publicly recognise those with the apparent attributes of leaders, and to diminish their importance.

These two ideas, of emphasising equality and basing relations on friendship rather than kinship, are also linked in the sense that would-be leaders' initial support is usually gained from their closest kin. In other societies, where kinship relations carry obligations of duty or respect, such connections can underpin the existence of hierarchy and domination. However, in my informants' constant moderation of kinship relations and the lack of associated obligations, this avenue of potential control for would-be leaders is

minimized. Further, with their emphasis on the voluntary and limited nature of relationships beyond those of immediate family members, all relationships must be constantly maintained and reaffirmed by individuals. Thus, even if a group forms for a specific purpose, there is no sense that the group will continue to exist into the future. In Pijuayal, the ephemeral and limited nature of the 'community' is illustrated by the fact that people are constantly choosing to leave.

Centrifugal Individuals

In Pijuayal, the case of Chambira Macarilla offers a good example of how individuals can be drawn into, but then reject, the idea of being part of a community. The son of Moisés and Ernestina, Chambira had moved down to live in Pijuayal some time after the failure of his family to set up a *Comunidad* at Alta Mucha Piedra. He told me that he had been keen to join with others and for his children to go to school. The initial kinship connection between him and those living in Pijuayal was through the marriage of his sister, Norma, to Ernesto Vásquez, and this was later strengthened by the marriage of one of his other sisters, Chabella, to Juan, son of Rosemila Vásquez and therefore step-son of Agustín. Chambira originally built a house on one side of the football field and then cut a *chacra* behind it. He lived there for a number of years and actively participated in the life of the *Comunidad* and its associated activities. At some point, however, he started to withdraw from communal living, before finally setting up a new house some distance away, further up river.

Chambira told me that he no longer liked living with everyone else, but rather preferred to live in his own place where no one else bothered him and he was free to do as he wished. This was a sentiment that I heard from a number of people who had moved their houses away from the immediate vicinity of the school. When I arrived, Gruger, one of Agustín's adult step-sons and brother of Juan, was the officially elected *jefe* of the *Comunidad*. Within two months of my arrival, however, he publicly renounced his position on the grounds that he was receiving no support and had no time to perform his duties. He then moved his family to a new house and plot upstream on the opposite bank of the river, closer to his father-in-law Antonio Picon. After that, his children stopped coming to school and I seldom saw him in Pijuayal at all. The examples of both Chambira and Gruger show that movement into a *Comunidad*, and an implicit willingness to fall under the influence of a particular individual, is in no way a

permanent choice. These examples also illustrate that not all Ashéninka see increasing communality as necessarily a good thing.

What these two examples do show is that a leader, along with the associated practice of living in a settlement, can be rejected. Two other examples illustrate, however, that leadership and concentrated settlement are not necessarily linked. Rather, individuals can explicitly reject the authority of a single individual even while they retain a desire to live close together. Jorge often told me that he was ready to leave the *Comunidad* of Pijuayal and cited a number of reasons. His most common complaint was that all of the land belonged to Agustin. By this he meant that Agustin, by virtue of the fact that he had at some time or other over the past years cultivated most of the land in the immediate vicinity of the school, was understood to have preferential rights over it. Further, he complained that Agustin always tried to control things, including use of the *peque-peque* motor that had been given to the *Comunidad* by a timbermen in payment for timber. For these reasons, during my first year Jorge started to cut a large *chacra* further upriver, telling me that he would move his family there and thus show his displeasure with Agustin. This move was never made however, as Jorge's wife Edith appeared to be against it and because Jorge realised that it would disrupt his children's education. Then, near the end of fieldwork, Jorge decided to transfer his entire family to Amaquaria. In doing this, he was following his brother-in-law, Cafelata, another outsider who had married a Vásquez sister. Cafelata himself told me that he had decided to move three years before because he was tired of Agustin. He still wanted to live in a *Comunidad* however, and be able to send his children to school. Jorge gave me exactly the same reasons for his move to Amaquaria, and I helped him to get his third daughter a place in the secondary school there.

I will return to the topic of rejection of *Comunidades* in my final chapter, as well as examining some of the reasons why people choose to join them in the first place. My point here has been to show how individuals can be drawn into groups that are more defined and cohesive than the familiar dispersed form of living and how this can occur around particular individuals and for a specific purpose. Even when individuals do gain some influence in an area, others have ways of avoiding domination and of limiting the influence of would-be leaders. Most importantly, with no definite obligations to kin or limits on residence, individual families are always free to choose whether to participate

in wider groups or not. In this interplay between personal autonomy and a willingness and ability to join together for a common purpose, we can again discern a certain flexibility in Ashéninka society. This flexibility, I maintain, in part underlies the Ashéninka's relative success in interacting with and adapting to other groups with whom they come in to contact. In the second half of this thesis, I will take these ideas forward to examine how my informants, and the Ashéninka in general, interact with the outside world. First, however, I want to examine gender relations in Ashéninka society. In a similar manner to the way in which gaining individual power is both possible but restricted, I believe that Ashéninka gender relations are best understood as based on an essentially egalitarian ethos, although individual relationships can be marked by differentiation. I will begin by analysing the role of polygyny in Ashéninka culture.

Polygyny, *Masato* and Gender Relations

Lévi-Strauss (1967) wrote that the most important advantage that came with chieftainship in Amazonian societies was polygyny. He argued that men had control over women and that men could transfer this 'power' to their chief. Price has questioned this idea of polygyny as 'reward':

The 'moral and sentimental reward' of having two wives is probably outweighed by the disadvantages. Because of the division of labour by sex, the polygynous household represents an unbalanced productive unit (Price 1981: 698).

Amongst the Ashéninka where, as we have seen, the production of *masato* is central to sociality, the advantages of polygyny could be seen in terms of the increased ability to produce large quantities of *masato*. Rosengren sees *masateadas* among the Matsiguenga in terms of the 'showing off' of the givers: "Feasts are, thus, displays both of wealth and generosity and of the authority the host has over his residence group who provides much of the labour necessary for giving such feasts" (Rosengren 1987a: 196). In such a view the presence of numerous wives would help an individual male, and his household, to produce more *masato* and therefore to gain prestige in an ever increasing circle.

I have argued (in the latter part of Chapter Three) that among the Ashéninka such competitiveness regarding the ostentatious production of *masato* does not seem to occur. Unlike amongst the Matsiguenga, there is little idea of competitive over-production of

masato. Rather people were content as long as there was enough to satisfy everyone throughout the day. In addition, I argued that attendance at such occasions was in itself a kind of reciprocation of the hospitality of the hosts and hence facilitated the creation and maintenance of equal and flexible relationships. In this situation an individual has nothing to gain from the increased ability of his household to produce *masato*.

Furthermore, in my fieldsites co-wives refused to work or even live together. Rather, wives had separate and autonomous households and seldom offered assistance to each other. This was the case for both Antonio and Agustin. Both of their sets of wives refused to live together, even though in the case of Antonio his two wives were also sisters. In fact, both men's two households were at some distance to each other and during my time in the field the men had both been forced to make new households even further apart. By the time I left, Antonio's two wives lived over an hour's walk apart. In view of this separation and the inevitable doubling up of subsistence activities for the wives, both of whom needed gardens felled, houses built and a regular supply of meat, the advantages of having more than one wife appeared minimal. In fact, the only reason for having more than one wife seemed to be an individual's desire for them. Such a desire would need to be matched by a willingness and ability to cope with the extra work of keeping both wives satisfied and preventing either from running off with someone else.

Lévi-Strauss's original discussion of the benefits of polygyny was arguably based upon the idea that men control women. Much work has been done to question such views of male domination of women (examples include Josephides 1983, Leacock 1978) and to problematise simplistic views of the separation and relationship between the sexes (see Ortner & Whitehead 1981 and Collier & Yanagisako 1987 among many others). I do not here have the space to fully engage in such important and complex debates. As a brief contribution, however, I do wish to suggest, in contrast to older views of Ashéninka societies, that there exist certain aspects of Ashéninka culture that act against the overt domination or control of one sex over another. As with my description of leadership, my argument is that even while individuals can be seen to be able to gain influence over others, this is generally achieved with the implicit agreement of all involved. Moreover mechanisms are always available to counteract this dominance.

Little has been written about gender relations in Asháninka society, but comments by past ethnographers tend to point to a ‘masculine bias’ in Asháninka culture (Weiss 1975: 270) or dwell on the ‘submissive, faithful and hard-working’ nature of Asháninka women (Elick 1970: 165). Based as they are on narrow views of gender relations and on a tendency to place more value on male activities (hunting, garden felling and interactions with outsiders), than on their female equivalents (gardening, gathering and shaping relations with other Asháninka), such analyses can perhaps be seen to reflect ethnographers’ own gender bias rather more than an indigenous reality. If ‘male’ and ‘female’ activities are understood to have equal importance, as appears to be the case among my informants, then a complementarity and mutual dependence can be seen between genders and the activities they perform.

Rosengren also see males as being dominant in Matsiguenga society. He argues, against Meillassoux (1975), that this is not because they lack control over their own production and reproduction. Instead, male dominance stems from the fact that women’s impurity prevents them from carrying out male activities of hunting and garden felling (Rosengren 1987a: 104). He further argues that as men have ‘greater purity and, by extension... moral superiority’ they therefore produce the material preconditions for female labour (*ibid.*: 105). However, he makes little reference to the importance of *masato*, beyond arguing that the holding of large ‘feasts’ can add to a man’s prestige (*ibid.*: 196).

Among the Ashéninka in my fieldsites, the conditions were very different from those described by Rosengren. There were no obvious restrictions on female activities. Women seldom hunted, but stories were told of women who had. This included the woman with whose family I lived in La Selva Melita, who, it was generally agreed, was an excellent shot with both bow and arrow and shotgun. Similarly, while women did not willingly pick up an axe to fell trees, there was no suggestion that they could not do so. In contrast, my suggestions that a man could chew manioc to produce *masato* were met with utter ridicule, as being almost unthinkable. The importance of this fact was not lost on my male informants. For them, this was the main reason to have a wife, for without one a man would never have enough *masato* to drink, nor could he ever hold a *masateada*, and thus participate in Ashéninka social life as an equal. There was only one older adult man in the area, Sacarilla, who had never had a wife. He often complained to me about

how difficult it was for him to live alone, and how hard it was to have to do everything for himself. Beyond this, he was generally considered by others to be a figure of fun and ridicule and was often the butt of jokes about his lack of ability with women. Furthermore, he was not deemed to be an official *comunero*. In contrast, his widower brother, whose difficulties in coping might have been thought to be compounded by the presence of his three young sons, faced none of this social stigma or ridicule.

Also in contrast to Sacarilla was the situation of young single women, either recently widowed, divorced or still unmarried, who were objects of great interest. Such single women were able to hold their own *masateadas* and even work parties. They produced their own *masato* using manioc taken from their parents' or siblings' gardens and then invited men from the area to carry out activities in their name. This meant that such women, or women whose husbands were away working with timbermen for an extended period of time, could still have their own houses built or gardens felled. While I would not go so far as to argue, in opposition to Rosengren's depiction of Matsiguenga society, that this suggests that women are dominant over men in Ashéninka society, I do believe that such facts point to a basic equality between the genders, based upon a genuine balance of control over essential aspects of life in a household. The outcome of this parity could be seen in the relatively equal give and take of everyday interactions between spouses. Thus, in the house in which I lived in Pijuayal, Edith might use the promise of *masato* to coax a tired Jorge into going hunting, or to make him buy some soap off a timberman, while Jorge would refuse to go hunting until Edith persuaded one of their daughters to return to school⁶⁶.

During Mahuco's *minga* (described at the start of this chapter), it was Chabella, his wife, who had made, served – and thus controlled – the essential *masato*. In my host's house I often witnessed the arguments that passed between Jorge and his wife, Edith, over the production of *masato*. These would usually centre on the need for *masato* in order to hold a *minga* to facilitate some activity. Usually there was little problem if the labour entailed the felling of a garden, or the cutting of a canoe, activities that would benefit the whole household. When, at one point, Jorge wanted to construct a house to use as an Adventist

⁶⁶ In this apparent balance between the provision of meat and *masato* it is possible to discern a parallel to the parity between manioc bread and meat in Northern and Eastern Amazonia (Hugh-Jones 1995:59). It is notable that *masato* appears to be of greater importance in Western Amazonia where the absence of bitter manioc varieties means that manioc needs little preparation before it can be eaten.

church it took him a few weeks before he finally persuaded Edith and her daughters to engage in the necessary labour of producing *masato* for a *minga*. Conversely, Edith might compel Jorge to undertake some task that he had been putting off by starting to prepare large amounts of *masato*. Veber makes a similar observation, noting that: “Women are able to use their control of basic foodstuffs... to balance male domination” (my translation, Veber 1997: 132)⁶⁷.

For young men, the power of women seemed to be evident most strongly in a young couple’s choice of residency. Often men would tell me that the choice to live in the forest near to their in-laws, rather than closer to the school or in another *Comunidad* closer to the main river, had been made primarily because their wives still wanted to be near their mothers. ‘They are like that,’ I was often told while other men would nod in agreement, ‘And what can we do?’ The preference of the young girl was given as the main reason for post-marriage matrilocality, while the practice of the new husband to cut a new *chacra* near that of his father-in-law was seen as pragmatic cooperation rather than as ‘bride-service’, as some anthropologists have seen it (see Bodley 1971: 63)⁶⁸.

I had also stumbled across one more important indicator of the underlying equality between genders on that morning before Mahuco’s *minga*, although I did not realise it at the time. As I was sitting drinking my coffee, Ernesto and Rafael passed by the house and sat sharing the morning with me. At some point, Juan came over from his house to tell me that he wanted to go fishing but did not have any fishhooks. I understood that he was asking me if I had any and made to get some. As I got out a few hooks and measured out some nylon line he told me that he would give me part of his catch in return. During this exchange Rafael and Ernesto had been watching me intently and I thought to offer them some. Ernesto immediately asked me what I wanted for them, saying that he too would give me fish. Knowing that I had a few such arrangements already, I asked him if he could give me a couple of woven baskets instead. He seemed reluctant to agree to this, again repeating that he would bring me nice, big fish but

⁶⁷ “Las mujeres pueden usar su control de los alimentos básicos y/o los servicios sexuales para equilibrar el dominio masculino” (Veber 1997:132). Veber’s reference to sex links to an older discussion that sees women as giving sex in return for men’s provision of meat (see Siskind 1973a:117 and 1973b and Gow 1991:125-6). In my fieldsites, this connection was not made explicit to me, and I therefore feel unqualified to contribute to this debate.

⁶⁸ In my experience, any produce from such a *chacra* was unambiguously owned by the young couple. For example, I often saw Edith ask her daughter, Luisa, if she could ‘borrow’ some manioc from her garden, as there was none suitable for making *masato* in her own.

eventually, after my continued insistence, he nodded. After more drinking and sitting the two then declared that there was more *masato* at Mahuco's house and that they were going to go there. As they got up to leave Ernesto came over to thank me for the fishhooks and then said 'I will bring you some fish for them'. He had obviously been thinking over this departing statement as he sat on the patio and it left me with little opportunity to argue further.

To me, a basket in exchange for the fishing hooks had seemed like a fair deal between two individuals, and it never crossed my mind that a single male Ashéninka would not be able to get hold of baskets. I was therefore puzzled by Ernesto's discomfort with the arrangement. Later, however, I realised that I had made an inappropriate request. What I had not understood was that married men and women retain individual ownership over things that they have produced or acquired and must respect each other's wishes over those objects. Ernesto knew that he would not be able to appropriate one of his wife's baskets in order to pay for something that only he could use. Ordering her to make more, on the other hand, would be out of the question. For this reason, he needed to make sure that he could repay me with that which he could produce for himself.

In arguing for this underlying parity between the sexes, I note that it is still possible for one individual in a couple to dominate a relationship. Along with the mechanisms that exist to counteract individuals gaining power over their peers, the parity between women's control of *masato* and men's provision of meat, their complementary household tasks and their individual ownership of those things that they produce, can all be seen as a relative surety against individual domination. However, even in the presence of these cultural constraints, it is still possible for particularly skilled or charismatic individuals to gain power over others. In my fieldsites there were examples of couples in which the man or woman might be seen as more controlling than the other. Veber has also suggested that while women generally dislike their husbands having a second wife, they are more likely to enter into such relationships when the man is particularly charismatic and well known or can offer them physical or shamanic protection (1997: 129). In such relationships, we see a reflection of my wider arguments about Ashéninka individuals' willingness to relinquish some of their personal autonomy for particular benefits. Again in this sphere of Ashéninka social relations we can discern an inherent flexibility such

that there are no absolutes in how individuals choose to control and manage their relationships with others.

In sum, we can see that although it is possible to discern certain differences between individuals in Ashéninka society, and while particular individuals can be seen to gain influence over others during particular times, all individuals consider themselves to be essentially equal. This is true of the relationship between men and women as well as between all individuals of both genders. Having been taught from an early age the importance of self-reliance, individuals value their own independence and their autonomy to act as they see fit in any given situation. Any individuals whom outsiders might view as 'leaders' occupy such a position only by virtue of their personal attributes and their position within kin and – particularly – friendship networks. Within Ashéninka society, however, such individuals do not have any actual coercive power. They can sway opinion, and thus precipitate action, only through the force of their rhetoric and in relation to their ability to help solve a problem or give benefit to those who follow them.

Female Leaders?

Such discussions of the equality between individuals and the sexes suggests to me that, in tandem with my analysis of male hierarchies within the area, there may well have been women in similar positions to those of Agustin and Antonio. Indeed, it strikes me that while I have put Agustin at the centre of the networks of people, much of his status derives from his relationships with the family of his two wives. In particular, Rosemila, his first wife, might better be understood as being at the centre of Pijuayal, as it is her brothers and sisters and her children that actually comprise its core. It would then be interesting to know what role she played in Agustin's choice of second wife, and whether his marriage to this woman, Dominga, acted to strengthen or weaken Rosemila's position.

As a male anthropologist in Pijuayal, I was unable to explore these questions with any confidence. While in Ashéninka society equality between the genders may exist, there is still a definite separation between them. Unrelated men and women seldom talk, and even at *masateadas* and family gatherings, a certain segregation between the genders can be seen. Moreover, it is considered to be inappropriate for a single, unconnected man to talk to a woman, with accusations of adultery being a likely outcome. As such, it was

difficult for me to spend much time in the company of women, especially when only women were present. This was even the case with Edith and her daughters in the house in which I lived.

My only evidence that certain women may hold similar positions to men within Ashéninka society was the case of Melita, the woman with whose family I lived in La Selva. As with Agustín, her opinions were respected by others and she was known for speaking well. People told me that she had been instrumental in drawing people together to stop the attempted incursion of Amaquarians onto La Selva land that I describe in Chapter Seven. I also heard her speak out at a communal meeting about the value of choosing the *jefe* and other authorities of the *Comunidad* from among the Ashéninka rather than electing *mestizo* individuals. Furthermore, she was one of the few Ashéninka in either community who had married a non-Ashéninka, an act that in La Selva served to link her to the core of the Ashéninka community through birth and the *mestizo comuneros* through marriage. Meanwhile, her son, Wilder, from her first marriage to an Ashéninka, was now the elected *jefe* of the *Comunidad*.

While I feel that this subject matter offers an interesting future opportunity for study, I do not wish to press these speculations about the possibilities of female leadership too far. For even with the respect of others and her connections within the community, Melita's position, certainly among men, was still not comparable to that of Agustín. This might have been the case even had she lived in Pijuayal, but in La Selva, with its number of *mestizo* inhabitants, the dominance of men was much more palpable. This was primarily because La Selva adhered more closely to the official legislation that laid down the manner in which *Comunidades nativas* were to be run. Here, official positions and hierarchies were taken more seriously than those in Pijuayal. Moreover, coercive authority was commanded by those in official positions, and by the two *mestizo* teachers. The fact that these positions were always held by men, in line with what was considered 'proper' in wider Peruvian society, meant that the voices of women were seldom taken seriously. Peruvian national society is male dominated, and male leaders are expected from indigenous groups, as will be outlined below. First, however, I will discuss how – in a more subtle and understated manner – male domination in everyday life is increased through interaction with outsiders.

Male Domination Increased by Outside Interaction

I have shown that Ashéninka society is characterised by egalitarian relations between individuals. This is based on the assumption that all adults are autonomous and able to take independent action as they see fit. I have argued that this is true in everyday relations between men, and between men and women. Having understood this fact during the initial stages of my fieldwork, I was later struck by how the Ashéninka's interaction with the outside world appeared to be eroding the egalitarian nature of their society.

As I mentioned above, I was myself guilty of one common misconception held by outsiders when I tried to demand something of a man that was actually not his to give. Luckily, by this time Ernesto knew me well enough to realize that there would be no recriminations for denying me a basket. In other situations, however, men were less circumspect about taking women's possessions. A number of times I saw men remonstrating with their wives over the fate of chickens (which tend to be owned, and looked after, by women). On one occasion I even saw a man forcibly wrestle a chicken out of his wife's hands in order to give it to a timberman, arguing that he had to keep him happy. Furthermore, the fact that the main source of outside income and goods was from timber, which only men worked, made women increasingly economically dependent on their husbands for the new 'necessities' brought by outsiders.

This discrepancy, between men and women's relative abilities to contribute towards the needs of a household, does not exist for couples that have little reliance on outside manufactured goods. Rosengren writes that among the Matsiguenga he studied,

Although men make most of the arrows... without the thread spun by the women there would be no arrows and no hunting. Hence... it follows that female labour is a necessary prerequisite for the activity that largely makes a man a man. Similarly, women, being the spinners and weavers, produce all clothing that enables the men to keep up their decency and thus to approach the *śáangaríte* [good spirits] (Rosengren 1987a: 95).

The situation seems to have been the same in other Asháninka groups that did not have easy access to outside goods. In my fieldsites, however, women seldom wove clothes from scratch, or even spun into threads the cotton that grew in their gardens. All of

them valued and preferred industrially-manufactured thread and a style of heavy cotton material that they used to make *cushmas*. They all told me that these manufactured materials were much more durable than anything that they could make themselves and that it saved them a lot of work. This meant that the direction of giving was now reversed, such that women increasingly depended upon men and their relations with timbermen for such essential items.

Another outside influence that threatened the equality between genders even more was Adventist missionaries' assaults on the custom of *masato*. Strict Adventist doctrine prohibits the taking of any intoxicating substances, and since their first arrival in the jungles, missionaries had been trying to prevent the production of *masato* amongst indigenous groups. As I have argued, this drink is of central importance both to the position that Ashéninka women hold in society and also to Ashéninka sociality in general. If such a prohibition was strictly adhered to, it is clear that it could have repercussions for the power that women have for controlling relationships with others. However, in both of my fieldsites, and even amongst the most overtly 'Christian' of my informants, while this rule was often discussed, it was never strictly followed. Indeed, as I will argue more fully in Chapter Six, the presence of such a rule seems to have contributed to the failure of Adventism to have made any full converts in this region, despite over fifty years of activity in the area.

Interestingly, the fact that many men in Ashéninka settlements have themselves come from outside the area contributes to their role as mediators between the Ashéninka and other outsiders, thus gaining them an additional advantage. In Chapter Three, I showed that 43% of Ashéninka women in my two fieldsites were married to Ashéninka men who had come from outside of their settlement area (see Table 2). I argued that this was because the marriage prescription for individuals to marry their cross-cousins actually worked to force men to marry outside the circle of their immediate acquaintances. Such preferences are facilitated by the network of *ayompari* trading partners that allow men to travel long distances from their natal areas. This network is now being replaced by the timber trade and the connections of *mestizo* timbermen working on the Ucayali (see Chapter Five). Coupled with matrilineal residence, these factors mean that many men end up far from their original communities. Agustin is a good example of this. Having been born about 200 km up river from Pijuyal, he arrived in the area while working for

a timberman. This experience, of living in other areas, combined with extended interaction with outsiders and their own initial position on the fringes of a community, makes such men the obvious people to deal with the outside world. Furthermore, they tend to have acquired the necessary national identity documents during their periods of work, and have learned to speak good Spanish. As with Agustín, such a position and experience can often be turned to an individual's advantage as he becomes the mediator with rich and potentially beneficial outsiders who come to the area.

Finally, there is the fact that outsiders from a more European background have usually expected to find a single, male 'chief' who can speak for his people and then order them to carry out specific tasks. This was evident from the time of the first missionaries who, as they set up mission settlements, were keen to find native leaders and then raise them up to attain real positions of authority within their own groups (Santos-Granero 1991: 17). The power of such *curacas*, derived as it was from their relationship with the outsiders, dwindled after the expulsion of the Franciscans. Each subsequent group that has returned, however, has sought to work with similar individuals. The Law of Native Communities, which stated that all registered *Comunidades Nativas* had to elect official representatives, can be seen as the latest example of this trend. In both Pijuayal and La Selva, the first people to take these posts were those men who had been instrumental in gaining official recognition of the *Comunidad*. In Pijuayal this was Agustín and Germán. Even though both had given up their positions by the time I started fieldwork, once Gruger, Agustín's step-son, had renounced his position of *jefe*, Agustín, as the only man with official documents, knowledge of bureaucratic procedures and a willingness to interact with outsiders, was soon re-elected to the position.

If interaction with outsiders can be seen as working against or even eroding the Ashéninka's egalitarian ethos, then I was also struck by how outsiders themselves appeared to be exempt from Ashéninka ideas of parity.

The Power of Outsiders: Their Danger and Fecundity

After my experience at Mahuco's *minga*, described at the beginning of this chapter, I was in no hurry to help out with timber rolling again. Not only was the work heavy, dirty and dangerous, but I also found myself frustrated by having to maintain a certain distance and not get involved even when I could plainly see that mistakes would lead to

extra work. I was therefore more than slightly apprehensive when the opportunity arose to spend some time in a timber camp. For the first few months, I had heard of various *madereros* (timbermen) working in the area. They were spoken of with a mixture of fear and respect as tough men who held the key to money and goods (see Chapter Five for a more thorough assessment of Ashéninka relations with timbermen). One man in particular, Melvin, would pass by the *Comunidad* every few weeks on his way between the main river and his camp, which was in the headwaters of the stream (see Plate I). He seldom bothered visiting the centre of the *Comunidad* itself, and the few times that he did he kept himself away from Jorge's house. He would later tell me that this was because he wasn't quite sure what a *gringo* like me was doing there and thought it best to steer clear. This changed one evening, however, when he set up a temporary camp near the school. Fuelled by cheap liquor we had a wide-ranging conversation late into the night and from then on we became good friends.

As a result, the next time Melvin returned to his camp, he picked me up on his way. His camp was a well ordered, if makeshift, group of small shelters in a hastily made clearing by the clear shallow headwaters of the Amaquaria. After the quiet isolation of Ashéninka houses, and the taciturn nature of my companions, the camp came as something of a shock. Most striking for me was the manner in which the Ashéninka reacted to Melvin and carried out his work. It would start early in the morning, when Melvin told one or two of the younger boys to draw water for his *mestiza* cook, wash the dishes or clean fish for food. He then gave similar orders to older men, telling one to check the fishnet set the night before, another to cut firewood and a third to clean the chainsaw. At 9 o'clock sharp he ferried all of the men across the stream to where they would be working for the day. He generally then left them to get on with whichever activity was needed; clearing paths to the timber trees, rounding the logs or rolling them. He was, however, not reticent in criticizing or giving instructions, particularly when the logs were being rolled over difficult terrain. On these occasions, he took control of the group, directing each individual to push at a specific point, hold their lever-pole steady or slow the timber's descent. While I could sense that my Ashéninka companions were sometimes annoyed by Melvin's detailed direction, they never complained openly. Instead they followed along, and they often stated to me how it was amazing that Melvin could move logs bigger than they would ever attempt amongst themselves.

This deference towards outsiders was not restricted to timbermen. In Pijuayal, it often seemed that Wagner, the *mestizo* teacher, could be regarded as the real *jefe* of the *Comunidad*. It was he who called, chaired and ran communal meetings, even while Agustín sat at his side. At such meetings, the matters discussed were usually brought forward by Wagner. He would propose that a party be organised to celebrate a national holiday, or instigate action over a directive that had been sent to the *Comunidad* from the local government or school authority. He would begin discussions by announcing an idea and then, after making some attempt to gain people's agreement, he would dictate what should be done. Although they sometimes ignored Wagner's orders, leaving him to complain that no one cared (see Chapter Seven), his plans were often carried out⁶⁹.

Descriptions of outsiders organising and controlling communal meetings have been given by other writers in Amazonian contexts (Johnson 2003: 178 and Gow 1991: 206). Johnson argues that hierarchies between households in Matsigenka society can be shown by studying the number of visits that each household makes and receives. Using such criteria, he demonstrates that 'Maestro', the community teacher, could be considered a local leader (Johnson 2003: 178). Johnson goes on to argue that this is so not only because of the central importance of the school in the community but also because Maestro acted as a *patrón* to many of the families, exchanging goods with them, paying them for labour, helping people to visit the local town and playing a role in hearing and resolving disputes (*ibid.*) The fact that outsiders can come into indigenous Amazonian societies, renowned for their lack of coercive leaders and obvious chiefs, and demand such respect and apparently wield real authority is particularly striking.

There are a number of points that serve to explain the power and position of non-Ashéninka in Ashéninka society. First, there is the danger, but also the potential, that outsiders are thought to promise according to indigenous cosmologies. Secondly, there is the Ashéninka's own willingness to work towards a specific end (as illustrated above) and the fact that by choosing to follow an outsider Ashéninka individuals are able retain egalitarian relations between themselves, while working in effective concert.

⁶⁹ This fact also presented some problems to me. At first I was often embarrassed by how seriously people would take some of my ideas and I swiftly learned to keep quiet in meetings and discussions. This was particularly true in the events surrounding the marking of the communal boundary that I outline in Chapter Seven, when I inadvertently became the leader of a group cutting a line through the jungle.

My analysis begins with the Amazonian fear of outsiders and specifically with the Ashéninka notion of *pishtacos*. I had heard of South American myths about *pishtacos* before I started fieldwork. Such myths pervade much of the Andes and seem to have spread from there into certain parts of the jungle. The basic tenet of the belief (which has a long history and many variations – see Weismantel 2001 and Gose 1986), is that there are certain men (often thought to be white men/*gringos*) who travel around the country, usually in backward, rural areas, intent on extracting the fat from human beings⁷⁰. The use they make of this fat seems to have evolved over time; early accounts referred to the grease used in guns, while versions from the latter half of the 20th century refer to the gasoline needed for cars and aeroplanes. The latest stories, which were told to me in both my fieldsites and in Pucallpa, recount that the *pishtacos* need the fat to turn into cosmetics and to help them rejuvenate elderly white people or to help them perform cosmetic surgery. Descriptions of the *pishtacos* themselves have also changed over time. In earlier versions, they were depicted wearing the armour of *conquistadores*. Later they were said to be clothed in the robes of Catholic priests. Weismantel writes that in parts of the Andes during the insurgence by *Sendero Luminoso* and the subsequent ‘Dirty War’ with the government, *pishtacos* were portrayed as both terrorists and as members of the ‘Sinchi’, or Peruvian Special Forces (2001: 198)⁷¹. This iconography did not seem to have entered into the ideas of those on the Ucayali. Although my informants did often talk in fear of ‘*terroristas*’ (‘terrorists’), these were seen as a separate entity from *pishtacos*⁷². Their description of *pishtacos* instead seemed to be based on the figures of white Westerners working for NGOs or petrol companies: tall men with large, heavy boots and waterproof jackets, who were carrying cameras, radios, and ‘specialised equipment’ (believed to be for extracting the fat). Their most important characteristic or, at least, that which was dwelt upon by my informants, was their ownership and use of ‘Johnsons’ (the generic term used in the jungle for any outboard motor always

⁷⁰ Descola links the *pishtaco*’s love of fat to Amazonian Indians’ own love of fat, which is uncommon in the non-domesticated animals that they hunt (1996:140). The belief in *pishtacos* also shows striking similarities to ideas in other parts of the world, particularly in Africa where such beings are said to desire blood (Weiss 1998 and Maurice Bloch, personal communication).

⁷¹ Gow (2001) also gives a detailed account of the transformation of *pishtaco* rumours during his fieldwork on the Urubamba in the 1980s. Gow arrived in the area while Werner Herzog was filming *Fitzcarrald* and Gow shows how indigenous groups used their own ideas about the activities of *pishtacos* to make sense of events in the film camp (*ibid.* :256-268).

⁷² *Pishtacos* and *terroristas* could be seen to fall within the same category as *brujos* (witches), *chullachaquis* (a forest spirit) and all manner of *demonios* (demons). All of these beings were regularly used as symbols of the dangers that lurked in unknown parts of the jungle. In particular, they were used to warn children from wandering too far off on their own and by adults as excuses not to visit certain areas.

thought of in contrast to the *peque-peque*). I had thought about these ideas before I started my fieldwork and deliberately took as little equipment and paraphernalia as possible on my first visit to the settlements. My knowledge of these stories was also one of the reasons why I used locally available transport and depended upon the boats and motors of others. Unsurprisingly, however, the arrival of a lone, male *gringo* in a backward place with no understandable motive was likely to cause suspicion.

The first direct proof of the unease I was causing appeared on my second day in Pijuayal. I had just finished a first day of *minga* and was tired. And I was still adjusting to the taste and effects of *masato*. Still beset by the worries that accompany any new endeavour, I tried to relax and make myself feel better by washing and going swimming in the river. As I was rinsing the last suds from my hair I heard someone approaching behind me and turned to be confronted by a bare-chested man, whose obvious strength and fierceness immediately struck me. He had the green slime of chewed coca oozing from his mouth and had obviously been enjoying his *masato* more than I had. I had never seen this person before and tried to pre-empt him by immediately explaining what I was up to, but he would have none of it. Instead he started to shout at me in a mixture of Spanish and Ashéninka, which I found almost impossible to follow. Gradually I understood that he was accusing me of being a *pishtaco* and telling me to leave the *Comunidad* as soon as possible or else he would take violent action against me. All of my arguments and attempts to placate him failed, and I became quite worried, as I stood there in just my shorts and contemplated how easy it would be for him to hurt me. Finally I managed to collect up my things and squeeze past him up the river bank towards the house. Wagner, the teacher, who had heard the commotion was at the top of the bank and waylaid my accuser, allowing me to escape.

This man, I learned, was Rafael. I would later develop tremendous respect for him⁷³. While he was the only one to confront me so openly, it transpired that all of my

⁷³ A few days later, Rafael came up to me at another *minga* and apologised for his behaviour. At that point I think that he was following the orders of Wagner who had told him that I would prove beneficial to everyone if they were nice to me. Over time, however, Rafael did genuinely warm to me and, after he had built a new house on the other side of the school from Jorge's, we would often sit together. The final proof that he had lost all fear of me came when I once met him on the path between Pijuayal and La Selva. I was following the path through the deserted jungle, having left the last house an hour or so before, when I heard a noise. I was startled, but knew enough to make some kind of noise back. After a series of calls back and forth, I finally discerned Rafael coming out of the jungle with a dead peccary on his back. We acknowledged each other and explained what we were each doing. Then he said to me with a smile 'You

informants had, at first, held similar fears. Melita later confessed that during the first nights that I spent in La Selva, sleeping at her son, Wilder's, house, which was 50 feet from her own, she had slept with a machete at her side for fear of what I might get up to in the night. One old lady even told me that the first time that I had stayed at their house on the path between Pijuayal and La Selva she had urged her husband to go and skewer me with one of his arrows while I was sleeping, as she was sure that I was about to steal fat from them. Luckily, I managed to convince people of my benign intentions. Yet later, other white people working in the area would tell me how they had been forcibly refused entry into certain villages. Two groups in particular were singled out for such attention. The first were a group of Adventist missionaries who travelled up and down the main river in a large riverboat and took people on board to give them medical help. The second were a group working for *Médecines Sans Frontières*. The head of their team told me that people were particularly alarmed by a large metal box in which they carried their medical equipment. Such anecdotes clearly show the real fear that Ashéninka have of the outside world, and of the powerful white people who come from it. This echoes the Ashéninka's more general fear of unknown others that I discussed in Chapter Two. There are many long and detailed discussions of the history, meaning and importance of beliefs in *pishtacos* (see in particular Gow 2001: 253-285, Weismantel 2001 and Gose 1986). Instead of becoming involved in such discussions however, I have given the above descriptions of these beliefs, only as a particular example of the fear that is engendered by outsiders in Ashéninka thought.

Nonetheless, I have shown in my description of my informants' attempts to bring all people into relationships based on friendship, difference, as well as being potentially dangerous, is also recognised as potentially fecund⁷⁴. This potential productivity also manifests itself in the more material advantages that can be offered by outsiders. For indigenous people in the Amazon, where trade networks and the sources of goods are

should be careful, this is precisely the sort of place *pishtaco's* like to catch you'. At which point he laughed uproariously, wished me well on my walk and went on his way.

⁷⁴ This view can be connected with Viveiros de Castro's argument about affinity in Amazonia (1992a and 2001). In this view the importance of affinity for Amazonian people is not with those fellow tribesmen who can become actual affines, but rather with those beings who will remain forever as potential affines. Such potential affines are vital because, while certain relationships can be entered into with them – be it warfare or trade – their potential productiveness is assured by the fact that they cannot be reduced to actual kinship. As Gow puts it, "It is therefore the potential affine, the enemy, who allows social life to exist, rather than the real affine, who simply replays, in domesticated form at the intimate level of daily life, the function of the enemy" (2001: 306). My informants' vision of white men as *pishtacos* seems intent on emphasising, and thus maintaining, this elemental difference.

still predominantly controlled by non-indigenous groups, it is understood that outsiders are needed to furnish them with the modern goods that they desire. If Ashéninka no longer wish to live in the hills ‘without salt and matches’ (words Jorge used to convince his daughter, Ipaulita, to return to school, see Chapter Seven), then they need to interact with the outside world, regardless of its potential dangers. Thus, in talking of white people, my informants not only dwelt on their fear that such outsiders might be *pishtaco*’s but also on what might be gained from these people with apparent access to unimaginable goods and power. If conversations often centred on my position as a *pishtaco* and children cried spontaneously on first seeing me, even more questions were asked, by adults and children, about my ability to drive cars, fly aeroplanes (my protestations about being unable to do so were never accepted) and about all the things that must be in my country. If I felt that part of people’s interest in me was underpinned by fear, it was also apparent that they were interested in any benefit that might accrue from my presence.

From this perspective, the importance and power of outsiders for the Ashéninka and, by extension, their willingness to allow themselves to be led by such individuals, can be better understood. For the outsider is both a symbol of fear and a promise of wealth; a potent figurehead that allows for beneficial communal action, both through the coercive power that comes through his threatening nature and the attraction of personal gain. Moreover, this latter attribute – the promise of personal gain – links back to my wider argument about individuals’ willingness to give up their personal autonomy for a specific purpose. In following Melvin my informants were not only working to achieve an obvious and practical goal, that of moving a log for example, but were also working towards the longer-term aim of gaining goods from him.

Additionally, in following an unrelated outsider, rather than one of their own, Ashéninka people can also maintain the equality that exists between themselves. Thus, although they are still giving up some of their personal autonomy in working for a leader, they still feel themselves equal to their own peers. This feeling was particularly illustrated in the feeling of camaraderie that Ashéninka men would have in timber camps, especially while they complained about the demands and strictures of a *mestizo* patron. Finally, Ashéninka individuals know that an outsider will not remain with them forever and that, even more than with a would-be Ashéninka leader, it will always be

possible to move themselves away from an individual's influence. As I describe in the next chapter, this is precisely what occurs with timbermen. When they fail to sufficiently repay their workers, or treat them too harshly, they are promptly deserted by their Ashéninka followers.

These understandings help to explain the difference that was apparent between my two experiences of rolling timber: that involving Ashéninka alone, and those at Melvin's camp that involved Melvin as an outsider. It is not that leadership is not understood or that individuals cannot accede to another individual, but rather that they are more likely to enter into such an arrangement when it is likely to be spatially and temporally limited. While, as I have shown, this can occur within purely Ashéninka groups it happens more readily when local people deal with outsiders who are beyond the long-established egalitarian relations of Ashéninka peers and who are also unlikely to remain within the confines of the community. Interestingly, the most powerful and renowned leaders of Ashéninka rebellions, such as Juan Santos Atahualpa himself, have been outsiders. This is an issue to which I shall return in Chapter Six when I further argue against seeing messianism as underlying these movements.

Conclusion

Starting from observations in my fieldsite of Pijuayal, I have shown how Ashéninka in everyday life are loath to fall under the authority of their peers. Instead, they seek to maintain their personal autonomy, even when the result appears to be to their own detriment. In contrast to this everyday reality, however, Ashéninka individuals are willing to follow others in pursuit of specific goals or to gain particular benefits. In my fieldsite, this was shown by individuals' willingness to agglomerate under the leadership of Agustin for the material benefits that he obtains from outsiders, specifically in the form of a government school and the goods brought in by timbermen. In this case, individuals can be seen to willingly give up some of their personal autonomy for their own gain. However, there is no compulsion for individuals to remain in such alliances and I cited cases of individuals who had left the *Comunidad* of Pijuayal professing their dislike of Agustin's attempts to control them.

The same underlying ideal of equality can be seen within Ashéninka gender relations where members of each gender have some power to prevent their domination by the

other. While showing that there is a separation of men and women's labour, I have argued that gender roles should be understood as being complementary. Specifically, I examined the power that women derive from their control of the production of *masato* which can be seen to counteract men's ability to procure meat and to monopolise relationships with outsiders. Hence, individuals can use the threat of not fulfilling their tasks as a means of ensuring parity in their relationships. Thus, while particular relationships might be unequal owing to the particular individuals involved, in general, neither gender can be understood as dominant. I briefly suggested that this egalitarianism is being threatened by my informants' interaction with the outside world, specifically by outsiders' own prejudices that see males as dominant and that look for individual male leaders in all communities. However, in general, equality between the genders is still being maintained.

Finally, I have considered the role of outsiders in Ashéninka society. This analysis began with noting the marked contrast between Ashéninka men's working habits with and without the presence of a timberman. Here it became apparent that my informants were more willing to follow outsiders than one of their own would-be leaders. I argued that this difference is underpinned by the Ashéninka's beliefs in both the danger and potential fecundity of outsiders. These beliefs, coupled with the material benefits that can be gained from timbermen and the fact that in following an outsider a group of Ashéninka men maintain their equality with each other, offers an explanation of why Ashéninka are willing to follow outsiders.

My conclusion, then, is that, while valuing personal autonomy, individuals are willing to join together for a common purpose under the general authority of a particular individual, especially when that person is an outsider. This leads me to observe another flexible component of Ashéninka culture. Even while their actions and words attest to the central importance of personal freedom, and their preference is to form voluntary and obligation-free relationships with others, Ashéninka are willing to enter into other forms of living, acting and inter-acting. This flexibility, I maintain, underpins the Ashéninka's relative success in engaging with the rest of Peruvian society. In the second half of this thesis I will take these ideas forward to examine how my informants, and the Ashéninka in general, are interacting with particular representatives of the non-Ashéninka world.



The Amaquaria river with the Shira hills in the background



Foraging in the forest with Jorge's family



The Headwaters of the Amaquaria with Melvin the timberman

Houses in Pijuayal



La Selva
The Central Square
with the Shira Hills in the
background

A Masateada in Pijuayal



Agustin drinking



Sharantine sleeping off the effects

Working Timber



Melvin Felling a Tree



The Labour Gang



Taking a Break

Rolling Logs in Pijuayal



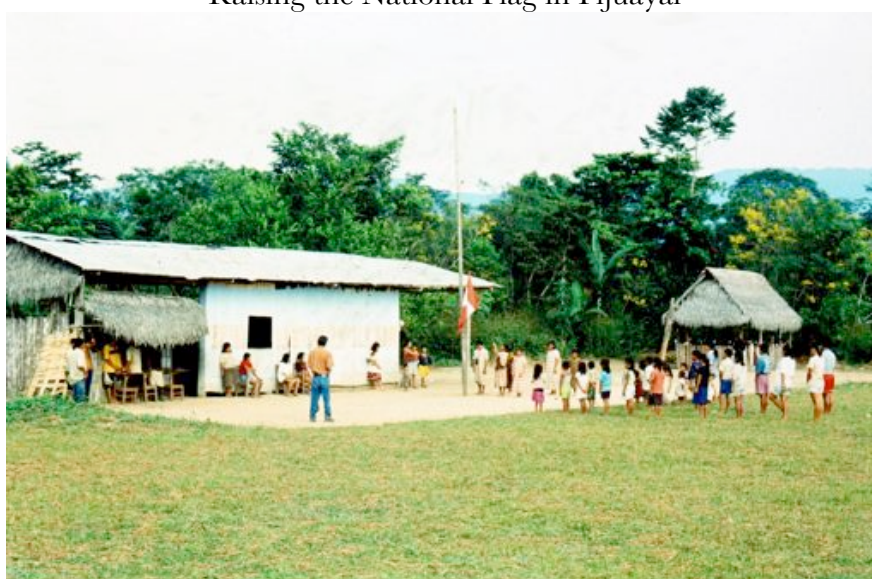
Fiestas Patrias – Peruvian Independence Day



School Children March past the authorities in La Selva



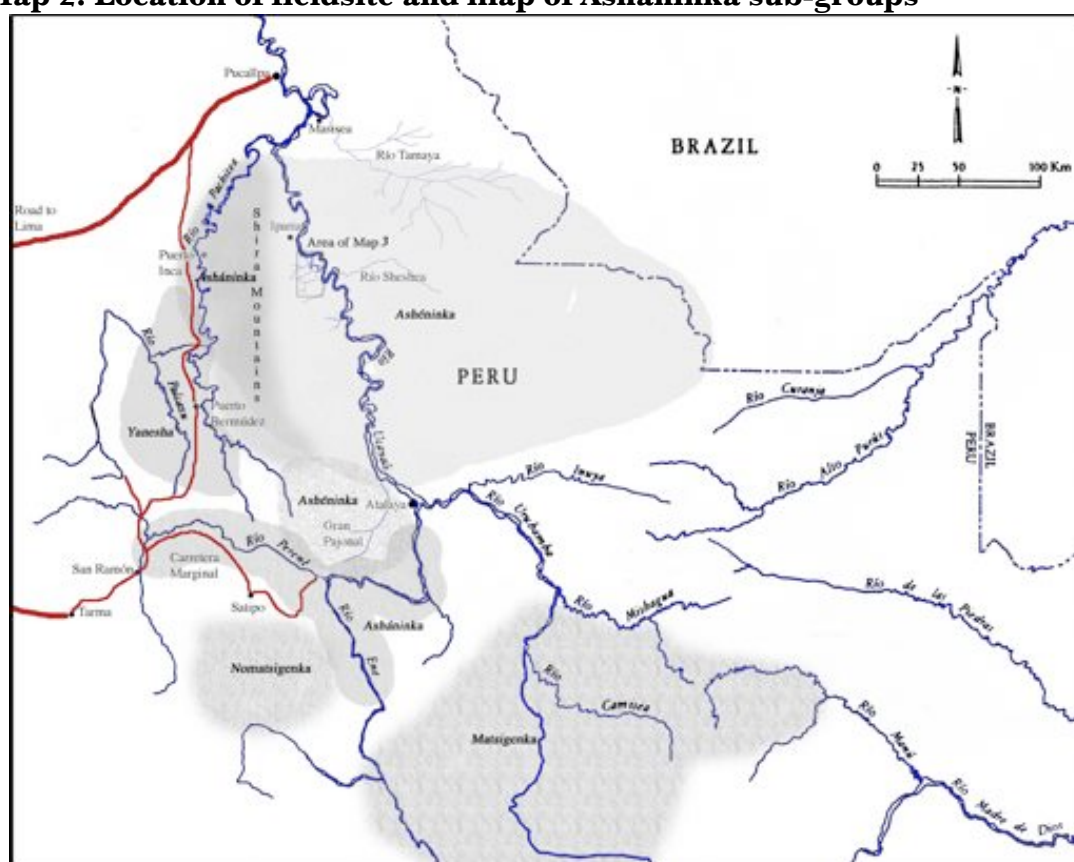
Raising the National Flag in Pijuayal



Map 1: Peru



Map 2: Location of fieldsite and map of Asháninka sub-groups



(Based on maps in Brown & Fernandez 1991 and Anderson 2000. n.b. other indigenous groups which live interspersed with Asháninka groups are not shown).

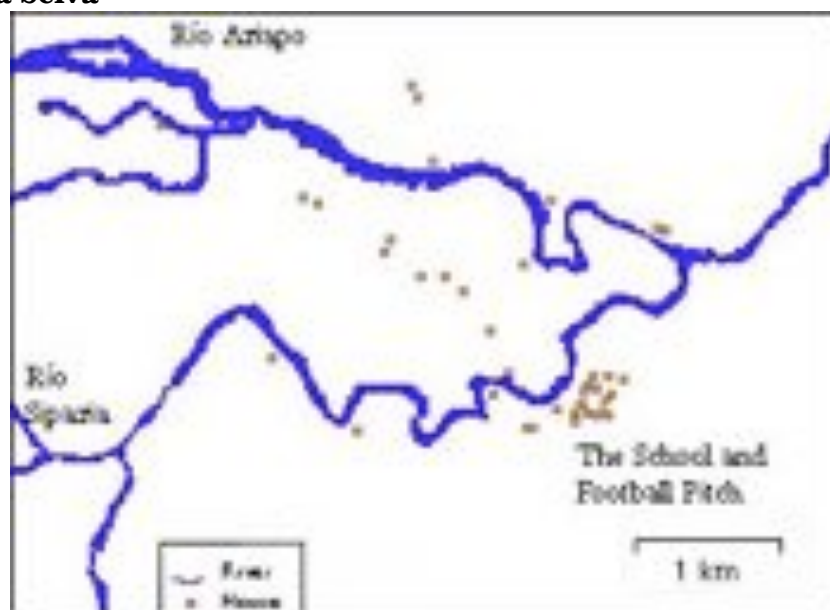
Map 3: Area of fieldwork



Map 4: Boundary lines of *Comunidades Nativas* in the area of fieldwork



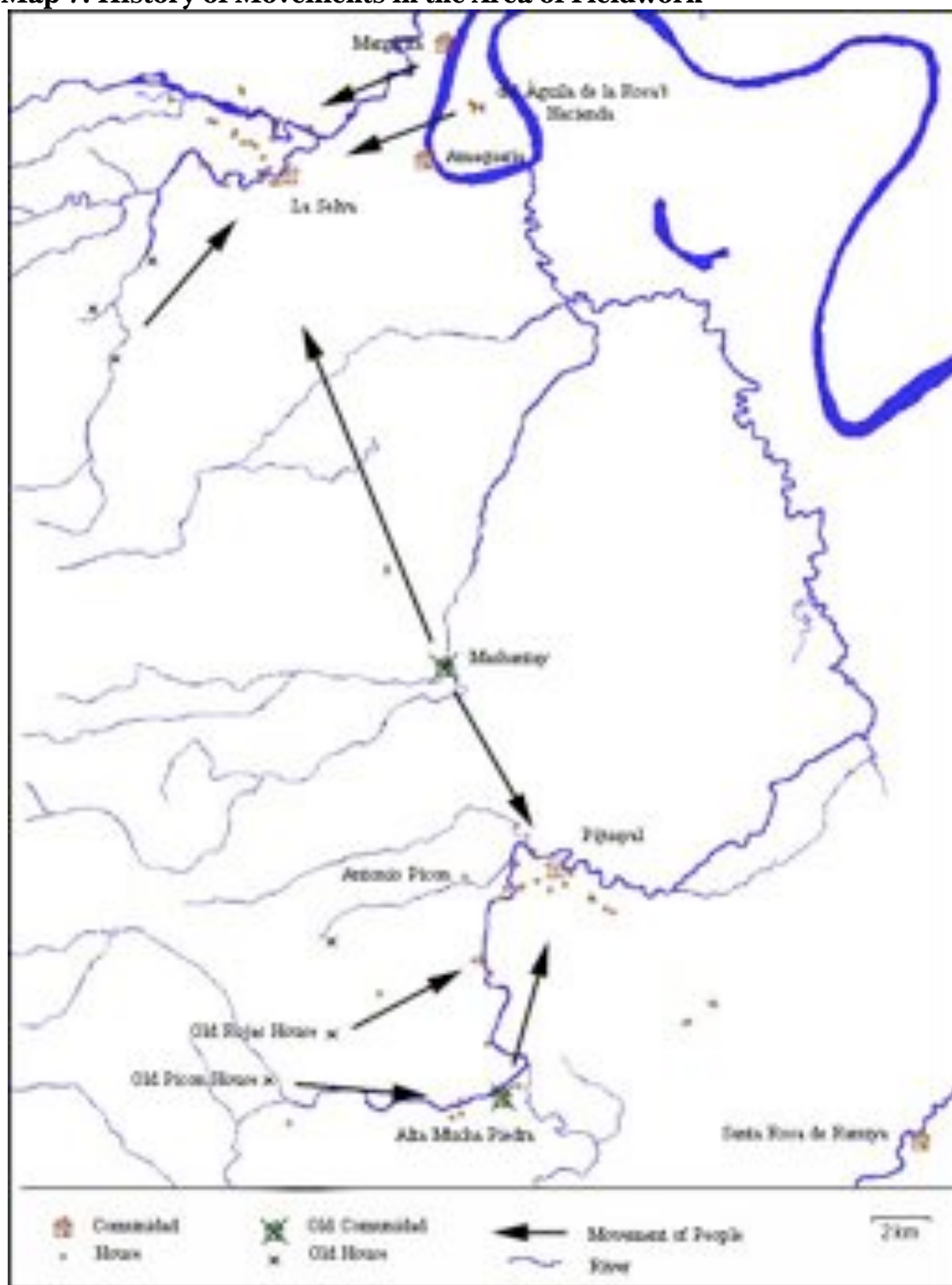
Map 5: La Selva



Map 6: Pijuayal



Map 7: History of Movements in the Area of Fieldwork



Part Two: Transformations and Continuity

Part One set out some of the underlying principles of Ashéninka sociality, namely their preference to form voluntary and equal but restricted relationships with all others and their willingness to give up their fiercely-defended, personal autonomy for social or material gain. Part Two examines how these cultural ideas influence the manner in which the Ashéninka interact with outsiders and Peruvian national society. Chapter Five looks at how Ashéninka try to draw *mestizo* timbermen into relationships based on their own ideas of *ayompari* friendships. In doing so, my informants seek to impose moral obligations on these outsiders, in order to counteract their attempts to exploit them. Chapter Six examines the Ashéninka's long relationship with Christianity. Drawing on the contemporary experiences of informants with the Church of Seventh-day Adventists, it shows how Ashéninka have been drawn into, but then rejected (sometimes violently) various missionary overtures. Chapter Eight looks at the advent of contemporary *Comunidades Nativas*. It shows how the Ashéninka's desire for education for their children underlay their initial interest in gaining official recognition of their settlements. It also charts how this new form of living has brought other pressures, including the necessity of interacting with government bureaucracy and defending newly titled communal land. Within Ashéninka society it has also changed relationships, forcing the election of individuals to official posts, necessitating the undertaking of communal activities and the introduction of ideas of individual property. In looking at all of these issues it is noted that even as the Ashéninka are affected by the outside world they react to it on their own terms and according to their own cultural ideas. It is argued that their culture, with its central emphasis on 'living well', does not prevent them from accepting and integrating outside ideas and ways of living with their own and that this adaptability explains, in part, the Ashéninka's cultural endurance in the contemporary world.

Chapter Five

Exploiting Friends: Transformations of the *ayompari* trading system

Introduction

So far in this thesis I have examined various aspects of Ashéninka culture, particularly cultural ideas about how individuals should live and interact. The Ashéninka, as with many Amazonian groups, are primarily concerned with the idea of ‘living well’ and I have described how, for my informants, this involves living in independent nuclear households which allow individuals to act autonomously. In Chapters Two and Three I showed how kinship relations are downplayed while all relations are instead centred on friendships: relationships that are entered into voluntarily and are based on fellowship and generosity rather than on predation or kinship obligation. In everyday life it is *masateadas* that allow for these relationships to be played out in a defined and limited setting, while the institution of *ayompari* trading partners links more distant Ashéninka within the idiom of friendship. In the last chapter I then considered Ashéninka attitudes to leadership. While noting my informants’ apparent dislike of domination and hierarchy, I observed that some Ashéninka individuals can nonetheless be seen to have more influence than others in a local area. I noted that in pursuit of a specific benefit Ashéninka men were willing to give up some of their personal autonomy and follow others. I also commented on the respect and power that non-Ashéninka individuals can receive, arguing that this stemmed from their status as outsiders. I therefore argued that individuals were particularly willing to follow outsiders who promised material gains while also enabling Ashéninka men to maintain their equality with their peers.

In this chapter I apply these observations of the central importance of the idiom of friendship for the Ashéninka and the power of outsiders to examine my informants’ relations with the timber industry, manifested in the form of the timbermen *patrones*⁷⁵ who come to the village. After outlining the history of the *ayompari* and *habilitación* trading systems, with a focus on their similarities, I explain how and why the Ashéninka

⁷⁵ I will use the Spanish term *patrón*, commonly used by my informants and throughout the region. My reasons for not using an English translation will be made clear later in the paper. The word *patrón* can refer to any person who fulfils the role of advancing goods on credit to another. In my fieldsites such people tended to be *mestizos* from Pucallpa, the local city. Since they worked in the timber industry I will also refer to them as ‘timbermen’, which is a translation of the word ‘*maderero*’ used by my informants.

have become involved in the relatively recent increase in logging in the region. Timbermen can be seen to fulfil many of the economic and social functions once fulfilled by Ashéninka trading partners (*ayompari*), and the Ashéninka's adaptation of the system of debt peonage fits with their own ideas of how trade should be carried out by partners who are bound together in a long-term reciprocal relationship. I will argue that this has been an important vehicle for allowing individuals to acquire agency in their relationships with *patrones*.

The History of the *Ayompari* and *Habilitación* Systems of Trade

In what may be called the *ayompari* system, an individual agrees to trade on a regular basis with another individual... a man will give his *ayompari* a set of arrows thereby establishing a debt relationship, and ask him to give a steel knife in return. The second man will have an *ayompari* in another region who is perhaps in contact with white patrons or traders and from whom he can trade for a knife. Eventually the first man will get the knife he requested and the debt will be paid (Bodley 1971: 51).

According to Tibesar (1981), Franciscan priests described this form of trading system as being active when they first entered Asháninka territory at the end of the 17th century. At that time, native trade centred on the movement of salt from *tsiviari* ('the mountain of salt') in the Chanchamayo valley. Evidence of the system's geographical dimensions and pre-Columbian origins was also attested to by the presence of bronze axes and Incan artefacts (Huerta, cited by Tibesar 1981). Tibesar writes that an Asháninka group controlled the mountain itself and trade was primarily with other Asháninka groups. He describes how the Asháninka would descend the rivers on large rafts carrying salt downstream where they would trade it. The basic articles for exchange seem to have been *cushmas* (woven cotton robes), animals and their pelts, and other jungle and garden produce. However, the most important goods were those that were not available locally, most notably bronze axes from the Andes and ceramics produced by other ethnic groups. While the group from *tsiviari* offered access to salt, groups from other regions, such as those closer to the Inca in the highlands or the Piro on the Urubamba, provided other scarce items. With the arrival of Europeans, iron tools were quickly incorporated into the system and those with access to missionary forges formed new foci within the

system (Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 52)⁷⁶. I have already discussed the importance of the *ayompari* system in terms of the types of relationships it generated between geographically disparate Asháninka and the role it played in giving young men access to distant, unrelated brides (see Chapters Two and Three). Here, I wish to focus on the system as a mechanism for allowing Asháninka access to crucial goods.

The first major outside economic interest in Asháninka territory occurred with the rubber boom in the 1870s. Starting from the lower Amazon, the search for sources of rubber stemmed from the discovery of the process of vulcanization in 1844. The first Peruvian rubber barons were based in Iquitos, but as land concessions were made official and prices rose, so operations increasingly stretched further up river. During this expansion Asháninka were brought into the industry first as guides and then as rubber gatherers. The rubber industry was the Asháninka's first experience of the *habilitación*⁷⁷ system of production and exchange: a common Amazonian system based on debt peonage, the method whereby a *patrón* loans a worker money and goods in advance for the commodities that the worker will extract from the forest. The *patrón* then keeps a record of the outstanding debt, from which the value of the returned goods is subtracted. During the rubber boom, unscrupulous traders kept indigenous groups in virtual slavery, inflating the prices of the commodities that they gave out and deflating the prices of the goods they were given (Santos-Granero & Barclay 2000: 38). The rubber industry collapsed in the 1910s due to the opening of rubber plantations in the Far East. The traders, no longer able to sell their rubber on the world market, stopped paying their workers and the Asháninka staged various violent uprisings (Bodley 1971: 109). While there was something of a resurgence of the rubber trade during the 1940s, when the Japanese occupied the Malaysian plantations, it never regained its former significance. From the 1940s, boosted by the opening of the Lima to Pucallpa highway in 1943, mercantile activity in the region began to focus on the extraction of timber. This new industry was again centred on relationships of debt peonage (see Plates IV and V for photos of timber-working).

⁷⁶ Santos-Granero notes that the Franciscans quickly became aware of the importance of *tsiviari* and of the Amuesha (Yanesha) and Asháninka trading networks and deliberately moved to exploit them as a means of gaining power and influence in the region (1991:15-16).

⁷⁷ Directly translated as 'fitting out', as in 'fitting out an expedition'.

There are obvious similarities between the two systems, of *ayompari* partners and *habilitación*. Both are based, at least in theory, on the idea of delayed and balanced reciprocity. From the Asháninka point of view, both offer access to otherwise unavailable outside goods. At the time of Bodley's fieldwork in the 1960s, the Ashéninka still tended to keep these institutions separate. He describes that while some groups had become permanently involved with *patrones* in order to gain constant access to manufactured goods (*habilitación*), some still rejected their advances, even withdrawing entirely into the forest to escape all contact. For this latter group, the system of trading partners (*ayompari*) was still the favoured mechanism for getting access to desired goods. Bodley argued that this was because it allowed them to maintain their distance from direct contact with outside patrons and the 'tangle of obligations incompatible with the traditional way of life they desire' (*ibid.*: 54). For Bodley, the choice of contact usually became one of 'all or nothing', with initial partial, contact with *patrones* either leading to a complete rejection of contact or swift entry into the full market economy (*ibid.*: 23). My two fieldsites offer an interesting opportunity to reassess Bodley's claim.

My observations in La Selva broadly support Bodley's suggestion that Ashéninka, once exposed to direct access to outside goods, fully embrace a market economy. However, in contemporary Pijuayal, this 'inevitable' wholesale movement has not occurred. In Pijuayal, my informants had adopted a different strategy in dealing with *patrones* and hence in facilitating access to manufactured goods. Whereas Bodley (*ibid.*) and Varese (2002) have both shown that in the past non-Ashéninka were specifically excluded from the *ayompari* 'chain of credits and debits' (Varese 2002: 34), in Pijuayal timbermen have now become the *preferred* form of *ayompari*. In this way, the Ashéninka have tried to negate the power of the *patrones* while still maintaining access to desired goods. Before I elaborate on this idea, however, we must first examine how the timber industry still follows the *habilitación* system and the ways that this is being transformed.

***Habilitación* and the Power of Goods**

As I noted above the form of labour employment used by timber *patrones* can be seen as fitting within the traditional form of debt-bondage known as *habilitación* or *enganche*. This system has characterised all of the extractive industries in this part of the Amazon basin over the past 150 years, since the advent of the rubber boom. Writers agree that the most important aspect of the *habilitación* system is that the *patrón* advances goods on

credit to his workers, which they must then work to pay off. By forming the debt before any work has been done and by enforcing his own role as commercial middleman, the *patrón* gains a powerful claim over his workers that can lead to a relationship of virtual slavery. However, this monopoly depends upon two crucial factors: first, that the *patrón* is his workers' only reliable source of desired items and second, that no one is in competition with him for the goods being extracted. In the past, particular *patrones* had complete control of large swathes of jungle and its residents and thus gained a high degree of power over those natives within their network (Santos-Granero & Barclay 2000). In modern day Peru such a monopoly is seldom possible. The closeness of my fieldsites to Pucallpa (the local city two day's journey by river from my fieldsites), compounded by my informants' relatively good knowledge of the outside world and the presence of a number of different timbermen and the occasional trader, made it impossible for any individual to wield so much power. In this new situation, the balance of power may still be with the relatively richer *patrones* who have access to the money and timbermills of Pucallpa, but their complete dominance is no longer assured.

The power of timbermen over locals increases in proportion to the depth of their penetration into the jungle. Thus, at the headwaters of the river Amaquaria, another few hours beyond the central point of Pijuayal, timbermen were still the only source of goods for Ashéninka families. This was made clear when one man showed me how his only axe's blade had been worn down almost to the shaft. He complained that he had not been able to fell a garden that year and that this was why he was now working for a *patrón*. A lack of axes and machetes, tools necessary for subsistence living, tended to be the final compulsion forcing even the most distant and reclusive men to come to timber camps seeking work. Guns, gun cartridges, torches, cooking pots and Western style clothes have also become 'necessities'. Younger men will also work for watches and radios that have become important prestige goods. This creation of need for new goods can be seen as an outcome of being drawn into a market economy and as part of the increasing acculturation of Ashéninka groups (Dumont 1976, Bodley 1970 and 1972, Mayer 1972, Huxley & Capa 1964). However, while the power of the economic system and of the lure of manufactured goods can be seen in these terms, it is also important to try and understand this process in indigenous terms.

Hugh-Jones (1992) stresses that the value of Western goods for Indians is different from their value for Westerners. He notes the failure of many observers to recognise this in their use of such descriptions of indigenous clothes as ‘tattered garments’ or ‘European hand-me-downs’ when to the Indians these are often ‘hard-won and much treasured clothes’ (Hugh-Jones 1992: 54). In part this is because these goods, and especially tools, clothes and pots used for basic living, have real value to the Indians in their everyday lives. However, the importance of goods, and especially clothes, goes beyond their use value to encompass symbolic worth. Brown and Fernández suggest that “Goods stand in a metonymic relationship to the European world and its power over native peoples” (1991: 136). As they put it, “This is not to deny that Indians wanted the goods as *goods*. But the goods defined a semiotic field much larger than immediate material needs” (*ibid.*). Such an approach better explains the common ethnographic experience in Amazonia in which fieldworkers are pressed for goods that will be of no obvious use to the receiver. Hugh-Jones argues that this proves the primarily social importance of exchange (1992: 67). I will deal with this aspect of his argument later in the chapter. Here, however, I want to argue that the gifts primarily desired – a watch in the case I detail in a moment, or the books in English that Hugh-Jones describes – are significant in that they are ‘white people’s goods’: goods that cannot be produced locally and are directly associated with extreme foreignness⁷⁸.

Gow writes that among the Piro “the acquisition of white people’s clothing was a very visible manifestation of the state of Piro people’s relations with white people” (Gow, n.d.a). He then goes on to argue that by taking a longer historical view it can be seen that the Piro’s adoption of ‘white people’s clothes’ is just the latest in a long line of similar transformations of clothing styles all based on the copying of the clothes worn by groups seen as ‘powerful’. He first describes the taking on of the ‘jaguar-affect’, followed by a copying of the styles of other ethnic groups and now those of incoming *mestizos* and Westerners. Gow links this to the Piro’s ‘perspectival cosmology’ in which differentiation between types of beings depends on appearance rather than any notion of ‘cultural’ or

⁷⁸ Both Hugh-Jones (1992) and Gow (1991) refer to ‘white people’s things’ when referring to goods that are of obvious foreign manufacture. My informants never referred to such goods in this way and associated the goods more with Pucallpa and the *mestizos* who lived there. However, the power and importance of the goods for my informants does parallel that of the reactions of the Piro and Barasana that the two writers describe.

‘spiritual’ difference. He argues therefore that what should be seen as ‘traditional’ is the Piro’s emulation of others’ clothing styles rather than any particular style itself (*ibid.*).

I do not believe that the Ashéninka use of clothes can be understood in precisely the same manner as the Piro’s. However Gow’s emphasis on the importance of perspectival cosmology is suggestive. Unlike in the case of the Piro, there is no historical evidence to suggest that Ashéninka clothing has changed over time. Moreover, Ashéninka in remoter regions still predominantly wear the dyed cotton robes (*cushmas*) that early explorers described as Ashéninka attire. In both of my fieldsites, while Western clothes were increasingly being worn by younger generations, many people of both sexes still owned and wore *cushmas*. I was given many reasons for the new preference for Western clothes by my informants. However the underlying one, as with the Piro, rests with the importance of appearance as a differentiator in perspectival cosmologies.

The most notable part of Ashéninka bodily adornment, apart from the *cushma*, is the use of red face paint made from achiote seeds (*Bixa orellana*). While my informants again gave me varying reasons for its use, its most important function seems to be to ‘protect’ individuals (*cf.* Varese 2002: 34), both men and women, when they venture into the forest. Furthermore, it is considered essential for good hunting. The idea seems to be that it acts as a form of ‘disguise’, hiding individuals’ true appearance from animals. This occurs not in the manner of a Western hunter’s camouflage, to blend the individual into the colours that surround them, but rather in the sense of hiding individuals’ ‘otherness’ from different beings. The idea seems to be that the animal, not seeing individuals’ true human form, will mistake them for another animal and therefore not fear them as a predator. Equally, the achiote protects individuals from beings more powerful than themselves (namely jaguars and evil spirits), that might prey upon them by again hiding their true form.

If this analysis is accepted, then it suggests a new importance for white people’s clothes and explains the Ashéninka’s reasons for adopting them in certain situations while continuing to use the *cushma* in others. The Ashéninka can be seen to think of Western clothing as a similar form of disguise to that provided by achiote. That is, in wearing them when they are in the company of outsiders they are seeking to cover over their own Ashéninkaness such that they will not be preyed upon by these powerful and

dangerous beings. The important distinction between this indigenous view and the idea that it is a sign of acculturation is that for the Ashéninka there is no question of having given up their own Ashéninkaness. On the contrary, they are putting on the guise of the white man precisely so as to protect their own essential character as Ashéninka. They are merely taking on the appearance of white men, not their attributes.

In making this argument, the underlying consideration is to understand my informants' interaction with wider national society in their own terms. While the prospect of outside goods undoubtedly acts to encourage the Ashéninka's desire to join into wider economic systems, it must be understood that this desire is still underpinned by indigenous ideas about the importance and value of such goods.

Having noted this desire for the goods that *patrones* can provide, I shall now turn to a more detailed analysis of the actual interaction between my informants and timbermen. First, I will pay particular attention to the payments that are made for timber and labour.

Exploitation?

The *patrones* use a relatively complicated system for working out how much they will pay individuals for timber. First they will measure the logs, recording their lengths and minimum diameters and subtracting volume for any holes or blemishes. Using tables that are widely available in Pucallpa, but not in Pijuayal, they work out the number of feet in each log. They then enter into even more complicated formulations in which an amount per foot is paid for a certain percentage of the timber. To the innumerate Ashéninka this entire process is somewhat bewildering and they are sceptical about the *patrones'* measurements, calculations and general use of numbers. Nonetheless, I was usually struck by how scrupulous the *patrones* were in calculating value. From observation and access to both odd scraps of paper from my Ashéninka informants and notebooks from a few willing *patrones*, I never encountered arithmetical trickery⁷⁹. The point at which the *patrones* were less scrupulous, however, was when it came to deciding

⁷⁹ I believe that the main reasons for this were that the *patrones* themselves are not very numerically proficient and that they therefore took some pride in being able to get their figures right, while also being afraid, as might happen in other communities, that they would be caught out by others if they made mistakes. One *patrón* also admitted to me that he was careful because such things had been checked by members of Shining Path during their visits in the area in the 1990s.

what ‘expenses’ needed to be deducted from this total. Here, the *patrones* would enter the cost of their own gasoline, the ‘renting’ of the chainsaw, the wages of their own men and, on one notable occasion, the wages of other Ashéninka men who were never, in fact, paid. From what was left would then be deducted the cost of the overpriced goods that had been given at the outset or during the work. The final amounts left owing to some men, after several months’ work, were often negligible or even negative. My informants were very aware of how little they usually got for their work, noting that this was because of the *patrones*’ unscrupulous tactics and their own lack of knowledge⁸⁰. They were, however, relatively philosophical about this state of affairs, arguing that they knew they were being tricked, but had little option given that they wanted to sell their timber and labour so that they could buy – or in direct exchange for – things.

Santos-Granero and Barclay (1998: 256) show how Asháninka living on the Perené, where there is easier access to markets, have tended to reject working for timbermen in favour of concentrating on planting their own cash crops, or working for others as agricultural labourers to gain access to money and goods. This suggests that, given a choice, people prefer to gain money and goods from activities other than the timber industry. This is also illustrated by making a comparison of Pijuayal and La Selva. In Pijuayal, every adult male was involved with the extraction of timber at some point during the year and a large proportion of the younger men spent most of the rainy season working with *patrones*. In La Selva, however, far fewer people were engaged in such work. The majority of families concentrated on producing cash crops such as rice, maize, beans and pineapples, or raising pigs or chickens for sale to the teacher who ran a village shop or to itinerant traders who regularly passed through the village. This is also in keeping with Bodley’s observation, mentioned at the start of the chapter, that those Ashéninka with continual direct contact with *patrones* tended to enter fully into the market economy for themselves (Bodley 1971: 23). There were a number of men who dedicated themselves to extracting timber, even at the expense of their own subsistence agriculture, but these men were able to by-pass the intermediaries. Either they made deals with the *patrones* to share the finished timber (receiving a share of the finished planks which they then sold themselves), or they had access to their own purchased or

⁸⁰ My informants’ awareness of how their lack of knowledge allowed them to be exploited was one of the main reasons why they were so keen for the children to be educated, and thus their desire for schools (see Chapter Seven).

rented motors and boats and could therefore take their own timber to Pucallpa. Furthermore, those generally younger men, who were still employed as basic workers, were educated enough, or had access to help from sympathetic educated *mestizo* men such as the teachers, not to fall for numerical trickery. While timbermen still tried to gain the upper hand through various means, men in La Selva were far more likely to question any dubious claims or confront them when they attempted to cheat them. In this way, most of the men in La Selva, if not already working as partners with incoming *patrones*, were slowly building up the equipment to work for themselves.

This state of affairs can be seen in relation to the broader social and cultural differences between Pijuayal and La Selva. Certain shared cultural traits of the Ashéninka – their dispersed style of living, dislike of active leadership and the importance of independence and self-sufficiency – make them more open to exploitation by outsiders than their Shipibo or *mestizo* neighbours. My informants often told me, in private, that the reason why the *patrones* took advantage of them was because they lacked knowledge. They would not, however, want to appear ignorant in front of the *patrones*, or even in front of each other⁸¹, by admitting this more publicly. They would often agree to the timbermen's 'contracts', even though it was clear they had no idea what these entailed. Politeness and respect, and a preference for avoiding disagreement and confrontation, inhibited them from asking for further details, and prompted them instead to become philosophical about the problem. The importance of individuality and independence, coupled with a lack of leadership, also meant that they tended to confront outsiders on their own rather than in groups. This makes them easier to exploit in Pijuayal where the *patrones* can play individuals off against each other and against the community as a whole. Whereas in La Selva bargaining power was gained through the claim that all timber was on communally held land and thus that both individuals and the community should be paid, in Pijuayal timbermen turned this argument on its head. Since they were dealing with individuals, claimed the timbermen, it was up to each *comunero* to decide whether or not to pay the community out of *his* own pocket.

⁸¹ This was proved to me most eloquently when I watched two of my adult male informants engage in a 'game' with tiles that they had found in the school. While Pacheco vaguely remembered that the variously signed tiles could be used to play some kind of game, he obviously couldn't remember precisely how. He and Ernesto preceded to take turns in laying down the tiles, and every so often Pacheco would say that one of them had 'won', but no rules were ever discernible. Throughout it all Ernesto sat there laying down his tiles, never asking questions and only nodding in agreement whenever Pacheco told him that he had won. Afterwards he would not admit to me that he had had no idea what had been going on.

This lack of communal bargaining power, and the related lack of clarity about precise property rights, also leads to another marked distinction between the two communities over their interaction with larger timber companies.

Over the two years of my fieldwork, at least four different companies requested permission from La Selva to extract timber from their lands using tractors. Two of these were granted permission to work in specific areas at the base of the hills where it would have been impossible to bring out the logs with human labour alone. At community meetings contracts were drawn up stating the limits of the permission and setting out payment levels. Here, too, the loggers used their complicated mathematical system to work out how much they would pay, but in La Selva the *comuneros* could calculate the figures for themselves and argue for their increase. Then, when the timber was brought down to the river, it was men from La Selva who did the measurements and checked exactly what they were owed. Interestingly, the system still tended to work as debt peonage, with the companies advancing large goods to the community as a whole, including a solar panel, loudspeaker, and a generator. However, when one company brought a shortwave radio as advance payment it was quickly rejected as being too old and the company was told not to return. Through such deals, La Selva has steadily been gaining outside manufactured goods. By the time I left a generator, which was connected to light bulbs and sockets in all of the central houses, had been installed. In this way, the inhabitants of La Selva negated some of the power of the *patrones*, in part because the *patrones* no longer hold a monopoly over the supply of goods and also because they themselves are in competition for an increasingly rare resource: easily extractable, good quality timber. In contrast to Pijuayal where individuals, acting independently, still find themselves beholden to the demands and restrictions of their *patrones*, people in La Selva were thus increasingly able to play the debt system to their own advantage.

Another aspect of the system of *habilitación*, far from disadvantaging labourers, can work in their favour. This strikes at the very heart of the system and shows why control of a monopoly is so important to *patrones*. Underlying this form of labour is the idea that individuals are working for themselves, extracting a jungle good to which they have access and over which they therefore have some claim as a saleable commodity. The *patron*, by equipping them, is thus ‘facilitating’ their work. In return, he expects that the

extracted product will be ‘sold’ back to him. Instead of leading inevitably to a form of labour bondage, it works in the labourer’s favour in a situation where other *patrones* are competing for the same resources and workforce. In such a situation, as in La Selva and on the lower stretches of the river in Pijuayal, people can play *patrones* off against each other. Thus, in La Selva people could bargain for better deals from a position of relative strength. More interestingly, though, the handing over of the initial goods increased my informants’ power over their *patrones*. Many of the *patrones* were themselves relatively poor or in debt to others in Pucallpa, and might already have lent a sizeable proportion of their own money in financing/indebting an Ashéninka man. They would be anxious for this money to be returned and thus became somewhat vulnerable to their workers’ demands, either in the light of the direct threat that the timber might be sold to another *patrón* or when faced with demands linked to the timber’s extraction. People would often demand more food, axes and machetes once work had already started, arguing that they would not be able to continue without them. Finally, my informants’ ultimate hold over *patrones* was that they could just ‘disappear’ for a few weeks to go ‘hunting’ or just ‘visiting’ and hold up the process indefinitely until some *patrones* were forced to leave in dismay. If a *patrón* was ever forced to leave then the Ashéninka had, of course, gained some goods for nothing. This echoes the comment made by Humphrey and Hugh-Jones about barter in general that:

Barter itself, as a mode of exchange, is a struggle against enforced transactions, though frequently a puny one. The threat never to come back again and the range for bargaining may be small and feeble, more or less illusory in respect of the wider economy, but their existence maintains whatever is possible in the way of equality in the relation between partners (1992: 11)⁸²

The most proficient at playing this strategy was Agustin, the *de facto* head of the *Comunidad* (see Chapter Four), who manages to maintain long-term relations with various different *patrones*, always working just enough to keep them satisfied while still staying in enough debt so that they come looking for him when they need help. In this way, he keeps open the access they provide him to manufactured goods while also ensuring that he will not lose out if they fail to return. In these types of situations and

⁸² This strategy also echoes the Ashéninka’s standard response to would-be leaders and any individuals that seek to dominate them (see Chapter Four).

especially in areas where there is still a reasonable quantity of accessible timber, it can be argued that the most important resource for *patrones* is labour rather than timber⁸³.

In general, however, I do not want to overplay these Ashéninka strategies as they tend to work only in the short term, since *patrones* who have been made to lose out in this way are unlikely to return. I now want to show how in Pijuayal the Ashéninka have a different and much more subtle strategy for gaining agency over *patrones*.

The View from Pijuayal

In the forest world of my informants in Pijuayal, it is the timbermen who represent their most enduring contact with the rest of Peruvian society. Given the nature of this association, it is not surprising that it should have evolved over time. It was, indeed, these very changes that my fieldwork initially set out to study. I had intended to examine how the Ashéninka, once they were accustomed to a capitalist economy in which natural goods are seen as ‘products’, would adopt new strategies towards outsiders. Once I began seeing these relationships for myself, however, and hearing how my informants talked about them, I realised that something quite different was occurring.

At this stage, I wish to return to Hugh-Jones’ work, picking up specifically on his argument about the primarily social importance of trade. In his essay on the Barasana’s trade relations with outsiders, he argues that:

[B]y taking both [trade with Whites and barter with other Indians] together, we can see that trade between White people and Indians is continuous with barter amongst the Indians themselves and influenced by it. One consequence of this is that, in trade between White people and Indians, the two sides may not fully share each other’s understanding of the objects, values and social relations involved (Hugh-Jones 1992: 44).

Hugh-Jones goes on to argue that for the Indians “bartering is... a mark and device of sociability which people engage in for its own sake” (*ibid.*: 61). Thus “visiting, working,

⁸³ Santos-Granero & Barclay argue that this has been the case since the first introduction of the *habilitación* system on the Amazon and its tributaries (2000:35). This detail and the fact that my informants were aware of the manner in which they were overcharged and yet also chose to remain in their *patrones*’ employ leads me to query those who characterise the Ashéninka as being ‘enslaved’ by their *patrones* (see Parellada & Hvalkof 1998). Amongst my informants, while there were complaints about how mean and harsh present and past *patrones* could be, there was never any sense that my informants thought that they, or their parents, had been ‘slaves’.

and trading with White people is simultaneously a means of acquiring consumer goods, a popular pastime and entertainment, a way of making social contacts with foreigners, and an end in itself" (*ibid.*: 67). However, Hugh-Jones notes that the key difference between barter with other Indians and trade with Whites is that "trade with White people is fundamentally asymmetrical and it is usually they who set the terms of exchange" (*ibid.*: 68). He notes that trade with Whites is in some ways paralleled by the Barasana's trade relations with the Makú who must give 'tribute' to the Barasana, and hold asymmetrical trading relations with them. "Significantly the Barasana employ the verb *hoso* – 'to be made into Makú', to describe their own situation *vis-à-vis* White people" (*ibid.*). The situation for the Ashéninka can be seen as similar. But rather than accepting this unequal relationship, my informants' ultimate aim is to negate the power difference and to seek to be treated as equal partners in the interaction.

The first evidence of this came from how the Ashéninka talked about the timbermen. The Spanish term generally used in the area is *patrón*. While dictionaries translate this to English as 'boss' or 'employer', I prefer to consider it in terms of its closest English equivalent, 'patron'. In this sense, while still carrying connotations of a 'master-servant' relationship,⁸⁴ and indicating the corresponding relation of power, the term points to a deeper connection between the two individuals. This more subtle understanding of the term goes some way to showing the nature of a relationship that is dependent on a high degree of cooperation, and reciprocal interaction, between the two sides and is not quite as clearly hierarchical as references to 'employment' would suggest. Nonetheless, I was still somewhat surprised by the words that the Ashéninka used when referring to the timbermen. People always associated *patrones* with individual men. They would ask another man when 'his' *patrón* was arriving and complain about their own lack of a *patrón*, or compare their own unfavourably with another man's. In a context in which many of the men would be working for the same person, or would move quickly from working with one *patrón* to working for another, such talk seemed slightly odd. Gradually, I also noticed that *patrones* would sometimes be referred to as *amigos*, the direct translation of which is 'friends' in English. This also seemed to be a slightly strange usage of the term, given the exploitative nature that these relationships could

⁸⁴ The Latin root of the term referred to 'the former owner of a freed slave' (Oxford English Dictionary).

entail. The full relationship between these terms suddenly became clearer to me after Jorge, the man in whose house I lived, told me the story of ‘mosquito’.

The story recounted how, in the mythic ‘before time’, mosquitoes were ‘people’ and they used to not want to wear *cushmas*, for fear that they would be too heavy and break their bones. Instead the only thing they wanted from trading partners were bamboo sticks full of the red achiote dye, used by the Ashéninka to paint their faces. My informant explicitly linked the redness of the achiote to that of blood. Because of this failure to accept other goods the visiting traders grew angry with the mosquitoes and decided to get them drunk and then do away with them. Before they could act however, the mosquitoes started dancing in a circle, humming loudly and turning faster and faster until, finally, they all flew away.

The story itself was not of particular importance but what caught my attention were the words that Jorge used to describe the men who had come to the mosquitoes’ village with goods. At first he called them ‘Ashéninka *patrones*’, saying that they brought goods, pots, machetes and *cushmas* to trade. Later he would use the term *ayompari* and then interchange this with the Spanish word *amigo* (friend). This suggested a correlation between *ayompari* and *patrones*, with the use of the word *amigo* showing that such people were viewed primarily in social terms. Having gained this insight, I slowly realised that it was a common perception and that people even used the terms interchangeably about me. I remember one particular occasion when, as I sat in an old deserted camp waiting for some Ashéninka to join me, the first I heard of their presence was a distant calling of ‘*ayompari*’ and ‘*amigo*’ coming from deep within the forest.

Timbermen and *Ayompari*

I will return to the importance of seeing the Ashéninka’s understanding of this relationship as a primarily social one. First, however, I want to examine the link between timber men and *ayompari*. There are a number of other reasons, both functional and structural, why timbermen have fitted neatly into the role of *ayompari* in Ashéninka society. The rainy season is, traditionally, a time of minimal agricultural activity⁸⁵. Time tends to be spent mending houses, holding manioc beer parties or visiting others. With

⁸⁵ This is true for manioc, which must be planted before the rains, but is not true for other introduced crops such as maize and beans, which can be planted later.

the rivers swollen, this period is also the time when timbermen focus their activities on getting timber out of the upland areas where shallow summertime creeks become occasional torrents. This new opportunity for work in no way interferes with the regular agricultural and social life of men. Now, rather than spending their time alone in their houses or occasionally seeking out others, the men, some of whom bring their families, congregate in and around the timbermen's camps. There, work is generally carried out in a festive spirit, usually with the aid of manioc beer or imported alcohol.

Those who tend to spend the most time working for timbermen are the young unmarried men. They are also the most likely to help the *patrón* float the logs downstream, and will often accompany him on the full journey downriver to the local city, Pucallpa. There they may accompany the same *patrón* to other areas of the jungle or even gain new work with another person and end up in a completely different region, often for extended periods of time. During this time away from their own families, and especially if they are taken to another part of Ashéninka territory, they may well find a wife and settle there permanently⁸⁶. In fact, of 50 marriages in Pijuayal, 8 couples had met when the man had come in with a *patrón*. As I have shown in Chapter Three the Ashéninka marriage ideal is either to marry a cross-cousin or to 'marry far' (i.e. to an Ashéninka beyond the usual kinship connections). One of the aspects of the *ayompari* relationship was for a man to send his son to find a wife in the family of his trading partner. The role of giving young men access to unknown brides is now increasingly fulfilled by timbermen rather than trading partners.

Having shown why I believe that the Ashéninka's relationships with timber patrons should be understood in terms of their older ideas about *ayompari* trading partners, I now want to analyse the consequences that this view has for the form that these relationships take.

Binding Exchanges

Exactly one week after my first arrival in Pijuayal, Jorge came up to show me that the second hand of his watch had fallen off. He then asked me if I could fix it. In a moment of bravado, happy to have something concrete to do and anxious to show that my

⁸⁶ See also Gow (1991:130) in which he describes how, for the Piro, working for timbermen has become almost a rite of passage with 'ya es maderero' being equivalent to saying 'he is now a man'.

presence might be of some small help to him, I set about taking it to pieces. After I was some way into dismantling it and already had an array of very small screws, cogs and springs lying haphazardly in front of me, I finally thought to ask him how much it had cost. '50 soles', he told me, which was roughly one week's wages. Suddenly I realised that the watch, which to me had seemed a cheap example of its kind, was actually rather valuable to him, both monetarily and, no doubt, personally.

Needless to say my tinkering did not fix the watch and I soon gave up hope of ever being able to return all of the cogs and screws into the neatly ordered structure of the watch case. I panicked momentarily at the idea of destroying my fledgling relationship with the man who, at that time, was my only ally in the community, but I quickly came up with a face-saving plan. In my preparations for coming I had been very careful neither to bring too many things nor give too many large gifts away for fear both of upsetting the Ashéninka's egalitarian sensibilities and, more selfishly, so that I was not immediately seen as a fount of goods. For this reason, I had taken care to hide the few more valuable and desirable things I had brought in the bottom of my bag. Within this cache was my own watch, which I now brought out. I was, however, still reluctant to make an outright gift of it so I told Jorge that until I had an opportunity to take his watch to Pucallpa to be mended I would lend him mine. This seemed to please him greatly and I congratulated myself on having averted a disaster.

Over the next few weeks, however, Jorge kept pestering me about how he wanted to *buy* the watch from me and kept demanding to know how much it had cost. I was reluctant to agree to this, not least because I liked the watch but also out of some deeper (and I now recognise) 'Western' idea that 'friends' should not be monetarily indebted to each other. I knew that Jorge would not be able to pay me immediately, but rather that our transaction would be dragged out over a long period of time, and I was reluctant to enter into such an arrangement. He kept coming back to the subject, however, so in the end I told him an approximation of the watch's real price, 150/s (approximately 3 weeks' wages), hoping that this figure would be enough to deter him. In fact it had the opposite effect. When I next returned from a brief trip to the local city and presented him with his repaired watch he refused it saying that we had 'agreed' that he would buy mine from me. At this point we had a strange conversation in which we seemed mostly to be talking at cross purposes. First I tried to tell him that the watch had been a gift to

me and that I was too attached to it to part with it. He rapidly dismissed this argument along with other increasingly feeble excuses I presented, such that finally I accepted that I had no choice but to acquiesce. At this point I suddenly felt terrible that he would be 150/s in debt to me and I tried to bargain the price down or even to get him to accept it as a present. Now, to my amazement, he became even more animated than before and refused to accept any change in the settlement. Instead he started to argue that he could 'easily' pay such a 'small' amount or even more if need be. Here, I felt that we were entering into a realm of surreality as my attempts to at least bring the price down were met with statements of bravado on his part and then accusations of my treachery and lack of friendship for him. As I became more and more bewildered by his arguments and increasingly embarrassed that this man upon whose hospitality my entire enterprise depended should feel in debt to me, I decided to leave the matter alone.

In fact I secretly suspected that he would never get around to paying me so I slowly started to forget about the whole incident, although Jorge would occasionally talk of how and when he would pay me what he owed. It was not until an entire year later, long after we had become good friends and he had begun to accept the gifts that I insisted he take for letting me stay in his house, that the issue came up again. For the past few weeks he had been working for some timbermen in the *Comunidad* and one day one of them finally returned from Pucallpa to pay him. I was not even aware that there was any money, too used to the ploys of the *patrones* to believe a word they said, and the first I knew of it was when Jorge came back to the house and came to where I sat writing. He asked me to tell him exactly how much he owed me for the watch. Thinking quickly I named 100 soles and to my amazement he immediately began to count out the money from the notes that he had obviously just received, leaving himself with only around 50 soles. Again I tried to lower the price further but again this was futile.

In the manner typical of so many ethnographic encounters, this event disturbed me but then helped to indicate to me the importance and the intricacies of exchange and trade and the relationships that they entailed for my informants. In fact, the more I considered the pattern of the events the more I realised that it was exactly parallel with older ethnographic descriptions of Ashéninka trading within the *ayompari* system.

For example, in Varese's description of the Ashéninka *ayompari* relationship, he talks of the importance of discussions between the two partners over their debts to each other. He argues that "Because basically this is the renewal of an oath or contract, what is sought is revitalisation of the consecrated word... In these [arguments]... there are insults and accusations... the word is charged with dangerous powers that must be countered with other words, shouted more loudly in the face of the opponent and reinforced with gestures" (Varese 2002: 35). I realised that this is what had been happening during my seemingly surreal conversation with Jorge. He felt that I was questioning not only his ability to pay but also the very nature of our relationship and that he was defending himself and restating the bond between us. Whereas this display scared me, to him it was a normal part of such a process. Varese goes on to show that at the end of the exchange "each of the traders will go on his way. There is no ill will, only the certainty of having wisely used the force of the spoken word" (*ibid.*: 35). For all my apprehension during the verbal exchange, it certainly never led to any animosity between Jorge and me.

Beyond this specific example, however, the experience led me into a deeper analysis of the importance of and ideas associated with reciprocity, debt and relations with outsiders in Ashéninka society. In Chapter Three, I discussed the importance of manioc beer and the sharing in its consumption as being central to Ashéninka sociality and an important act in keeping disparate Ashéninka families connected. Amongst the Ashéninka, these bonds are formed between individuals, or individual households, rather than at any wider group level. Within the *ayompari* system, this again holds true, with the emphasis always being on a relationship between two individuals rather than wider groups. I went on to discuss wider anthropological understandings of exchange and reciprocity as part of a 'social contract' binding people together with reciprocated beer parties helping to maintain cohesion in this otherwise acephalous society. In a similar vein, relationships between distant *ayompari* trading partners can also be seen to act to maintain cohesion over the wide geographical and disparate indigenous group as a whole. The binding force of these relationships lies in the reciprocity of goods between the two individuals involved⁸⁷.

⁸⁷ The specific reciprocity of particular objects set up between *ayompari* partners stands outside of the generalised giving of food, *masato* and subsistence items that I argued occurs between all Ashéninka (see Chapters Two and Three).

Varese, following Mauss's seminal discussion of the gift, argues that amongst *ayompari* the act of exchange "far from being only economic and social in interest, must be understood as an eminently religious feature." (Varese 2002: 33). Varese seems to have had in mind Mauss's discussion of the *hau* (glossed as 'spirit') of a gift among the Maori. Mauss' argument was that among the Maori "to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself" and that while individuals were bound by the law and morality of their society to return gifts, in some deeper sense it was also because the given goods themselves "exert a magical or religious hold over you" (Mauss 1950: 12). While I like this argument and believe that in an important way it does reflect the lived reality of this act of exchange for the Ashéninka, as Lévi-Strauss argued it seems to bear a danger of over-mystification (1966: 38)⁸⁸.

At this point we must deal with Varese's terminology. He describes the phenomenon as 'exchange of gifts or sacred trade' (Varese 2002: 33) thereby conflating these different actions as one and the same. It helps here to define 'gifts', or perhaps 'pure gifts' in the sense of 'goods which are given with no desire for any kind of return' (see Parry 1985). If this is accepted as a definition of a 'gift', then one can quickly ascertain that *ayompari* partners do not feel that 'gift'-giving is what they are doing. When Jorge took my watch he was very sure that he would, eventually, give me something in return. This suggests that the *ayompari* system is better understood (from a Western perspective) as being a form of trade. This is how Bodley describes it: "an individual agrees to trade on a regular basis with another individual... a man will give his *ayompari* a set of arrows thereby establishing a debt relationship, and ask him to give a steel knife in return" (Bodley 1971: 51). Yet Varese's use of the adjective 'sacred' is also suggestive. For the Ashéninka, there is a definite sense of what such a trading relationship entails and of the fact that each partner is morally bound to offer fair recompense to the other. This is in contrast to someone, such as a *mestizo patrón*, who might see such an exchange as primarily a business transaction from which, as I outline below, while governed by certain ideas of 'fairness', nevertheless he wishes to make personal gain.

Sahlins, in his discussion of Mauss's work, offers a reworking of the idea of the 'spirit of the gift' when he argues that the power of gifts should not be understood in terms of the

⁸⁸ Lévi-Strauss asks, "Are we not faced here with one of those instances (not altogether rare) in which the ethnologist allows himself to be mystified by the native?" (1966: 38, quoted in Sahlins 1972: 153-4)

objects themselves but rather in terms of the social mores that govern their exchange and usage. It is, therefore, the immorality of withholding a gift or acting inappropriately with it that carries the danger of bringing retribution. “We have to deal with a society in which freedom to gain at others’ expense is not envisioned by the relations and forms of exchange” (Sahlins 1972: 162). I believe that this understanding of the power of ‘gifts’, or more widely of any exchanged objects, is helpful in analysing the situation of the Ashéninka. My informants rarely enunciated the value of reciprocity and of helping others, but nonetheless, these ideas clearly underlie much of Ashéninka sociality (see Chapter Two). While, because all individuals are able to acquire the few necessities they desire, there is generally little need for generosity, this does not mean that it is not considered important. As I showed in Chapter Four, one of my informants’ main criticisms of Agustin, the *jefe*, was that he took advantage of his position and gained things at the expense of others.

Rather than seeing exchange and reciprocity as embedded in society it can be argued that in some cultures these activities actually give society its structure. If the importance of the *ayompari* relationship is seen in terms of sociality, then the delayed nature of the exchanges can be better understood. Delayed exchanges that involve periods of time and trust bind people together over longer periods of time and stretch out relations. The distances that separated the homes of *ayompari* trading partners in the past attests to the power of the exchanged goods. The Ashéninka, I contend, are trying to make the goods that they exchange with their *patrones* serve a similar function to the one that they had for their Ashéninka *ayompari*, in order to draw them into a long term and mutually beneficial relationship. Of significant importance to Jorge in my act of giving him my watch was the fact that I was an outsider. Coming so soon after my first arrival, and before I had made any real connections with anyone, this opportunity to form a relation of indebtedness offered Jorge his first chance to make real links between us. By being in debt to me he felt that we now had something that would tie us together, giving him a hold over me to force my return in search of repayment and giving me a claim over him. If we had both been Ashéninka and felt bound by the same social and moral code, that single exchange would have been enough to bind us in a particular form of enduring relation. Unfortunately, for the Ashéninka the social and moral prescriptions that they feel come with the exchange of goods are not shared by visiting outsiders.

Sahlins, in his discussion of ‘primitive exchange’, describes a scale that leads from the ‘generalised reciprocity’ occurring between close kin through ‘balanced reciprocity’ to the ‘negative reciprocity’ that characterises trade with outsiders. I am aware of criticisms of such substantive definitions and their glossing of a more complicated reality. However, Sahlins’s general idea is useful for understanding the Ashéninka position. Ashéninka relations with their close kin correspond to the category of ‘generalised reciprocity’. Likewise, the *ayompari* relationship between men corresponds with Sahlins’s notion of ‘balanced reciprocity’, in which specific objects must be reciprocated by “returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period” (Sahlins 1972: 195). Finally, Sahlins argues that in ‘negative reciprocity’, “the participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other’s expense” (*ibid.*). This form of reciprocity can be understood as characterising capitalist exchanges. We can see it at work in the timbermen’s idea of how relations should be with the Ashéninka over payments for their timber and labour.

Timbermen, in line with their experience in a market economy, are trying to get the most out of any transactions with local people. Yet, as evidenced by their restraint in using arithmetical trickery, they still have some idea that this should be done ‘fairly’. They no longer resort to the more predatory practices that were used in the past, which could be seen as reducing debt peonage to a form of slavery. In my fieldsites, the *patrones* that I observed were always keen to try and legitimise their trading practices in the eyes of others – and not just visiting anthropologists. They would go to great lengths to explain and justify the reasons for the reductions they made for ‘expenses’. Obviously, such explanations were part of their tactics in the bargaining process; however, the position of the timbermen themselves must be taken into account before their practices are condemned as ‘exploitative’. In most cases, the timbermen are in debt to creditors in Pucallpa. In fact, the chains of debt often lead back to Peru’s capital, Lima, or even further. Thus, the timbermen in my fieldsites were not like the ‘rubber barons’ of early last century, who famously enjoyed the best luxuries of the age while mercilessly exploiting their workers. If there are modern-day equivalents, they are those timber bosses and sawmill owners with expensive sunglasses, imported pickup trucks and houses in Miami, who venture no further than Pucallpa. Those who come to the jungle, by contrast, are poorer *mestizos* from Pucallpa, who only manage to get started on the basis of considerable debt. Many of them, having been outfitted by the owners of

sawmills in Pucallpa, are as beholden to the system as are the Ashéninka. Nevertheless, from the Ashéninka's point of view, the timbermen are still treating them badly and unfairly gaining from what my informants thought should be a balanced relationship.

Firth, in a rejection of the more spiritual Maussian explanation of reciprocity, outlines three more secular ways in which individuals can claim substantive help: they can appeal to the continuation of reciprocity, appeal to the giver's own prestige, or transform it into a moral obligation (Firth 1967: 13). I have shown the presence of the first strategy in the play of credits and debits between *patrones* and the workers. My informants certainly used the second strategy in subtle and not so subtle ways. They are also, I contend, trying to force the power of the third appeal onto their *patrones*. They want the *patrón* to feel the 'power' of the link between them as they might, and thus to feel a moral obligation to repay them fairly. In this way, they recognise that the important thing is to try to impose some social hold on the timbermen. As Firth puts it:

The fear of punishment sent through the *hau* of goods is indeed a supernatural sanction and a valuable one for enforcing repayment of a gift... [But] the main emphasis of the fulfilment of obligation lies... in the social sanctions – the desire to continue useful economic relations, the maintenance of prestige and power – which do not require any hypothesis of recondite beliefs to explain (1959: 421, quoted in Sahlins 1972: 155).

The trick is thus to make the outsiders feel the same sense of responsibility that Ashéninka do towards each other.

In postulating this analysis, I bear in mind Hugh-Jones' advice not to underplay the active involvement of indigenous peoples in economic activities with outsiders (Hugh-Jones 1992: 70). As I have shown, the Ashéninka do want to become involved in the timber industry and do want the goods on offer. My point is that although they can be seen to do badly in the outcomes of this economic relation, they cannot be understood as passive victims. Instead, while the timbermen are trying to increase their returns in line with their own ideas about market relations, the Ashéninka are actively trying to impose their own cultural ideas on people who they know do not understand them. The Ashéninka act in terms of an understanding that they cannot demand things of patrons as they can of other Ashéninka, or of their old *ayompari* partners. But they *want* to be able

to make such demands. They want the *patrones* to become, in some important manner, more Ashéninka so that they too will feel social and moral obligations. It is this that Jorge was doing in his transactions with me over the watch.

The veracity and power of this strategy was shown to me near the end of my fieldwork when Vicente, a man with seven children who lived near the headwaters of the Amaquaria, died after returning from Pucallpa where his *patrón*, Melvin, had taken him for a few weeks. I too had been away from the area but on my return quickly learnt of his death. I also heard that everyone, while not holding Melvin responsible for his death, was ready to demand that he help Vicente's bereaved wife and children. When Melvin arrived the next week this obligation was both directly stated and indirectly alluded to by many different people. In this case, such appeals proved effective and Melvin, as well as honouring his specific debt to Vicente by giving the goods to his bereaved family, also gave them other goods and foodstuffs and promised to help them in the future. This incident proved firstly that my informants felt that *patrones* had an obligation to help their workers and their families and also that *patrones* could feel this responsibility as well.

What made Melvin perhaps the most ideal kind of *patrón* was the particularly long-standing and intimate ties he had in the area. He was one of only a few *patrones* who had worked continuously in and around Pijuyal for many years. He had first come there 12 years before my fieldwork began with a brother-in-law to grow coca. After his brother-in-law's death, and given the difficulties involved in illegal cocaine production, he had returned by himself to begin logging. Starting with only basic tools he had steadily used his earnings to buy boats, motors and chainsaws until he started employing other *mestizos* from Pucallpa to act as his foremen, enabling him to work a number of different sites simultaneously. Through all of this he was well aware of the importance of the Ashéninka's acceptance of him and over the years he had built up close relationships with some of them. Melvin can thus be seen as representing the ideal patron to whom all my informants aspired to be linked: the beneficent, powerful outsider who is bound by a sense of moral and social obligation and, ultimately, even by kinship ties⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ In this account I have been concerned with understanding the Ashéninka's view of their relationships with outsiders. I have represented this in contrast to the *mestizo patrones*' more 'capitalist' position, which seeks to limit social relations and gain as much as possible from all transactions. In a case where the Ashéninka have managed to transform this relationship according to their own sensibilities, it would be interesting to examine the *patrón's* own ideas about how the relationship has changed and thus to examine

While Melvin certainly represents the clearest case for the efficacy of this Ashéninka strategy, I did see similar examples of it in the case of other long-term *patrones*. What Melvin and the others show is that the best *patrones*, from my informants' point of view, were those that returned repeatedly rather than just coming once and then leaving with timber that they might never pay for. Individuals knew that they would neither be able to track down timbermen once they had left the communal lands nor to force repayment. In La Selva, this meant that surety would be demanded, in the form of leaving a *mestizo* worker or a motor or chainsaw; but in Pijuayal, my informants' hope seemed to rely on the idea that individuals would feel a moral obligation to return and to repay debts. Too often, this was not the case and men would laugh at how someone was still waiting in vain for their *patrón*. But sometimes such a patron did return, and a long and mutually profitable association might result⁹⁰.

This analysis of the Ashéninka's interactions with *patrones* fits well with my discussion in Chapters Two and Three of the manner in which my informants preferred to form relationships. There I noted that, rather than being preoccupied with drawing individuals into consanguineal relations, or viewing them as real or potential affines who must be exploited, the Ashéninka are willing, and indeed prefer, for individuals to be regarded, and to remain, as 'friends' – equals, with whom voluntary relationships can be formed. I noted that this form of relationship allows for both sides to benefit from their interaction while also avoiding the deeper complications that come from drawing others into other types of kinship relations. Hence, in this example of how the Ashéninka interact with the outside world, we can see how their relationships are underpinned by

whether and how Melvin's thinking about the Ashéninka he knows has changed. Unfortunately, I do not know enough about Melvin's previous attitudes to offer such an analysis at this time.

⁹⁰ Interestingly there is one *mestizo* institution that can be seen to parallel the Ashéninka *ayompari* relationship, that of *compadres*. While a *compadre* is ostensibly a godfather to a person's child, the relationship forms a strong bond between the parents and the *compadres* themselves. Descola writes of the *compadre* relationship as 'an association more political than religious', arguing that Quichuas in Ecuador enter into such relationships with outsiders 'to win the protection of a powerful man' who, in turn, gains a client who will provide him with local goods and 'unprotestingly accept the systematically unfavourable rate of exchange that he will impose' (1996:11). Descola, however, also notes that there are a few advantages for indigenous peoples in the relationship: "Through it they acquire the right to put up in their protector's house... and they are promised that he will intercede for them when they have problems with the national bureaucracy" (*ibid.*). I would add also that, they get a guaranteed buyer of their products. Interestingly, while Jorge tried to draw me into an *ayompari* relationship, Melita, the lady with whom I stayed in La Selva, explicitly made me *compadre* to her daughters Dexarlis and Mariella. I have already noted Schäfer's contention that the word *ayompari* itself might be derived from the word *compadre* (1991: 50). Such parallels are intriguing but unfortunately time and space have not allowed me to consider them fully.

their own cultural ideas of the best manner in which relationships should be conducted. The fact that the Ashéninka's ideal relationship is flexible and voluntary, has undoubtedly helped to ease these interactions and meant that outsiders could both accept and be accepted into Ashéninka society.

Conclusion

In this way, we can see that, for the Ashéninka, contact with the outside world is not an 'all or nothing' choice, as Bodley suggested. While in La Selva individuals do eschew the *patrón*/worker relationship in favour of seeking their own, more direct, means of generating money and goods, in Pijuayal my informants were more willing to work within the system of *habilitación*. In part, the system can be seen to have changed sufficiently since its first introduction during the rubber boom – mainly due to increased communication with the outside world – to alter the power relations between the *patrones* and their labourers. However, my research has also aimed to offer a more generally applicable analysis of the Ashéninka's own ideas concerning relationships with *patrones*.

Noting the role played by manufactured goods in drawing indigenous people into increased interaction with outsiders, I argued that this should not be glossed as simple 'acculturation', but rather that attention should be paid to indigenous people's own understandings of the importance of Western articles. The Ashéninka's relationship with timbermen should, likewise, be understood from their own point of view. Firstly I argued that timbermen now play the social role once occupied by the Ashéninka's *ayompari* trading partners: providing goods not available elsewhere, giving a chance to socialise and engage in *fiestas* with non-immediate kin, and enabling young men to leave their native areas and seek brides from afar. I drew on ethnographic examples, including the case of Jorge and the watch exchange, to show how my informants were keen to draw individuals into relationships based on exchange in order to cement a link between them. The act of exchange between Ashéninka men and *mestizo patrones* can, then, be understood differently by the two parties involved. Whereas the timbermen see it as a primarily economic exchange from which they are entitled to maximise their own gain, the Ashéninka believe that the act itself brings social and moral obligations. Above all, the Ashéninka want to make their *patrones* into something more akin to their *ayompari*: to draw them into a relationship far closer to that of '*amigos*' (friends), with all of the social and moral obligations that that entails, than that of a 'boss' or 'master'. How far

they succeed in doing this is debateable, but I contend that such an understanding helps to elucidate the nature of my informants' interaction with the timber industry.

Having analysed my informants' own conceptions of and reactions to representatives of the timber industry, in the next chapter I turn my attention to the Ashéninka's past and present interactions with Christianity.

Chapter Six:

Adventism, Christianity and Messianism

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the manner in which the Ashéninka use their own ideas about how best to conduct relationships to try and gain a degree of agency over their timbermen *patrones*. In showing how such relationships are influenced by the Ashéninka's own conceptions I followed one of the main concerns of this thesis: to put my informants, and their own understandings of the world, at the forefront of my analysis. In this chapter my aim is similar, but now relates to the Ashéninka's long interaction with Christianity. In doing so, I draw on my own experiences from fieldwork to develop some general conclusions about the reaction of the Ashéninka to representatives of Christianity. These conclusions are then used to analyse past examples of this interaction, and reassess some of the conclusions reached by other anthropologists working on similar issues.

The chapter begins by looking at my informants' present relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In particular it analyses how and why this sect achieved seemingly rapid and widespread conversion of Ashéninka people in the past. I will then analyse how effective this apparent conversion has been in the long term by looking at the attitudes of my present-day informants towards the Church, its doctrines and strictures. While the Church superficially seems to have been accepted for a number of reasons, it has not – in marked contrast to the acceptance of timbermen shown in the last chapter – been fully integrated into my informants' way of life. I analyse some of the reasons why the Ashéninka have been unable or unwilling to adapt and reformulate the Church's doctrines in terms of their own cultural understandings.

After looking at the reactions of my informants to the Adventist church, the second half of the chapter applies these contemporary findings to the Ashéninka's historical interactions with Christianity. Past events are investigated here through an analysis of earlier writings on the Ashéninka. Most writers have argued for the importance of seeing messianic beliefs in the Ashéninka's own cosmology as the key to their apparent readiness both to accept Christianity and then to rebel against what they perceive as its

strictures. In contrast to the arguments of Métraux (1942), Brown (1991) and Brown and Fernández (1991), and in keeping with my own experience of the Ashéninka during fieldwork, I maintain that messianism is not an essential part of the Ashéninka worldview. I also hold that a belief in the promised arrival of a messiah does not underlie the Ashéninka's relations with Christianity. I argue instead that these historical patterns are more plausibly explained in reference to those cultural traits that I have outlined in both the first part of this chapter and throughout the thesis as a whole. Having put forward my own understanding of these past events, the final part of the chapter, taking its cue from a recent article by Hanne Veber (2003), closely analyses and critiques those writings that form the basis of the view that messianic beliefs are an important part of Ashéninka cosmology.

In pursuing this project my main aim is not to attempt to understand the particular beliefs of my informants nor the Ashéninka as a whole, nor to analyse the cosmological changes wrought by conversion to Christianity. Rather, I am concerned with elucidating the practical cultural traits underlying the Ashéninka's apparent willingness to follow new individuals and ideas, and then the ultimate reasons for their rejection of these new codes of living. My emphasis is thus on secular reactions rather than on determining the influence of evangelicals on my informants' cosmological beliefs. This latter task is one I see as the concern of another, future project.

Adventism in La Selva

My interest in the Ashéninka's relations with Christian churches stems from my initial experiences in La Selva. On my first day there, as Wilder, the *jefe*, showed me around the centre of the *comunidad*, he pointed out one thatched building that had recently collapsed. He told me that it was the 'church'. He explained that it had fallen down two days before and that they would soon rebuild it. Asking me if my family, and all of the people in my country, were Adventists, he seemed unconvinced when I explained that neither I nor any of my family – nor indeed many of my fellow country-men – were members of this church.

Later on, after we had returned to the house to eat and I was lying in a hammock contemplating the day, Rose-Marie, Wilder's 11-year-old daughter, came to ask me if I would be going to church with them. Worried about being seen as a member of the

church so early in my fieldwork, I made my apologies. She seemed a little perturbed by this but her mother quickly called for her to leave me alone. A little later the three of them – Wilder, his wife Lydia and Rose-Marie – all appeared dressed in their smartest clothes with wetted and combed hair and a bible clutched in one hand. I watched them walk across the football pitch to the *Casa Comunal* (Community House). For the next hour or so, the sounds of orations and singing drifted across to where I lay and I grew a little worried by the piety that was being displayed. It was a Wednesday night. I would later learn that such meetings were held for an hour or so on Wednesday and Friday nights, while the main church service took up much of the day on Saturday, the Adventist Sabbath.

In part, it was this overtly visible piety that led to my desire – perhaps displaying my Western/secular prejudices – to search for another fieldsite in which I might find less overtly Christianised Ashéninka.⁹¹ Over the next two years however, I came to realise that the bulk of the Adventist congregation in La Selva were actually the *mestizos*. I also learned that the piety shown by Wilder and his family on my first few days in La Selva was not representative of their own usual actions, let alone that of other Ashéninka. In fact, it seems to have been influenced by my own presence. For, in their experience, the majority of white foreigners who had visited the area were missionaries of the Adventist church, or of other similar North American Protestant evangelical sects. Thus they assumed that I must be one of these or that, even if I was not a pastor, I must still be a member of the Church. In the end it would take months of continual visits and my move to Wilder's mother's house, before Wilder fully understood that not only was I not an Adventist pastor, but that I did not belong to the Adventist Church at all. At this point, there was a marked reduction of his overt piety when I was around, exemplified most obviously by his willingness to get drunk in front of me.

It was Melita who would be instrumental in showing me the more representative reactions of the Ashéninka to Christianity in general, and Adventism in particular. I specifically remember one occasion when I was working in Melita's *chacra* with her family. It was larger than any *chacra* I had seen in Pijuayal and was the result of several years of work. Melita explained to me how each year they would cut down a new bit of

⁹¹ This desire to find 'less Christian' Ashéninka was no doubt a part of that common affliction of new and inexperienced fieldworkers and represented the futile search for 'unspoiled' and 'pure' subjects to study.

the forest for planting fresh manioc while older bits were used for different crops. These would eventually be turned into pasture for cattle and goats⁹². As I worked I noticed that all along one side was a large patch of land that seemed to be completely overgrown with wild bushes. This puzzled me and finally, during one of our *masato* breaks, I asked Melita about it. ‘Oh that. That’s God’s,’ she told me. Then, laughing, she explained to me that the family had helped Luz-Maria and her husband cut the plot two years before, but that Luz-Maria had never got around to planting it.

“She asks me what is the point of working when God is so close. But I say, ‘What will we give him when he comes?’ How could I let Jesus come into my house and then not have anything to serve him? I would be ashamed. No, instead I will say, ‘Here you go Jesus, some nice fresh *masato*, nice and sweet, and here is some manioc and some fish’, and he will be pleased.”

Then, as she got into her stride, she added,

“Luz-Maria, she is lazy and her husband is a drunkard. And anyway, when will God come, how do they know? No one knows, and so until he comes I will work. Look at them [Luz-Maria’s family] now, they have nothing to eat. They only survive because Wilder gave them one of his *platanales* [plantain *chacras*]. I told him not to, but he is too good. And still they ask for things, and do no work.”

While Melita’s outspokenness on the matter was uncharacteristic, and owed much to our close relationship, her feelings were definitely shared by many other Ashéninka in both La Selva and Pijuayal. Just two years before, in 1999, they had been beset by Adventist pastors coming and warning them of the imminent second coming of Christ⁹³. While this had not excited widespread – or any – millennial sentiments, these visits and the accompanying missionising had prompted an increase in regular church-going among most of the inhabitants of La Selva. Nevertheless by the time I arrived, a year and a half into the new millennium, the scepticism of most of my informants had become obvious and few bothered to have anything to do with the Church⁹⁴.

⁹² See Chapter Seven for a discussion of this new use of land.

⁹³ While the Seventh-day Adventist Church made no official pronouncement on the new millennium, and seems to have deliberately put out neutral statements referring to it (for example see *The Adventist Review* December 1999 – available at <http://www.adventistreview.org>), throughout Amazonian Peru, at least, their followers and native pastors, were not slow to make the connection.

⁹⁴ This process was attested to by everyone I talked to including Elias, the *mestizo* who was now the head of the church in La Selva.

At first glance, this apparent process of conversion and then reversion appeared to be directly linked to the new millennium, but a glance through documented history and the memories of my own informants suggests that this sequence was nothing new. In fact, throughout their recorded history the Ashéninka, and other Asháninka groups, have a pattern of converting to Christian sects, only for their adherence to each sect's creeds to lapse. It is my contention that my informants' attendance at church had less to do with their own belief in a new millennium than with the increased impetus that the new millennium gave the Church's pastors in their quest to increase their worldwide congregation. Given our understanding of Ashéninka culture, it is not surprising that the Ashéninka follow the exhortations of outsiders who come offering physical things, and also preaching of the dangers of not following their beliefs. Equally, it is unsurprising that when these promises and expectations are not fulfilled the Ashéninka quickly fall away from the Church. Before I expand on this argument, I will first give a brief account of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church and its work amongst the Asháninka in the 20th Century.

History and Description of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Peru

The Church of Seventh-day Adventists grew out of the Millerite movement of the 1830s and 40s started by William Miller in New York state. After the failure of his prophecy for the end of the world on or before October 22, 1844, a few of Miller's followers still remained faithful to the idea of Christ's imminent return. One particular group argued that the biblical verse that Miller had used to prophesy the second coming ("And he said unto me, unto 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," Daniel 8: 14) had in fact been referring to the cleansing of the sanctuary of Heaven itself and not the earth. This doctrine was specifically espoused by Joseph Bates, who in turn converted James and Ellen White. These three individuals went on to become the first leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, which was officially formed on May 21, 1863. Ellen White in particular was said to have received visions from God and her accounts of these became a foundation for Adventist doctrine. The Church has always had an evangelical doctrine and after beginning in the United States it slowly extended its missions to other countries⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ This short history of the origins of Adventism is based on sources at www.adventist.org and www.sdanet.org.

The first attempts at missionising in Peru occurred at the end of the 19th century. By 1911, Fernando and Ana Stahl, missionaries originally from Michigan USA, were officially posted to the Lake Titicaca region of highland Peru to establish churches, schools and health centres. By 1919 they had 46 primary schools grouped around six mission stations (Kessler 1967: 235). Fernando Stahl's health was deteriorating, however, and this prompted him to begin work in the lower altitudes offered by the jungles. He began by establishing a mission on Peruvian Corporation land on the Perené River (Brown & Fernández 1993: 75). He arrived there in 1921 and began preaching amongst various Asháninka groups. At first Stahl met with only limited success, but this dramatically changed after about 7 years when he decided to make a trip down the Perené and Tambo Rivers in the company of another Adventist, V.E. Peugh (Bodley 1971: 111). They undertook the trip to determine how far their preaching had reached and were amazed at what they uncovered. Peugh described the event as follows:

There are actually thousands of [Asháninka] Indians along these rivers who are longing for the gospel. The message has penetrated the forest way beyond our missions or our missionaries. We found whole villages among the savages where the message had trickled through, and all had given up the use of liquor and tobacco. At every place we stopped, hundreds gathered about us and attentively listened to the word of God (McElhany 1928: 24)⁹⁶

Bodley argues that this dramatic conversion stemmed from Stahl's preaching of the impending second coming of Christ. "Stahl certainly never set a date for the great Advent, but in the minds of the [Asháninka] it was imminent. They expected Christ to appear today or tomorrow, not ten or twenty years in the future" (Bodley 1971: 113). There were ideas that the dead would arise, people would ascend to heaven where they would no longer grow sick and die, and that others would be burned or slaughtered like peccary. But, as Bodley points out, all of this seems to have been derived 'without major modifications from the message preached by Stahl' (*ibid.*: 114). Bodley argues that when God was not forthcoming the movement slowly lost support, dwindling to a small group at two missions.

⁹⁶ Taken from a letter by Peugh, quoted by McElhany in an article for the Adventist publication *Review and Herald* (1928, vol. 105:45 p24, cited in Bodley 1971:112).

Later efforts at missionising by representatives of the church in other areas, while not quite as dramatic, did follow the same basic pattern. For example, Bodley describes in detail the formation of the mission community at Shahuaya with the arrival of Tomas Flores in 1958, a '*mestizo* lay Adventist':

At first he lived with Conibo believers in the area and visited the Campa. Finally he invited them to become believers again [Stahl had been in the area in previous decades] and promised them that a missionary, a school and even a landing strip were to come if they were interested... Flores appointed one of the Campa as chief, who in turn directed the others in the building of the school and church and the planting of the missionary's garden. Soon there was a general shift in settlement patterns within the area as households moved near the school from the nearby hills and upper portions of the river" (Bodley 1971: 153).

This description of events in an area less than 40km from my own fieldsite parallels the descriptions my informants gave me of the setting up of a previous settlement in their area, Mashantay. They described how Adventist preachers had come into the area telling everyone of Jesus' imminent arrival and how they must all learn to live properly if they were not to be sent to hell for eternity. The preachers came in aeroplanes and encouraged those living in other areas to construct their own landing strips so that they could be visited directly. In the late 1960s⁹⁷ a settlement formed at Mashantay, about equi-distant between La Selva and Pijuayal (see Map 7). It was centred on a church and a school to which a teacher was sent. Following earlier patterns of behaviour, again interest in the church gradually fell and the demise of the settlement finally occurred when the teacher refused to return. My informants described how individual families then drifted towards the areas now known as La Selva and Pijuayal⁹⁸.

This brief history suggests that the events before and after my arrival, and the adherence of my informants to Church doctrine and then their gradual falling-away, was part of a wider and long-established pattern. Older histories of other Asháninka groups in other

⁹⁷ It is difficult to give an exact date for the formation of this settlement, but I have extrapolated from the current ages of my informants and their descriptions of themselves at the time. The Adventist air programme began in 1964 (Muir, 2000:38) and was especially active throughout the rest of the 1960s and then 1970s (Bodley 1971:150).

⁹⁸ In Chapter Seven I will outline the specific histories of these *Comunidades* in terms of changing government policies towards indigenous groups and their rights to land.

areas further attest that this is not just a local phenomenon but rather a generally characteristic reaction by the Asháninka to Christian sects. It is my aim in this chapter to understand the underlying factors that have led to this pattern of conversion and rejection. In so doing, I reach conclusions about the nature of the Ashéninka's interactions with these religious outsiders.

In understanding this pattern from the Ashéninka's point of view, it is important first to consider the beliefs and doctrines espoused by the incomers themselves.

Adventist Beliefs

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Protestant sect and broadly follows the same teachings and beliefs as other Protestant Churches. Adventists profess faith in God and his son, Jesus Christ, and obedience to the Ten Commandments and the Scriptures in general. They are fundamentalist in the sense that they believe that the Scriptures are 'the written Word of God' and are 'the infallible revelation of His will' (S.A.C.M.: 9)⁹⁹. This adherence to Scripture results in the observance of mission codes and strictly disciplined behaviour. Keller, describing the activities of the church in Madagascar, characterises Adventist practice as being based on 'a Socratic type of Bible study', claiming that "The goal is not to learn Adventist doctrine by heart; the aim is... for everyone to find their own answers and to discover Biblical truth for themselves" (Keller 2004: 93). Among my (relatively illiterate) informants, however, a more didactic, 'by rote', approach is expected. Great emphasis is also put on 'Christian Behaviour': on modesty, restraint and moderation. Thus dress "is to be simple, modest, and neat" (S.A.C.M.: 16) while attention is also given to health and diet. The original Biblical proscription of certain foods is followed (see Leviticus 11), while alcohol, tobacco and all narcotics are completely forbidden (S.A.C.M.: 16).

The name of the sect stems from two of their central beliefs, which mark their difference from other Protestant groups. First is the belief that the Sabbath should be observed on the Saturday "as the day of rest, worship, and ministry... from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts" (*ibid.*: 15).

⁹⁹ All quotations on Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and beliefs are taken from the church's own manual: *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2000 edition, published by Review and Herald® Publishing Association: Hagerston, Maryland U.S.A. The text is quoted from their electronic version downloadable from www.adventist.org.

Second is the belief in the second coming, or 'Advent', of Christ. Their doctrine states that:

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Saviour's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfilment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times (*ibid.*: 18).

Members of the Church thus see themselves as the last true remnant of the Christian faith whose mission it is 'to keep the commandments of God... announce the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaim salvation through Christ, and herald the approach of His second advent' (*ibid.*: 13). The importance of this belief, and the manner in which it relates to the effectiveness of Adventist conversion, will be discussed below.

The Power of the Missionaries

Bodley's account of the activities of Tomas Flores in the area of Shahuaya suggests some of the important aspects of the work of Adventist missionaries that facilitated their acceptance by the Ashéninka. As Bodley notes, the communities were not imposed on the Ashéninka from the outside. Rather the Ashéninka themselves willingly joined, and helped to organise, the new settlements (1971: 150). This is important, particularly as I have shown throughout this thesis the preference that my informants show for living in a dispersed manner throughout the jungle rather than in tight-knit settlements. If this is true, then something about the missionaries themselves, the benefits they gave the Ashéninka or the message they offered them were potent enough to overcome the Ashéninka's preference for living apart. I will argue that it was a combination of these things which led the Ashéninka to form these settlements.

Material Benefits

The first obvious power of the missionaries lies in their very status as outsiders. I have already shown the power that outsiders can command in Ashéninka societies and some of the reasons for this (Chapter Four). In particular, I noted my informants' fear of

unknown outsiders, coupled with their belief in the potential benefits that such interactions can have. In the case of Adventist missionaries, this indigenous belief in their wealth was well-founded, for the missionaries had obvious access to apparently endless supplies of goods and control of the symbolically important aeroplane. Others working in Amazonia, and with other Evangelical groups (most notably the Summer Institute of Linguistics – S.I.L.) have made a similar point: “With their superior economic positions [missionaries] become living proof of the connection between material rewards and Protestantism” (Hvalkof & Aaby 1981: 181). In the last chapter I noted how timbermen’s access to outside, manufactured goods gives them a great deal of coercive power over the Ashéninka. The position of the missionaries can be seen in a similar light. In fact, Yost, working with the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador, has documented just such a relationship, writing that the Huaorani were keen to make these unknown strangers (missionaries) feel obligations that would make them generous (Yost 1981: 688). Similarly, Taylor, in her study of the Achuar’s relations with Salesian missions in the 1960s, argues that the Achuar’s motivation for following mission strategy was to gain access to indispensable manufactured goods; their previous supply – via interethnic trade – having been interrupted by the 1941 conflict between Peru and Ecuador (1981: 649)¹⁰⁰.

While I have no direct evidence of missionaries being seen in this way in my fieldsites, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Ashéninka would have been keen to utilise the missionaries in the same way that they had every other outsider: as a valuable source of outside goods. It follows that one cannot fully appreciate the significance of Adventism to the Ashéninka without understanding the power that the missionaries’ access to goods gave them. The fact that such reactions have been detailed amongst other Amazonian peoples serves as further support for my argument. Moreover, it might be assumed that Ashéninka employed some of the same means to try and control the flow of goods as are observable today in their interactions with timbermen. This would, in part, explain why the Ashéninka were so keen to show their adherence to the strictures of the outsiders. The most important point for them was to maximise their gain from this new source of goods, and they were willing to go along with certain actions to continue this. If, then,

¹⁰⁰ Descola notes an irony in the fact that while indigenous groups see North-American protestant groups as prospective sources of goods, the missionaries themselves ‘convinced of the virtues of free enterprise’ are often against the very idea of such ‘charity’ (Descola 1996:55). This failure to provide goods, beyond a few initial goods, may also contribute to indigenous groups’ gradually falling away from these sects.

the Ashéninka's conversion was prompted by their respect for outsiders and the goods they offered, rather than by a 'true' conversion to the beliefs of the church, this suggests one reason for the short duration of their adherence to the strictures of the church. When the expected goods failed to appear so people lost interest.

There were, however, other compelling reasons to want connections with these missionaries. As I noted above, the Seventh-day Adventist church places great emphasis upon bodily comportment and cleanliness as well as general health. This promotion of healthy living also extends to their missionary work: "The church accepts its responsibility to make Christ known to the world and believes this includes a moral obligation to preserve human dignity by obtaining optimal levels of physical, mental, and spiritual health" (S.A.C.M.: 114). Part of the Stahls' first activities in the Lake Titicaca region of Peru was to establish health centres (Kessler 1967: 235). This project was furthered in 1964 with the setting up of the Adventist Mission Air Programme by Clyde Peters, another North American member of the church. This network was specifically aimed at providing a form of 'air ambulance' service to dispersed communities as well as giving missionaries and preachers easy access to the forest. Via a network of shortwave radios in various jungle communities, congregations were able to call the base in Yarinacocha and ask for the aeroplane to come and take sick individuals to government hospitals in Pucallpa. Muir (2000) describes this aspect of the Adventist mission in some detail and notes the presence of various members of the project who had professional medical qualifications. My own informants told me a number of stories about individuals whose lives had been saved in this way, after falling gravely ill or suffering terrible accidents.

Rivière, working amongst the Trio of Guyana, has linked the acceptance and rapid conversion of indigenous groups to the effectiveness of the Western medical techniques brought by the missionaries (Rivière 1981: 8-9). He notes that while the Trio were aware that medicine was mainly responsible for these changes, 'medicine did not come to them in an ideologically uncontaminated form'. For, in the missionaries' view the power of medicine to cure 'is directly dependent upon the will of Kan [God] who may give or withhold this power in any particular case' (Rivière 1981: 9). In this sense, the Trio were taught that the effectiveness of these new treatments depended upon their adherence to the new laws and doctrines laid down by the missionaries. Thus the

teachings of the missionaries about the punishment for ‘sin’ were directly backed-up by these Christians’ ability to overcome illnesses that their indigenous, shaman counterparts could not ¹⁰¹. The power of this new technology in the eyes of groups that still lack immunity to even common Western diseases, and that regularly succumb to grave infections, is clear.

While the practical benefits of better health care and access to manufactured goods, coupled with their very status as outsiders, go some way to explaining the ability of the missionaries to change Ashéninka behaviour, there is another aspect of their message itself that impacts upon the Ashéninka. This is the millennial message and its accompanying vision of the punishment of ‘sinners’.

Millenarianism and the Fear of Hell

One day, about six months after I had arrived in Pijuayal, an Ashéninka woman named Judy appeared at the house in which I was staying. She told me that she had come from La Selva to teach the people in Pijuayal about ‘the Church’ and encourage them to come to a baptism ceremony that was to be held the following week in Amaquaria. She had brought with her a flipchart showing pictures relating to Bible stories and various Adventist beliefs, starting with Adam and Eve and ending with a depiction of a large Jesus watching people ascend into heaven. In fact Judy knew only a few of the depicted stories and went through most of the pictures with little more than a perfunctory description of what they showed. One thing she could talk about at length, however, was hell. Her most graphic description involved her asking her audience ‘You know how much a small burn hurts? Well imagine if it was all over your body and for a long time – that is how much hell will hurt.’ This was the centrepiece of her exhortation for people to come and be baptised the next week. What Judy appeared not to know was that in Adventist doctrine there is no belief in the idea of an eternal hell. Instead it is said that after the second coming, and a period of Christ’s reign on earth lasting one thousand years, ‘the wicked dead will be resurrected for final judgement’ that will involve their being consumed by fire and destroyed (S.A.C.M.: 211). Her misrepresentation of Adventist doctrine on this occasion might be seen as a sign that

¹⁰¹ Rivière notes that the missionaries were not being ‘deceitful’ as they were ‘acting sincerely, and preaching what they themselves believe’ (Rivière 1981:9).

Ashéninka interpret imported versions of Christianity – like many other imports – in indigenous or local terms.

However, the fact that Adventist pastors use the fear of hell as an incentive for conversion shows that this was not merely an indigenous or immediately local permutation of Adventist doctrine. I heard pastors and laymen dwelling upon the imminent second coming of Christ and – by implication – the imminence of hellfire. In doing this they were following the hundred-year-old tradition of Adventist preaching. Bodley's account of the influence of Stahl in the 1920s noted that the Ashéninka's ideas of the dead rising up and people ascending to heaven while others were 'burned or slaughtered like peccary' seem to have been derived 'without major modifications' from the message preached by Stahl himself (1971: 114). The fact that this millenarianism is still important in present day cases of Adventist conversion and adherence is illustrated by the attitude of Luz Maria, so forcefully recounted to me by Melita. 'Why bother to cut and plant a garden when God is so close?' she asked. Thus the fear of hell is made all the more forceful by the unrevealed, but imminent, date of Christ's coming, the point that offers the promise of either eternal reward or everlasting punishment.

The importance of fear in this coercive message is attested to by the attitudes of those Ashéninka who I did see getting baptised. Many of them had been baptised previously and seemed to see each event as some kind of insurance against the dire predictions of the pastors and their minions. Avoiding such threats was the main reason new converts gave for engaging in the rite of baptism. 'We must' they told me, 'or we will be burned'.

This credulity and this immediate adherence to the new doctrine need to be put in to context. In Chapter Four, I discussed the power that outsiders are thought to possess and the authority that this can grant foreigners in their dealings with indigenous peoples. I noted that, for the Ashéninka, the outsider is both a symbol of fear and a promise of wealth. If this is understood, then the ready acceptance of the words of these outsiders is not wholly unexpected. When powerful outsiders come in and start preaching to the Ashéninka about what they must do, the Ashéninka are likely to listen to them until their words are proved wrong. Linked to this are aspects of the Ashéninka's own rationality, which leads to a certain openness in their acceptance of what others say.

Ashéninka Epistemology and Syncretism

In common with most Amazonian groups, Ashéninka beliefs and cosmology are not systematised. As I have outlined throughout this thesis, my informants' most pressing concern was about how to 'live well', in the sense of living a good and peaceful existence. This emphasis on achievement rather than pure dogma suggests an intrinsic openness to Ashéninka thought. Furthermore, with its emphasis on personal autonomy and a lack of hierarchy and authority Ashéninka culture encourages individuals to reach their own conclusions about the nature of the world. This suggests that my informants, in professing their adherence to Christian beliefs or doctrines, do not necessarily see these as opposed to their older, more indigenous beliefs. Yost makes a similar point about the Huaorani, writing that, "Alternate explanations for phenomena are accepted with little real concern by the great majority of people, and little effort is made to harmonize new data or interpretations with the old. In most cases, rather than syncretize the Christian and indigenous systems, the new is just accreted to the old" (Yost 1981: 695).

In common with many Amazonian groups, the Ashéninka place central importance on personal experience in their epistemology. New knowledge is questioned in terms of the experience on which it is based, and the relationship between the listener and speaker is of crucial importance. If the imparter of the knowledge is trusted then the new information will be accepted and may be introduced into the listener's own general worldview. Thus, when I once told Jorge about vampires, he listened intently to my descriptions and then asked the crucial question, 'Have you seen one?' When I could not answer in the affirmative he then asked me if I thought that they really existed. When I again prevaricated he lost all interest in my story. The point is that if a trusted individual claims to have seen something for himself then how can the idea be questioned? Equally, if he is making something up then why is he bothering to 'lie'? Thus, when a powerful outsider able to establish a modicum of trust claims to be able to hear and 'know' God, the Ashéninka tend to believe them, at least until they have contrary evidence or until the relationship founders.

Various writers attest that notions like 'salvation' and 'healing' are interpreted in local terms rather than as pure imports. Elick wrote of a powerful Asháninka shaman, Pirotsa, who lived in Puerto Bermúdez:

[Pirotsa] asked the mission to send him a teacher for his wives and children saying 'I can save myself with this,' he said, showing his tube of *sheri* [tobacco], 'but I can't save my family. I want them to learn the Christian way so they can be saved' (Elick 1970: 217).

Elick notes that while Christian influence might be suggested by Pirotsa's use of the term 'salvation', "questioning revealed that his perception of the fate from which he wanted his family 'saved' and the 'heaven' to which he wanted to assure their eventually going was quite in line with 'orthodox' [Asháninka] belief" (*ibid.*). Hvalkof and Aaby make a similar point while discussing missionaries' use of Western medicine in arguing that:

[R]ejection of traditional ideology, and the acceptance of Western culture which accompanies conversion, stem not from an understanding of Western medicine or pharmacy *per se*, but from the traditional beliefs themselves: The missionaries have shown that they simply have more healing 'powers' than do tribal healers (Hvalkof & Aaby 1981: 181).

The openness of Ashéninka cosmological thinking, and their pragmatic approach based on the importance of 'living well', mean that the Ashéninka can incorporate new ideas and ways of being into their thinking. They can thus take advantage of the benefits offered by the outsiders, and even adhere to some of the prescriptions, while not themselves feeling that they have lost anything of their own cultural ideas.

Indigenous groups' conflation of their own beliefs with those of outsiders in many cases is tacitly accepted and even encouraged by the Christian missionaries themselves. Shapiro notes that:

It has been common practice, throughout the history of missionization, for missionaries to appropriate items from the cultural repertoires of the missionized in the interests of successful evangelization... it found its justification either in considerations of practical necessity or, better yet, in a belief that the elements of indigenous culture chosen for translation into Christian terms were, in reality, adumbrations of the Christian message, seeds of the Gospel planted by God so that peoples all over the world should recognize and accept the true religion when they were fortunate enough to encounter it (Shapiro 1987: 126).

This stance is officially recognised by the Adventist Church:

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the three angels' messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen¹⁰².

An interesting example of this strategy can be seen in the Ashéninka dictionary that has been produced by workers for the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Heise *et al.* 1995). In this the Ashéninka word '*maninkari*' becomes '*duende, ángel*' in Spanish (Eng: goblin/imp, angel). Weiss refers to this type of spirit¹⁰³ as 'The Hidden Ones' and says that they are considered to be 'good spirits';

Yet their goodness lies primarily in their being good and perfect, rather than in their doing good. They are paragons of goodness, but no Campa ever expects aid from a good spirit. Their doings, their comings and goings, are mysterious and unpredictable, and bear no relation to the needs and wishes of the Campas (Weiss 1975: 265).

In contrast, my informants told me that *maninkari* are a form of 'evil' spirit¹⁰⁴, that they described as 'glowing'. Similarly the Ashéninka word '*kamaari*', which was again described to me as a type of 'bad spirit', is translated to Spanish specifically as '*diablo, demonio*' (Eng. devil/demon). As Shapiro suggested (1987), it seems that Christian translators were willing to accept that the Ashéninka's collection of spirits was a mirror of the biblical pantheon and to use Christian names for beings which, in Ashéninka ideology, did not strictly conform to the nature and shape of their Christian counterparts.

As I noted at the start of this chapter, I am not concerned with elucidating the nature of Ashéninka 'belief'. Such a task, of determining exactly how different beings are thought of and of accounting for the interactions between Ashéninka cosmology and Christian mission theology, is beyond the remit of this thesis. What is important for my present

¹⁰² see http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/main_guide7.html.

¹⁰³ Which he says are synonymous with the *amacénka* that will be mentioned below.

¹⁰⁴ 'Evil' in the sense that they do harm to humans.

purposes are the following: firstly, in a society in which independence and self-sufficiency are valued there is no sense of an overarching ‘Ashéninka philosophy’; secondly, Ashéninka cosmology is structured in such a way that it is particularly open to new ideas and thus to change; finally, it is Adventist doctrine that the targets of missionary activity be at liberty to seek similarities between indigenous and Adventist ideas rather than being enjoined to relinquish their indigenous understandings completely. These three factors can be seen to work with the more practical reasons outlined above to explain the apparent ease with which Ashéninka accept Adventist teachings. Powerful outsiders, perceived of as powerful beings by indigenous people, who arrive in aeroplanes and have access to powerful medicines and desired manufactured goods, come preaching of the existence of a powerful deity who will bring endless joy to all, or punish those who disobey him. In line with countless other Amazonian groups, Ashéninka individuals agree to follow the new strictures and doctrines laid down. If such an account plausibly explains my informants’, and their forbears’, willingness to subscribe to this new religion, it must also provide clues to the ephemeral and transient nature of such conversion.

Adventism Rejected

Jorge was the individual who was most outwardly conformist towards Adventist beliefs in Pijuayal. Stimulated by the arrival of a pious Adventist teacher, Jorge decided, near the end of my first year of fieldwork that he must build a church for the *Comunidad*. After having picked and cleared a suitable spot himself, he decided to hold a *minga* to get everyone to help him construct the building. This posed a dilemma. While he knew that, as an Adventist, he should not really serve *masato*, he also recognised that failure to do so would result in no one being willing to assist him. He solved this dilemma by saying that he would ask his wife to make only ‘sweet’ *masato* – *masato* that had been freshly made and not left to ferment for a few days. On the day of the work, however, the *masato* was as strong as ever and everyone gradually got drunker and drunker throughout the day. By the end even Jorge had drunk his fill. People started to joke raucously about the church. Many of them laughed that the whole thing was pointless as none of them would ever go to ‘Jorge’s church’. One man even claimed that he was a ‘devil’, preferring always to get drunk rather than to attend church.

Before becoming inebriated, Jorge, at various points during the day, had tried to evangelise, telling people that they must come to the church when it was built and that they needed to learn about Jesus and his teachings. Such preaching, however, was quickly rebuffed by those at whom it was aimed. Usually, this rebuff took the form of the intended recipient just walking off to work elsewhere. Two men got fed up with the whole exercise and after only cursorily participating made their excuses early and disappeared altogether. Jorge continued to talk of how, once the church was built, he would cut a long clearing through the forest into which an aeroplane could land, but by the end of the day even the church itself was not finished. By the time I left Pijuayal, over a year later, little more progress had been made on either the building or the clearing.

Despite all of the compulsions to join the Adventist Church that I outlined in the previous section, the fact remains that it was only a minority of my informants who counted themselves as Adventists. Of these only the smallest number adhered with any regularity to the central tenets of the faith. This rejection of Adventism after an initial period of acceptance is discernible in other Asháninka areas. Holshouser describes how, in the 1970s at Nevati, the main Seventh-day Adventist mission station in the area in which she worked, significant numbers of Asháninka were leaving the settlement after an initial period of adherence to the words of the missionaries (Holshouser 1975: 101). Brown and Fernández (1991: 74) and Elick (1970: 16) also make similar points. I will now look at some of the possible reasons for this disenchantment with the Adventist message.

In Chapter Three, I described *masateadas* in Pijuayal and explained the central importance of this custom in Ashéninka society. I argued that it was these events that formed the core of Ashéninka sociality, allowing my informants to form relationships based on friendship with other Ashéninka and even with complete strangers. Given the autonomous and isolated nature of Ashéninka living, I demonstrated that it was these events that maintained a degree of social cohesion and allowed social reproduction to occur. At the centre of these fiestas was the *masato* itself. Beyond this social importance *masato* was also enjoyed for its effects. Weiss has noted that “The ideal psychic state of the [Ashéninka] is one of inebriation” (1974: 397). This was certainly true for my informants. The attraction of being drunk seemed to be twofold: the enjoyment of the

feeling itself, and the fact that it eased relations between people, allowing them to talk and interact more freely than usual. Thus, the importance of *masato* can be seen to work on a number of physical and social levels to promote good relationships and experiences.

In contrast to this indigenous view, one of the primary Adventist dogmas is that the drinking of alcohol is wrong: “Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them” (S.A.C.M.: 16). All accounts of the first Adventist missionaries note the importance that they placed on this stricture, and of adherence to it by the Ashéninka as the first sign of their conversion. In the letter quoted above about Stahl’s initial incursions into Asháninka territory, Peugh noted that “We found whole villages among the savages where the message had trickled through, and all had given up the use of liquor and tobacco.” (McElhany 1928: 24)¹⁰⁵. Similarly, Muir recounts how indigenous groups reached by Clyde Peters and Siegfried Neuendorff, who were working for the Adventist church in the 1970s, burned their *masato* troughs and promised to stop making and consuming the beverage (Muir 2000: 49). Unfortunately, but not altogether surprisingly, the relevant Adventist literature never refers to how long such abstinence was adhered to.

Nowadays non-indigenous Adventists are aware of the importance of *masato* amongst indigenous groups, and make some allowances for its consumption. Generally this follows the pattern of prohibiting only the strongly alcoholic kinds, and emphasising that it is the resultant drunkenness that is ‘evil’ rather than the drink itself. However, even this relaxation of the prohibition still causes problems, as in the case at the *minga* that Jorge held for the construction of the church in Pijuayal.

As in Jorge’s case, one of the difficulties in enforcing prohibitions, even in distinguishing potent from less alcoholic beverages, lies in the fact that it is the women who make *masato*. Men, being culturally restricted from doing so, must instead rely upon women to produce it when it is wanted or required. As I argued in Chapter Four, females’ control of *masato* is one of their main sources of power in their relationships with men. Thus, for

¹⁰⁵ Taken from a letter by Peugh, quoted by McElhany in an article for the Adventist publication *Review and Herald* (1928, vol. 105:45 p24) cited in Bodley (1971:112).

women, any prohibitions on *masato* production and consumption not only go against their cultural upbringing but also affect their relationships with their husbands. For these reasons, even faithful members of the Adventist church, such as Wilder's wife Lydia in La Selva, find it objectionable to observe these proscriptions. In fact, in keeping with my discussion in Chapter Four of the power that *masato* production gives women over their husbands, Lydia often seemed to make particularly large quantities of highly fermented *masato* and then to invite lots of people to come and drink it, as an expression of her displeasure with Wilder. By custom, Wilder could not refrain from drinking it in front of others, and Lydia seemed to gain satisfaction in plying him with endless bowls until he ended up hopelessly slumped on the ground. This example shows both the manner in which Ashéninka cultural ideas work against Adventist prohibitions and the fact that conversion and adherence to Adventist doctrine is a matter of individual choice rather than implicating spouses or other family members.

It is in this one area that the strength of Ashéninka custom seems to overwhelm the new, Adventist-inspired rules governing behaviour, and I did not find a single Ashéninka individual who obeyed the rule against *masato*. This pattern is also followed with respect to prohibitions relating to other areas of life, less central to the Ashéninka form of living. As I mentioned above, strict Adventists follow the rules laid down in Leviticus in which certain animals are deemed 'unclean'. The first of these prohibits the consumption of pigs (Leviticus 11: 7), a category which, by association, is deemed to include peccaries. Similarly, Adventist pastors note that the Tapir should not be eaten on account of its parted foot (Leviticus 11: 26-28). All large rodents, racoons and weasels are also deemed 'unclean' while monkeys are also prohibited. This latter prohibition is not based specifically on the laws laid down in Leviticus, but rather on the grounds, so I was informed, that 'they look too like humans'. Of all of the animals in the forest this leaves only the deer as a suitable game animal. Similarly, many fish are prohibited. Leviticus notes that 'all [fish] that have neither fins nor scales... you shall regard as vermin' (Leviticus 11: 10). This means that the plentiful armoured catfish¹⁰⁶ and giant catfish¹⁰⁷, both species deemed to be particularly delicious by my informants, are forbidden. According to these rules, an individual should ignore or return the majority of the animals and fish that he comes across whilst hunting or fishing. Unsurprisingly, few of

¹⁰⁶ Ash. shimpi / Sp. Carachama / *Ancistrus* sp.

¹⁰⁷ Ash. iotsi / Sp. Zúngaro or Doncella / *Pseudoplatystoma* sp.

my informants were willing to do this. For most Ashéninka individuals, this was not viewed as a large infraction and such rules were mostly ignored. However, when pastors and other, more pious indigenous individuals came to visit, they would inevitably preach about such practices, arguing that such violations would lead to an individual's ultimate damnation.

Amongst a group of people who have been socialised to be independent and self-sufficient, such strictures cause problems. Furthermore, in these increasingly populated areas, the decreasing availability of game and fish makes finding non-taboo animals more and more difficult. Hunters who adhered to the prohibitions would therefore often come home empty-handed. Similarly, individuals disliked the church's insistence on the observance of the Sabbath as a day of non-work and as a day of attendance in church. Apart from disliking being told what to do and when, this also meant that they were often forced to go without meat or fish during this day if they had not managed, or thought, to prepare food in advance. Such rules, owing both to their nature and their consequences, are enough to turn many people away from the religion.

Apart from these specific restrictions, there are more general underlying reasons why Adventism does not fit with the Ashéninka's own ideas of how to live well. As I briefly mentioned above, Keller characterises Adventist practice as being based on 'a Socratic type of Bible study'. She describes how Adventists of all ages in Madagascar often engaged in spontaneous Bible study and argues that:

Adventist bible study is not a matter of the truth being *taught* by an authority such as the pastor, but of everyone discovering it for themselves by way of serious study, reflection and discussion with others... nobody, not even the pastor, is right by virtue of his or her position in the church or in society at large. This egalitarian approach to knowledge is strikingly different to the Malagasy emphasis on seniority as the principal source, and legitimation, of authority (Keller 2004: 95).

While the Ashéninka, as I have argued throughout this thesis, place an emphasis on equality and a refusal to submit to the authority of others, the Adventist version of egalitarian practice does not accord to their own. The main problem is that Adventism is based on the central importance of the word of the Bible itself and everyone's equal

ability to interpret it. For my illiterate informants, this route to equality is not an option. As such, pastors and knowledgeable lay members take a much more didactic approach towards the passing on of knowledge in church services. Bible study time becomes more a lesson on how to interpret the passages concerned than a shared exegesis of their meaning.

In keeping with their willingness to listen to and follow outsiders my informants seemed to have no problem with this pattern. Difficulties began to occur, however, when the outsiders departed and local Ashéninka were left to conduct the services themselves. At this point, it was assumed that someone would lead the service as a whole, and the bible study in particular, but no individual carried the authority to be able make others listen to them. For example, Ernesto, an old Ashéninka man in Pijuayal, categorically told me his reason for non-attendance at Church was that Jorge ‘does not know’. In the past, when there had been non-Ashéninka teachers whom he trusted, he had attended, but now, with only an Ashéninka to act as the pastor he did not. This dislike of other Ashéninka taking a lead in Church matters was equally present in my informants’ rejection of any attempts by their fellow Ashéninka at proselytisation, as I described in the context of Jorge’s *minga* for the church, above.

If part of the power of outsider missionaries to convert Ashéninka to Adventism is based upon the very fact of them being outsiders, then it makes sense that some of the power of the church is lost when those outsiders depart, leaving local people in charge. In Chapter Four, I argued that Ashéninka society is strongly egalitarian and that no individuals can gain the authority to tell others what to do. I also noted, however, that my informants were willing to follow outsiders as this allows them to retain their egalitarian status between themselves. The problem therefore arises that in the absence of outsiders, and given the Church’s emphasis on bible study while most Ashéninka remain illiterate, the very basis of Church is undermined and its continuity disrupted when illiterate locals try to take charge.

There is one final way in which the teachings of the Church conflict with the Ashéninka’s own ideas about how to live well. While there is no explicit doctrine dictating that Adventists live in close-knit communities, living in defined settlements and being ‘civilised’ tend to be considered synonymous. In the view of outsiders, then, the

usual living arrangements of the Ashéninka – isolated family units spread out through the jungle – ‘*no es civilizado*’ (‘is uncivilised’) or is ‘*atrasado*’ (‘backward’). As can be seen in the history of the area of my fieldwork and from the descriptions of Bodley on the community of Shahuaya and the work of Holshouser, (1975: 101), Brown and Fernández (1991: 74) and Elick (1970: 16), one of the primary ways in which the Ashéninka show their disapproval of the church and their unwillingness to remain with it is by leaving the community that has been set up around a church or mission station. In doing so, families are following the Amazonian-wide notion of ‘voting with one’s feet’ and leaving an area to show their disaffection. They are also implicitly turning their backs on the very notion of ‘community’ on which non-Ashéninka seem to place such importance. I will discuss these ideas and issues in the following chapter, specifically with regard to my informants’ current interactions with governmental policies that encourage the formation of settled communities and registered *Comunidades Nativas*.

Here, however, I note that this state of affairs is in marked contrast to what Vilaça found among the Wari’ of Brazil. Vilaça notes that the Wari’ seemed to take to the teachings of Christian missionaries, in part because it allowed them to achieve their own ideal of living together ‘as if they were a community of consanguines’ (Vilaça 1997: 94). Also in contrast to the Ashéninka, Vilaça writes that in accepting the manner in which the missionaries wanted them to live, the Wari’ were not ready to accept the new cosmological system offered by Christianity. Firstly, the Wari’ had no gods of any kind in their cosmology. Secondly, rather than establishing a relationship of belief/doubt with this new God in line with the Christian tradition (see Pouillon 1993 and 1982), they incorporated him into their universe, “divesting him of his divine attributes, humanizing and affinizing him” (Vilaça 1997: 98). Vilaça argues that it was this inability to understand ‘God’ in the manner of incoming Christians that ultimately led to their complete rejection of him.

Vilaça contrasts the Wari’ case with that of the Tupinambá, another Brazilian indigenous group. While the Tupinambá also took rapidly to Christianity, Vilaça argues that they did it in the opposite manner to the Wari’. The Tupinambá seem to have had no doubts about the existence of the Christian God, as Christian doctrine echoed their own belief in their abandonment by a demiurge ‘who departed for the sky, leaving them behind on this earth’ (Viveiros de Castro 1992b: 30-31, cited Vilaça 1997: 99). Instead it

was their social practice that was resistant to the imposition of new doctrines (Vilaça 1997: 100). In making a comparison between these two indigenous groups' reaction to Christianity Vilaça makes a distinction between a 'meeting of cosmologies' between cultures and a 'meeting of sociologies' (*ibid.*: 99).

According to this schema, the Ashéninka's underlying rejection of Christianity can be seen as a separation of 'sociologies' rather than of 'cosmologies'. I have shown how the Ashéninka's own cosmological ideas did not preclude the idea of a Christian God: they are open to the introduction of new ideas. For them however, the problem, particularly regarding the Adventist Church, centres on specific doctrines that interfere with their way of life and go against some of their own assumptions about how social life should be carried out. After an initial period of acceptance, it is these differences over ideas about how best to live well that leads to a falling away from the Church.

In concentrating on my informants' relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist church, my aim has been to understand the nature of this relationship and to try and elucidate some of the underlying themes governing it. I have argued that the Ashéninka can be attracted to such foreign ideas and new ways of living by the promise of goods and other benefits, and that they are also willing to follow the ideas of others owing to their own undogmatic and ontologically-open understandings of the world. When such forms of living do not live up to their expectations, however, they are equally willing to reject them. In my fieldsites, this rejection has occurred slowly and peacefully. The historical record however, shows that this is not always the case, but rather that on certain occasions, Asháninka groups have been known to rise up forcibly against others.

An Historical Problem?

The Asháninka's historical tendency to stage large and violent uprisings has been seen by many anthropologists as something of a puzzle. Given the apparently disorganised and tranquil nature of Asháninka society, how and why did they stage such powerful and durable rebellions? Starting from the early work of Métraux (1942), anthropologists have posited the existence of messianic beliefs within the Asháninka's own cosmological beliefs to explain why they were willing to follow powerful outsiders, converting to new religions before violently rejecting them. In contrast to this approach, I question the existence of messianic beliefs amongst the Asháninka and contend instead that their past

behaviour can be understood in terms of some of the cultural traits that I have already outlined as being apparent in their lives today.

In essence, the Asháninka's past reactions to advocates of the Christian church and representatives of the Peruvian, or Spanish nation, seem little different from the events that I have documented as occurring in the area of my fieldsites over the past twenty years. When Franciscan missionaries made efforts to convert the Asháninka at the beginning of the 18th century, they were at first accepted. Then, as the Asháninka grew tired of the strictures that these outsiders placed upon their behaviour, they slowly became disillusioned with this new creed. Finally, after some time and in the face of the outsiders' apparent unwillingness to leave them alone, the Asháninka staged a violent uprising to forcibly eject the Franciscans, along with other representatives of the Spanish state, from their land. As in my fieldsites, I contend that the underlying pattern of the Asháninka's willingness to accept the outsiders, followed by a drifting back to their own ways of living, is clearly evident in this historical episode. Further, I believe that the unified and definite character of their reaction is equally explicable in terms of observable contemporary Asháninka culture.

I have shown (see sections in Chapters Two, Three and Five on the *ayompari* trading systems) that there exists a network of friendly relations that connect individual families across wide expanses of Asháninka territory. It is these networks of equal, independent and yet interconnected individuals that can come together in certain circumstances, usually under the leadership of a charismatic outsider and against a readily identifiable and malign enemy. In Chapter Four, I noted the historical presence of such 'military leaders', referred to by my informants by the Spanish word *guerreros* and in the literature by the Asháninka word *ovayeri* (Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 227). These individuals, whose presence has also been noted in a number of different Amazonian groups that are otherwise egalitarian, are said to gain authority over others as they take action to counter a specific threat to individual lives or an indigenous group's way of life (see Price 1981: 696 and Clastres 1977: 22). I further argued in Chapter Four that outsiders are particularly well placed to become leaders of Asháninka groups. This fact again connects to the power and respect that outsiders can command in Asháninka society, both in terms of indigenous understandings of the world and because their leadership acts to maintain the egalitarian nature of relations between Asháninka individuals

themselves. These two facts – the existence of networks across Asháninka territory and their willingness, in times of trouble, to follow the lead of a single (especially foreign) charismatic individual – offers enough explanation of why the apparently peaceful and independent Asháninka were able to mobilise to such effect. If this explanation is accepted then there is no need to posit the existence of messianic beliefs to explain the actions of the Asháninka.

While initially I was reluctant to take this stance against the widely-held view about messianism, my own experience during fieldwork and the recent work of Hanne Veber (2003) have convinced me that this older view is in need of revision. Having carefully read the existing literature on the Asháninka before embarking on fieldwork, I imagined that the importance of messianism in the beliefs of my informants would be relatively apparent. Even if I did not expect it in their everyday discourse, I imagined that it would appear in certain myths and in discussions about particular deities or mythical beings. As time went on, however, it became apparent that such ideas were conspicuous by their absence. Gradually, I became more proactive in my search for such beliefs, asking leading questions about the nature of the world, and the changing of society for the better. Finally, when even this had failed to elicit responses, I directly asked people if they thought anyone was likely to come and usher in a new period of life for them. In those instances where my question was not just completely ignored (a common Asháninka evasion strategy), the answer was inevitably framed in terms explicitly referring to Jesus. Yet, in pressing this idea, few seemed to place much credence even in this Christian doctrine. As Melita had been when talking of Luz Marie's failure to work, my informants were all utterly pragmatic about such ideas, refusing to really accept that Jesus was likely to come, saying only that 'that was what people said'.

It is always difficult for a researcher to prove the inexistence of something. The criticism can always be that they have not searched hard enough or examined things in the right way. This fact leads me to be cautious in arguing against an idea that has generally become the accepted view of Asháninka culture and history. Yet, on my return from the field and after carefully searching through the relevant literature, I feel that a case can be made to challenge this widely held understanding of Asháninka culture. The final push to my taking this stance was given to me by an article written by Hanne Veber (2003) in which she critiques the relevant literature. The rest of this chapter seeks to

expand upon Veber's analysis of those academic writings. In doing so, it is necessary to first outline a brief account of the most infamous of the Asháninka's uprisings: the 1742 rebellion led by Juan Santos Atahualpa, the event in which Métraux originally posited the existence of Asháninka beliefs in the return of a saviour.

Juan Santos Atahualpa and Asháninka Messianism

The Asháninka's first contact with Christianity was in 1595 when two Jesuit priests, Juan Font and Nicolás Mastrillo, mounted an expedition to the area (Varese 2002: 47-54). Only after a further forty years was any systematic attempt made to contact and convert the Asháninka. This time it was led by Franciscans, whose first mission was set up at Quimiri – now La Merced – near to *tsiviani* (the 'Mountain of Salt'), the only source of salt in the region and thus the centre of the *Ayompari* trading network (*ibid.*: 56, see Chapters Three and Five). After two years the missionaries' exhortations against polygamy and their attempts to control the salt trade led to an Asháninka uprising and the killing of the priests (Brown & Fernández 1991: 15-20). Subsequent missions would meet with a similar fate, often being welcomed by the Asháninka, before being killed or forced out when the foreigners' demands or actions annoyed the indigenous groups. The Franciscans finally abandoned all attempts at evangelisation in 1742 after the Asháninka, spurred on by increasingly frequent and devastating epidemics, rose up in revolt under the leadership of the self-styled Juan Santos Atahualpa (Bodley 1971: 5-7). After this period, the Asháninka retained their reputations amongst outsiders as a fierce people, and few attempts were made at systematic missionisation or colonisation. This ended in 1870, with the advent of the rubber boom and the influx of traders and rubber merchants. Missionaries, however, did not return in force until the middle of the 20th century, with the influx of evangelic missions from North America, in particular the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as I have discussed in the earlier part of this chapter.

Alfred Métraux's 1942 article represents one of the first, albeit brief, anthropological assessments of the Asháninka. Entitled 'A quechua messiah in eastern Peru', it specifically deals with the uprising led by Juan Santos Atahualpa against the Franciscan missions in the high jungle. It is in this early article that the idea of a latent Asháninka messianism first appears. Métraux writes that the progress of the Franciscan mission from 1709 had been 'constant and rapid' and that having reached the Ucayali and found a new and shorter route across the Andes, "The great dream of an easy outlet

from Peru to the Atlantic... seemed within their grasp” (1942: 722). Juan Santos is then described as up-ending this seemingly tranquil state of affairs by fomenting an armed rebellion that would push out the Franciscans, lead to twenty years of intermittent warfare with the Spanish authorities, and result in the subsequent isolation of the region until the rubber boom in the 1870s a full century later. In such a view the rebellion does indeed seem extraordinary in its speed, scope and effect. Writers have felt compelled to look for a persuasive account to show how the apparently disorganised and tranquil Asháninka enacted such a powerful and durable rebellion. For Métraux, fresh from his own research among the undoubtedly messianic Tupi-Guaraní¹⁰⁸, messianism seemed to offer an explanation.

Varese, quoting Franciscan texts, writes that Juan Santos proclaimed himself to be a messianic figure (2002: 90-1). In doing so, Juan Santos seems to have mixed together both Christian and Inca ideas, portraying himself as both the son of ‘God’ and of the ‘sun’, as well as a direct descendant of the last Inca. It is these self-descriptions that seem to have been the foundation of the idea that the Asháninka themselves held messianic beliefs. Brown, writing more recently, says:

[We do not know what the Asháninka] thought about the neo-Inca ideology of the messiah, which must have been as alien to them as the Christianity advanced by the Franciscan missionaries. Scholars have been quick to see the roots of the movement in a pan-Andean belief in Kinkarrí (the Inca king, who will return to overthrow European colonists and establish a native utopia) and even in the apocalyptic millenarianism of the Franciscans. *It seems more likely, however, that Asháninkas drew on millenarian roots in their own tradition*, though these were no doubt modified by social contacts with the Andean Indians, Franciscans, and black slaves who also resided in mission settlements (Brown 1991: 393 my emphasis).

A closer analysis of the events, however, and of contemporary Asháninka culture, seems to throw doubt on such an assertion.

¹⁰⁸ Hélène Clastres’ work (1993) on the Tupí-Guaraní attests to the value of using contemporary ethnographic knowledge in conjunction with a close study of historical records. In this case, however, the presence of pre-Christian and enduring messianic beliefs is clear.

First, the historical reality seems to have been slightly different from Métraux's original portrayal (Métraux 1942) that has then been followed by subsequent writers (Varese 1968 [2002], Brown 1991 and 1993, and Brown & Fernández 1991). In fact, as most of these authors acknowledge but then downplay, there had been rebellions preceding that of Juan Santos. Craig writes that "from the end of the 17th century [to] the early part of the 18th century, mission stations were being burned and razed by the Campas as fast as the Franciscans could establish them" (Craig 1972: 130). Furthermore, even those Asháninka who were 'settled' never seem to have taken completely to mission life and the exacting prescriptions on their behaviour demanded by the Franciscans. Regan writes that in 1737, the outbreak of epidemics precipitated a rebellion under an Asháninka chief Ignacio Torote, who also complained about the prescriptions against polygamy (Regan 1993: 35). In view of these facts, the novelty of Juan Santos, and his importance as a messianic figure, seem overplayed.

Nevertheless, Brown (2003), in his reaction to Veber's article (2003), argues that, in contrast to preceding rebellions, the one under Juan Santos in 1742 had 'unusual features' that suggest 'the influence of forces beyond simple rebelliousness'. Brown questions why the Asháninka would have followed 'a self-promoting apostate Jesuit novice... who probably did not speak their language or comprehend their religious beliefs' (2003: 201). This, in spite of the fact that the Franciscan sources refer to Juan Santos' ability to speak Asháninka (Varese 2002: 90). Then, contradicting the emphasis in his own earlier work (1991: 393, quoted above), Brown argues that the new spirit of resistance would have stemmed from the 'creolization' of Asháninka society and the introduction of *new* messianic ideas (2003: 201). This apparent acceptance that messianism came from beyond Asháninka culture seems to be in direct contradiction to his own earlier attempts to find indigenous messianic ideas at the root of all the later major examples of Asháninka resistance (cf. Brown 1991 and 1993 and Brown & Fernández 1991).

Brown and Fernández also write of the '*Amachénga*'¹⁰⁹, saying that Stahl, the first Adventist missionary in Amazonia (discussed above), was explicitly seen as an *amachénga*. They go on to imply that other such outsiders would have been considered in a similar

¹⁰⁹ Also referred to as the *amachegua*, *amachénka* or *amacénka*.

way, and say that these ‘good spirits’ are ‘a class of mythical saviours’ (1991: 61). They cite Weiss’s description of the *amachénka*: ‘they all flash, that is, they are the hidden ones’ (1975: 258)¹¹⁰ but fail to refer to his full writings on this class of mythical being. Rather than seeing the *amachénka* as ‘mythical saviours’, Weiss explicitly notes that

[T]heir goodness lies primarily in their being good and perfect, rather than in their doing good. They are paragons of goodness, but *no Campa ever expects aid from a good spirit*. Their doings, their comings and goings, are mysterious and unpredictable, and bear no relation to the needs and wishes of the Campas (Weiss 1975: 265, my emphasis).

Brown and Fernández then cite the diary of a Franciscan priest, Gabriel Sala, who travelled through Asháninka territory in 1896 and reported stories of an *amachénga* who, he was told, “is a great rogue who mocks the sacred and the profane, with the object of uniting people to work [rubber] on the Río Manú and other places” (Sala 1897: 140-141 cited in Brown & Fernández 1991: 61). Sala himself draws no conclusions as to who this individual was, but Brown and Fernández, following Reyna (1942:21), suggest it was Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald (an infamous rubber baron of the period). With no more discussion of ethnographic descriptions of indigenous cosmology, Brown and Fernández go on to describe the career of Fitzcarrald, explaining his amassing of native slaves and soldiers by reference to the power he would have gained from being considered an *amachénga*. They cite nothing more to confirm that the Ashéninka viewed him in these terms. Instead they quote one of Fitzcarrald’s own associates denying that he had any need to assume the mantle of a god in order to dominate the Ashéninka. Brown and Fernández then ask themselves rhetorically whether Fitzcarrald’s ability to raise such a workforce confirms ‘the persistence of an Asháninka belief in salvation through the appearance of a warlike messiah?’ (1991: 65). On the evidence they present, a negative answer would seem entirely reasonable. Instead a much more prosaic account of Fitzcarrald’s rise to prominence can be given. In this view (see Gow 1991: 39-41) Fitzcarrald’s power stemmed from the fact that he set up a region-wide transport system and amalgamated a large labour force by becoming the central supplier of goods to smaller *patrones* who already had their own work forces.

¹¹⁰ Weiss notes that *amachénga* are also known as *mantinkari*, which more directly translates as ‘the Hidden Ones’ (Weiss 1975:258).

Brown and Fernández again cite the work of prior Asháninka ethnographers, particularly Weiss (1975) and Elick (1970), in outlining their underlying thesis that in Asháninka thinking “the message that emerges most persistently is that the present world is about to make way for another” (Brown & Fernández 1991: 13). In quoting Weiss, however, they leave out two significant preceding sentences:

If Campa concepts of the origin of the universe are suspect, so is their conception of its end. Here, again, is a suggestion of missionary influence. The Campas anticipate a time when Tasórenci will destroy the world or, rather, transform it into a new world. When that occurs, sky and earth will again be close together, the earth will speak once again, and its inhabitants will be a new race of humanity knowing nothing of sickness, death, or toil (Weiss 1975: 407; my emphasis on sentences left out by Brown and Fernández).

While Elick (1970) does not so qualify his statement, it is notable that it comes at the very end of his thesis and evokes no discussion. Furthermore, contrary to the manner in which Brown and Fernández quote Elick’s work, the description was Elick’s own, not that of his informants¹¹¹. Thus, neither Elick’s or Weiss’s accounts actually back up Brown and Fernández’s central theses about the importance of messianism and messianic figures in Asháninka culture.

In a similar vein, Veber critiques the work of Varese. She argues that Varese was overly influenced by Eliade’s work on the history of religions such that “Eliade’s ideas reappear in Varese’s text as ethnographic interpretations of the Asháninka worldview and eventually *become* the Asháninka worldview, at least in the eyes of the anthropologist” (Veber 2003: 189). Varese writes that “The political unity of nearly all of the Indians of the central Peruvian jungle, a unique and unprecedented pan-indigenous phenomenon, *presumes conscious loyalty to a messianic ideal of liberation.*” (Varese 2002: 88, my emphasis). As such, his argument operates in reverse. Beginning with the fact that, under normal

¹¹¹ Compare:

John Elick found a similar belief among the Asháninkas he knew. ‘This world, tainted and contaminated by the intrusion of evil forces and beings,’ they told him, ‘will also pass away.’ (Brown & Fernández 1991:13)

with the original:

Campa mythology, frequently told and retold, reinforces the belief that this world as we now know it and experience it, is transitory. Various ‘worlds’ have existed and passed away. This world also, tainted and contaminated by the intrusion of evil forces and beings, will also pass away. (Elick 1970:235-6).

circumstances, no leader would be able to hold such power over large numbers of people, Varese presupposes that such an alliance must have relied upon ‘conscious faith in a messianic prediction’ (Veber 2003: 189). As Veber suggests, it seems as if Métraux’s original brief description carried such authority that “once he had classified Santos’s revolt as ‘messianic’ the classification was taken as self-evident by succeeding generations of researchers” (*ibid.*: 188). As such, Veber argues that “the notion of Asháninka messianism derives its veracity more from its scholarly repetition than from grounded analysis; it has created a ‘black hole’ in place of ethnography” (*ibid.*: 183).

Following this analysis, messianism begins to look less like an original and fundamental aspect of Asháninka thought, and more like the occasional adoption by some Asháninka of outside ideas, or even as the words of outsiders and the misunderstanding of their importance for indigenous people by scholarly writers. It thus seems overly bold to explain Asháninka resistance to the outside world, and their occasional historic fierce rebelliousness, by reference to this single cultural trait: one of which I found no evidence amongst my own informants. While messianic ideas may well have played a part in particular social movements and – as Brown and Fernández (1991) note repeatedly in their book – messianic and utopian ideals were certainly in the minds of many of the outsiders who ventured into the jungle, it seems wrong to posit them as underpinning Asháninka action and belief. Instead, we must reopen our analysis of each historical episode in order to re-evaluate the particular tensions at play and relate these to what we know of present-day Asháninka society.

In this manner, Juan Santos’ rebellion, even if his power is understood not to have stemmed from his role as a messiah, still offers important insights. Brown himself writes that a “common theme emerges from the episodes of Asháninka millenarianism... each was sparked by the arrival of a charismatic outsider... [who] succeeded in creating temporary alliances that transcended local kinship groups” (1991: 394). For Brown, as for Varese, this success came from Juan Santos’ role as a messiah. Yet if the importance of this specific role is put to one side, then Brown’s description seems, to me, to give enough explanation on its own. The power of such leaders stemmed less from the belief that they were ‘messiahs’, and rather more prosaically from the fact that they were outsiders, with forceful and dynamic personalities, who were promising to help the Asháninka. These facts, linked to the presence of a strong indigenous dissatisfaction with

the current state of affairs, were enough to foment widespread and powerful social action.

Such an argument fits well with the description I gave in Chapter Four of the possible emergence of Ashéninka leaders and the influence that outsiders can have in contemporary Asháninka culture. As I have already argued, outsiders are potent symbols in Asháninka thought, and individuals are able to turn this symbolic capital into real power. If this is true today for poor teachers and timbermen who, in reality, offer little material benefit to my informants, as well as for foreign missionaries, then it is hardly surprising that an outsider two-and-a-half centuries ago might have had a dramatic impact. Moreover, the Asháninka were already disenchanted with the new Franciscan regime, and the historical record shows that, prior to the emergence of Juan Santos, they had already staged smaller, indigenously-led uprisings. I suggested in Chapter Four that the Ashéninka are willing to come together, and set aside personal autonomy, when working towards a common goal – this will also be illustrated in the following chapter when I look at my informants' defence of their newly acquired communal land. Their discontentment with reduction into Franciscan mission stations and the Catholic strictures on their behaviour would have been enough of a reason for the Asháninka to take concerted action. Thus, not only does the presence of messianism among the Asháninka appear to have been over-emphasised, but their inability to coordinate widespread action without it is also challenged.

In fact, these same characteristics – following outsiders and being willing to aggregate against a common threat or towards a common goal – not only explain Asháninka periods of rebellion but also their original acceptance of outsiders, such as missionaries, and their periods of more peaceful co-existence with them. A similar pattern can be seen in the events surrounding the original acceptance of the first Franciscan expeditions in the latter half of the 17th Century. Tibesar describes how many of the Campas met by Biedma (the leader of the first Franciscan expeditions in the region in the 1670s and 80s) were enslaved by the Shipibos or lived in fear of them. It was these same individuals who were the first to proclaim themselves Christians (1981: 27). Here again we see that a charismatic outsider, offering a change of circumstances and a new way of living, is accepted by the Asháninka. And yet Tibesar also writes that:

Not all of the Indians in the area received the progress of the missionaries with pleasure... Some of those who opposed the advance of the missionaries were conservatives and refused to abandon their old customs, while others were scared of the quickly spreading diseases and still others disliked the limitations put on their liberty by the mission system (Tibesar 1981: 33, my translation)¹¹²

So we see the scepticism by some that, as conditions worsened, would lead to increasing rebellion before a new figurehead, Juan Santos, emerged to lead a widespread uprising.

Lehnertz argues that it is wrong to see the rebellion as a direct reaction to life on the missions. As proof, he states that “the first converts to Juan Santos were Campa from the Gran Pajonal, precisely the Campa who were less acculturated and who had maintained fewer direct contacts with the Franciscans” (1972: 116). Yet Juan Santos, of necessity, would have started his rebellion among those not under the direct control of the missionaries and their forces of outsiders. Such people had already rejected the missionaries’ advances, or fled from the missions themselves, and would have needed little persuasion to act more forcefully against these outsiders. As Varese writes:

The Juan Santos rebellion... reflects a state of saturation reached by the native communities who were mistreated and offended in their deepest traditions. The indigenous peoples’ clear awareness that the growing advance and ever greater intrusion by whites and *mestizos* into their territories was the principle cause of their cultural decline and slow physical agony found its expression in the figure of Juan Santos (Varese 2002: 86).

Individuals with direct experience of the new way of life were rejecting not only its specificities but also the outsiders and all that they represented.

The length and scope of the consequent Asháninka isolation from outsiders attest to the power of their sentiments and to the fact that it was an explicit rejection of the outside world, rather than a local messianic movement, that made them do so. Nor was it, as

¹¹² “No todos los indios de la zona recibieron con agrado el progreso misionero que representaba esta nueva misión y los preparativos de Biedma para sus nuevas fundaciones. Algunos de los que se oponían al avance de los frailes eran conservadores y no se resignaban a que se abandonaran las antiguas costumbres, otros estaban atemorizados por las enfermedades que tan rápidamente se propagaban entre sus gentes y había algunos a quienes les fastidiaban las limitaciones impuestas a su libertad por el sistema misionero.” (Tibesar 1981:33)

Varese put it, that: “Santos’s messianic call... had forever created an informed and aware indigenous people, who were prepared at any moment to protect their freedom and independence” (Varese 2002: 108-9). It was rather that the Asháninka had, in line with their own older cultural ideas, experimented with this new form of living, followed the promises of the new strangers, found them wanting and thus rejected them. These characteristics – the Asháninka acceptance of outsiders and the new goods and life they bring, their gradual disillusionment and then their eventual active rebellion when things turn noticeably worse – are evident in the other major periods in the known history of the Asháninka. Unfortunately, space and time do not permit me to analyse more of Asháninka history in this manner. However, it is my contention that the repeated patterns evident in these events right up to the present day attests to their indigenous nature. In future research involving a closer study of the primary historical sources I hope to extend and strengthen such arguments.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, based upon ethnographic examples from my own fieldsites, I showed how representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist church had been accepted by my informants and their forebears into the area. I argued that this initial acceptance was related to the missionaries’ position as powerful outsiders and as bearers of manufactured goods, aeroplanes and Western medicines. The Ashéninka’s own cosmological openness and the fact that they are willing to accept varying statements regarding ‘truth’ based upon individual experience and specific relationships also means that they are open to the teachings of what might otherwise be regarded as opposing systems of belief. While the Ashéninka are apparently willing to accept, or at least not reject, foreign systems of belief, they are less willing to adapt to new ways of living. This is particularly the case when new prescriptions on their behaviour seem to go against their own cultural ideas of how to ‘live well’. It was my contention that it was the Adventist church’s attempts to limit and control my informants’ behaviour that led to their gradual rejection of its teachings. I further showed that this pattern – of being drawn into interactions with powerful outsiders, apparently converting to new ways of thinking and living but then rejecting both the new ways of living and the outsiders – have recurred throughout both Ashéninka and wider Asháninka history.

The final part of the chapter dealt specifically with past anthropological writings on the Asháninka. In particular, I examined the argument that the Asháninka hold a latent belief in messianism. In showing the intellectual origins of this idea and its development, I follow Veber (2003) in arguing that it is based on faulty analysis which is unsupported by any of the thorough studies of the Asháninka's own beliefs (see Elick 1970 and Weiss 1975). Instead, I argue that it is more plausible to explain the Asháninka's past behaviour by reference to the cultural traits that I have described in the first part of this chapter and in other parts of the thesis. The Asháninka's willingness to accept outsiders, and new cosmological ideas, at least at first, is supported by the behaviour of my informants as outlined above. Further, as I showed in Chapter Four, the Asháninka have a strong network of equal, independent and yet interconnected individuals that can come together in certain circumstances, usually under the leadership of a charismatic outsider and against a readily identifiable enemy or for a particular cause. I have argued that these cultural traits can be used to understand and explain past historical events. If my ethnographic arguments are accepted in tandem with my critique of past writings describing messianism amongst the Asháninka, then I contend that there remains no reason to adhere to the view that the Asháninka hold messianic beliefs.

Having examined the reasons for the Asháninka's willingness to be drawn into the influence of Christian missionaries, the next chapter will look at my informants' interaction with the Peruvian government, specifically in terms of the introduction of official *Comunidades Nativas* and formal education.

Chapter Seven:

Centripetal Schools and Creating Community

Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have shown how the Ashéninka are strongly independent and favour living in autonomous households scattered through the forest. They attempt to limit and control their relationships with timbermen and refuse to be drawn into the Adventist church. In contrast to this unwillingness to be drawn into outside forms of living, however, stands the fact that my fieldwork took place in two officially registered *Comunidades Nativas*. Moreover, my informants seemed to value being connected with these settlements and even act in concert to defend their communally held land, while also appearing to integrate into certain aspects of the wider Peruvian state.

This chapter seeks to understand some of the reasons why, in the context of their obvious preference for living apart, my informants have been willingly drawn into these apparently new types of settlements and increasing interaction with the Peruvian national society. I begin by focusing on how government regulations have encouraged the Ashéninka to form these more tightly defined communities. In the first instance I argue that it is the Ashéninka's desire for education for their children that encourages them to come together. I argue that the government's stipulation that schools are provided for officially recognised *Comunidades Nativas*, provides an incentive for Ashéninka groups to come together. Once a community achieves official recognition, then this new form of living brings other pressures, including the necessity of defending newly titled communal land and interacting with government bureaucracy and other aspects of the state. Such pressures serve to reinforce this new found unity as well as linking the Ashéninka to the idea of the wider 'nation'. Within Ashéninka society, living in school-centred *Comunidades* has also transformed social relationships by creating differences between schooled and non-schooled children and adults. It has also necessitated the undertaking of communal activities and introduced ideas of individual property.

Finally however, I argue that whilst the Ashéninka are open to ideas of increased sociality, they still implicitly reject the notion that people must live in defined settlements

in order to be '*civilizado*' ('civilised'). Drawing on the outline of Ashéninka sociality that I gave at the very beginning of this thesis, I discuss the tensions that the Ashéninka feel are inherent in living close together and the reasons why they often prefer to return to a more dispersed form of living even in the face of external pressures and encouragement. For the Ashéninka, in other words, living in official *Comunidades* is still not a fixed state. They are willing to continue with it as long as it works to their advantage. As it ceases to do so, they know that they can choose to return to living apart. This final observation reflects the underlying adaptability of Ashéninka culture that has been elucidated throughout this thesis.

I begin by looking at my informants' desire for formal schooling for their children.

The Importance of Education

On one occasion well into my fieldwork, Ipaúlita, the oldest of my friend Jorge's unmarried daughters, went with another girl, Daisy, to visit La Selva. They promised to be gone for only a few days. After a week or so had passed and she had still not returned Jorge grew increasingly annoyed at her absence. He and his wife Edith, who was much more relaxed about Ipaúlita's absence, started to argue over what should be done, and Jorge turned to lamenting to me about his wayward daughter. He told me that his 'heart hurt', not only because of her refusal to return, but even more because she was missing school. If she missed school then she might as well '*vivir en los cerros, sin sal y fosforos*' ('live in the hills, without salt or matches'). For Jorge, his children's attendance at school was the main impetus for their living in the *Comunidad*. It was also an important part of their becoming '*civilizado*', a status that distinguished them from those Ashéninka who lived, or still live, away from others without any of the trappings of modern life. He often told me that he had deliberately built his house right next to the school about eight years previously so that his children could all receive an education. During my final months in the area Jorge decided to move his entire family to Amaquaria, the nearby Shipibo *Comunidad*, so that another of his daughters, Sylvia, could attend the secondary school there.

The attraction of education for many Amazonian peoples has been noted before (Gow 1991 and Rival 1992, 1996 and 2002). Both Gow and Rival argue that modern education in government-run schools is linked, in the minds of their informants, with the

notion of becoming ‘civilised’. Gow notes his Piro informants’ view that “people who cannot read or write, who cannot count, and who cannot speak Spanish well are people who ‘have not civilized themselves’ (*que faltan civilizarse*)” (Gow 1991: 233). Beyond just being ‘civilised’ for its own sake, the important point is that people 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’,” (*ibid.*). This same idea underlies my informants’ own insistence on the importance of schooling for their children. Many of the men often appeared resigned to the exploitation that they suffered at the hands of outsiders, telling me that they themselves did not know any better (see Chapter Five). But they were adamant that if their children learned how to read and, most of all, how to work with numbers, then *they* would not be cheated in the future. The power of this idea was illustrated by the fact that Ipaulita had in fact already ‘graduated’ twice from the school. In each of the last two years she had been considered a member of Class 6 (the final year) and first the previous teacher and then Wagner, the current teacher, had deemed her to have finished her primary education. At the start of each subsequent school year, however, Jorge had insisted on her continuing at school, despite her and her teachers’ attempts to explain that this was no longer appropriate. In the end it was only the fact of getting pregnant (during the very trip to La Selva that so upset Jorge) that made him relent.

Jorge’s reaction to Ipaulita’s absence, and the lengths to which he was willing to go to keep his children in school, attest to the importance that Ashéninka individuals place on their children’s formal schooling. In fact, as I suggested in Chapter Four, the government’s commitment to providing free teachers can be seen as one of the main stimuli for my informants’ desire to gain official recognition as a *Comunidad Nativa* in the first place.

In contrast to this position, García Hierro, Hvalkof and Gray (in Parellada & Hvalkof 1998) argue that the Ashéninka’s desire to form *Comunidades Nativas* and gain land titles was linked to their desire ‘to put an end to the slavery and invasions of their lands which had plagued them for over a century’ (Gray 1998: 165)¹¹³. However, none of my

¹¹³ This work details a project in which they participated, under the auspices of AIDSESP and IWGIA, to precipitate the granting of land titles to native communities in the Urubamba and Ucayali regions from 1989 to 1998. See García Hierro 1998, Hvalkof 1998 and Gray 1998 in Parellada & Hvalkof 1998.

informants ever spoke or behaved in such a way as to confirm this view. While there were complaints about how mean and harsh the old *patrones* had been, there was never any sense amongst my older Ashéninka informants that they, or their parents, had been ‘slaves’. Many of the original Ashéninka settlers in Pijuayal had been brought down from the upper Ucayali and Pajonal by *patrones* whom they then abandoned when they had grown tired of working. While their working conditions were undoubtedly hard, as I discuss in Chapter Five, Ashéninka individuals show little compunction about deserting *patrones* when they have had enough of them or their work. Thus, while the project with which García Hierro, Hvalkof and Gray (see their separate articles in Parellada & Hvalkof 1998) were involved to obtain land titles for indigenous communities undoubtedly achieved important work, I am wary of using their account to explain why Ashéninka in general, and my informants in particular, sought to gain official recognition as *Comunidades Nativas*. Although this desire for ‘liberation’ may have existed in other parts of Peruvian Amazonia, perhaps its most important influence was in gaining national and international support for the indigenous land rights movement. My informants did want to gain more parity in their relations with outsiders, but this was not because they felt themselves to have been slaves or because they wanted to defend their land.

Instead, the central concern of all who instigated the process of official recognition in my fieldsites seems to have been their wish to gain government-funded schools. The importance of schools in particular was shown to me by the manner in which my informants recounted the history of settlements in the area. For example, when talking of one old settlement, Mashantay (see Map 7), no one could tell me whether or not it had been an official *Comunidad Nativa*. Rather, their descriptions of the rise and fall of the settlement centred on its procurement of a teacher and his subsequent refusal to return. Similarly, accounts of the history of Pijuayal concerned the names of teachers who had come and gone and the fates of the various built structures that had been used to house the school. Furthermore, Agustín specifically described his and Germán’s decision to set up Pijuayal in terms of their desire for a teacher to come and teach their children, ‘so they would know’.

While the procuring of official land titles and recognition as a *Comunidad Nativa* can be seen as an innovation in Ashéninka society, this underlying emphasis on formal

schooling for children so that they will be better able to defend themselves in the future can be seen as fitting with older Ashéninka cultural ideas. I have already referred to the central idea of ‘living well’, the desire that there be peace between people, lack of suffering and a general sense of tranquillity in which people are able to live and act as they wish. My informants were well aware of how outsiders can threaten this peaceful living and saw formal schooling as one way of allowing individuals to counteract the ability of outsiders to dominate and exploit them. Hence, while living in *Comunidades* seemed to go against many of my informants’ desires, it can be understood as yet another example of individuals choosing to give up some of their personal autonomy towards a greater end (see Chapter Four). In making this choice however, my informants had perhaps bound themselves into more than they had anticipated.

The Law of Native Communities and the Ashéninka’s View

The first Law of Native Communities was passed on June 24th 1974 under the military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado who had come to power in a coup in 1968. Its stated aim was to ‘establish an agrarian structure which would contribute to the integrated development of the jungle in such a way that its population could maintain a level of living compatible with human dignity’ (Smith 1979: 42). The government hoped to achieve this by promoting agricultural activities; their doing so represented a continuation of activities started under the preceding Belaunde regime (*ibid.*). The government saw the law as a means of formalising the state’s relationship with its indigenous inhabitants who, up until this time, had no official legal recognition. Article 161 of the 1979 Constitution, which further advanced this law, gives clear recognition to the *Comunidades Nativas* of the jungle as ‘judicially autonomous entities in their organisation, communal work and use of the land, both economically and administratively speaking, within the confines established by law’ (Roldán & Tamayo 1999: 101-2, my translation)¹¹⁴. Law No. 19326 codified the need for bilingual education for all, the training of bilingual teachers and the provision of a school to all registered *Comunidades* with more than 25 students (*ibid.*: 232)¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ “daba un claro reconocimiento a las Comunidades Nativas de las áreas de selva y ceja de selva, como ‘personas jurídicas autónomas en su organización, trabajo comunal y uso de la tierra, así como en lo económico y administrativo dentro del marco que la ley establece’ ” (Roldán & Tamayo 1999:101-2).

¹¹⁵ See Roldán & Tamayo (1999), Gray (1997), Barclay and Santos-Granero (1980) and Smith (1979) for a fuller account of the political reasons and currents that underpinned the introduction of these laws.

La Selva and Pijuayal were both founded in the years following the revision of these laws: La Selva in 1984 and Pijuayal in 1985. Land titles were supposed to be assigned according to the amount of land already occupied by the established ‘communities’ and in relation to the number of inhabitants deemed to be settled there. As I have already mentioned, Germán and Agustin were the main instigators of Pijuayal’s formation and official recognition. In doing this, they were helped with the arduous and excessively bureaucratic titling process by a number of timbermen working in the area. Obtaining a full title to land involves no less than twenty-six distinct stages (Gray 1998: 171) and requires attendance at various different government offices and the filing of specific requests, application forms and documents: procedures difficult for forest-dwelling indigenous people to undertake without assistance. The timbermen were themselves keen for the *Comunidad* to be officially recognised, as this would enable them to claim that they were legally helping the Ashéninka to extract timber from their own lands. These timbermen thus ferried Agustin and Germán back and forth to the relevant ministries in Pucallpa, and even transported some of the government surveyors (known locally as *ingenieros*¹¹⁶) to the jungle when the latter did not have the petrol or boats to get there themselves.

If education underpinned my informant’s desire for official recognition as a *Comunidad Nativa*, then the actual process of receiving recognition was more of a means to an end. Consequently, at first they were not overly concerned with, or even aware of, other aspects of the process such as the titling of land, but rather went along with the steps of the process as it was shown to them. Further, the fact that the assistance of the timbermen was accompanied by ulterior motives does not mitigate the importance of their contribution; without it, Ashéninka individuals would never have been able to see the process through to its conclusion. Agustin and Germán described to me how they were taken to various buildings, whose significance they could not remember and of which the only detail they could recall was their air conditioning¹¹⁷.

In short, from the Ashéninkas’ point of view, the actions of the timbermen and then *ingenieros* along with the final procurement of official documents, were all things

¹¹⁶ This term was used in the region to refer skilled workers and professionals.

¹¹⁷ Germán told me how he had not understood why the air was so cold in the building and that the first time they went it had made him ill and he had had to leave.

necessary for them to receive a teacher. I follow Veber in seeing these things as ‘tokens of civilisation’, conceived of as potent rituals or powerful entities in themselves that must be somehow ‘captured’ (1998: 396). In this view, cutting a boundary is not only done to make a physical mark of ownership in the landscape but also as an act of symbolic significance that ensures the continued presence and official recognition of the *Comunidad* and hence of the school and government teacher. Documents are similarly thought to have significance in and of themselves, rather than in relation to the government that produced them. This was brought home to me by the importance that was given by my informants to the official map of the *Comunidad* that formed the central piece of documentation for the land title. This was kept in a special folder wrapped up in plastic and carefully hidden away in Agustin’s house. It was only brought out for ‘official’ matters, and was treated with a kind of care I never saw reserved for any other article. At one meeting held about a dispute over the boundary with Santa Rosa (detailed below), Agustin allowed me to have a copy of the map to examine. I kept this for a few days to try to correlate it with my own geographical survey. I then decided to take it to Pucallpa, without telling anyone, to get a photocopy made for myself. On my return, Agustin, while not openly chastising me, was obviously appalled that I had thought so little of ‘borrowing’ the map in such a way and he immediately took it from me.

There is an interesting parallel here with Gow’s analysis of early Piro interpretations of writing when he argues that the ‘ugliness’ of Western writing and its apparently un-uniform nature suggested to the Piro that the power of documents lay less in the marks on them than in the paper itself (2001: 208). While amongst my informants the nature of writing was more fully understood, they still seemed to reify the documents themselves rather than the words that were written on them¹¹⁸. This is an understandable reaction when they see the importance that is placed on such documents by outsiders and the power that their ownership, or lack of ownership, seems to have. As Veber argues in the case of the Gran Pajonal, ‘the magical realism inherent in the Ashéninka project was proven as true as the legal-organizational aspects of it’, in that once groups had

¹¹⁸ The fact that documents themselves were reified, rather than the words written on them, was also illustrated when one man reverently brought out an ancient, decayed and completely unreadable card which he told me was his identity card.

procured these documents their control of the land and power in the local area was seen to dramatically increase (Veber 1998: 396).

There is a relationship between this and my earlier argument (see Chapter Four) that the setting up of *Comunidades Nativas* provides would-be Ashéninka leaders with an opportunity to gain influence in an area. In this process of gaining land titles, it is the particular competence of individuals that can be seen to produce results. The government agencies that handle these matters are set up to deal with individuals or small groups that represent the whole, thus reinforcing one group's dominance and negating competing claims¹¹⁹. An individual who is good at talking to and dealing with outsiders will be more effective than others in gaining official recognition for those who live around him. Furthermore, once this recognition has been gained, it will be symbolised by the assignment of an official land title document that will go into his sole care. His control of this document then gives him an effective veto against attempts to move the centre of the *Comunidad* elsewhere. The fact that a school must be physically positioned in a specific place similarly serves to bolster an individual's influence. The position of the school is marked on both the land title map and on the government's own official maps, which means that it ought not be moved from that place. It is therefore also unavoidably associated with the specific man within whose sphere of influence it falls, and acts as a clear symbol of his abilities.

If their desire for a school explains why my informants wanted official recognition as a *Comunidad Nativa*, and the nature of Peruvian laws shaped how they went about this, then my concern now is to understand how living in such settlements might have transformed my informants' behaviour and ideas. Veber notes that the Law of Native Communities, based as it was on existing peasant communities in the highlands, presupposed a 'communal village-type organization of the rural population, a form of social organization foreign to... the Ashéninka' (1998: 394). Thus, not only were the Ashéninka faced with the new idea of gaining official recognition, but also they found themselves having to conform to the state's idea of how people should live, and then having to deal with the new social structures that this created.

¹¹⁹ This is what occurred in the rivalry between Pijuayal and Alta Mucha Piedra, also outlined in Chapter Four.

The *Comunidad* and ‘Civilisation’

The difference between an official *Comunidad* and the customary form of Ashéninka living in isolated homesteads is starkly obvious. Not only must a *Comunidad* have a school building, but there are specific guidelines governing the terrain around the school. It should face onto a field of a certain size, which is to be used for morning assembly and for recreation time and sports. By extension, there should be a cleared grassy area all around the building (see photographs on Plate VI). In most *Comunidades*, houses are then beside the playing field and along the length of grid-like ‘streets’ which stretch out in four directions. Larger settlements should have other official buildings, one for the *agente* and one for the *jefe*, as well as a separate communal building in which to hold meetings and the like. The teachers in both Pijuayal and La Selva were constantly encouraging the *comuneros* to build such structures and to keep the whole area cultivated and clean.

Beyond these physical changes there are also wider social and cultural changes, mainly affected by the government teachers who take it upon themselves to ‘civilise’ the settlements and encourage ‘modern’ forms of living. Wagner, when not complaining about the dilapidated state of his own house, often talked of the need for a proper toilet to be made in the *Comunidad*. His argument was that when official visitors came they would not want to have to ‘go into the jungle’. After a year and a half he finally managed to convince some of us to help him dig a pit latrine and then build a shelter around it. As we built it he extolled its virtues, but his exhortations fell on deaf ears and he and his family proved to be the only ones who ever used it. Rules governing personal hygiene and deportment were also part of everyday schooling, and Wagner sometimes discussed them in communal meetings. Not only ought the students to have clean school uniforms, but they ought to bathe regularly and keep their hair short and lice-free. The enforcement of such rules tended to be impossible, given the lack of available soap, let alone uniforms, but their importance was nevertheless constantly stressed.

Beyond these obvious attempts to effect changes in the area, the arrival of formal schooling in indigenous villages also tends to create a new separation between parents and children (Rival 2002: 155 see also Rival 1992: 258-272). By making them attend school every day, formal education takes children away from the daily round of production, thus creating a split between ‘consumers’ and ‘producers’. At the same time, among the Ashéninka where a child was considered to be an independent individual

almost from as soon as he or she could walk, schooling artificially prolongs their dependency on their parents for their own subsistence. Parents, keen to see their children educated, at first willingly submit themselves to the extra work involved in having children at school. As both the parents and their first children grow older however, and more children are born, some parents start to encourage some of the older children, and especially the girls, to miss school days in order to help with their younger siblings or to tend to the gardens. Older children might also find themselves going hungry as their fathers complained that they were unable to provide for all of the family. This encourages older boys to go fishing on their own or with friends, as their non-school-going peers would do, in order to provide food for themselves. Furthermore, continued school can mark out a separation between siblings, as some decide to continue on at school while others decide instead to work on a garden or for timbermen. This separation would then be highlighted in the fact that the working children would be able to find wives, build separate households and participate as full members of a kinship group, while those still in school remained dependent. This was the primary reason young men gave me for why they had not continued in school.

It is difficult to conclude if these separations will lead to longer-term divisions in the status of schooled and un-schooled individuals. Amongst those who were immediately past school-going age, however, those who had been at school were more likely than their uneducated companions to have spent extended periods of time in Pucallpa where they could more easily obtain some kind of paid work. If they returned to the area later, however, they quickly became indistinguishable from their peers. Having spent their money on immediate 'needs' (clothes, food, radios etc.) rather than investing it on longer-lasting objects that might be used for making more money, such as motors or chainsaws, they swiftly reverted to cutting *chacras* and subsistence agriculture. While those who had spent longer in school were also likely to have a better understanding of the wider Peruvian state, the very presence of schools and government teachers was having a general effect on *all* participants in the *Comunidad*, by drawing pupils, non-pupils and adults into a single, more homogenous world of 'being Peruvian'.

Rival has written that "It is not possible to separate the learning of new skills from the learning of a new identity, so one becomes educated, modern, and civilized all at once" (Rival 2002: 164). This fact was vividly apparent at certain times, most notably during

the celebration of national holidays, especially on *Fiestas Patrias* (Peruvian Independence Day). On this day, all students must arrive early and in their best clothes. They then line up in front of the national flag while the teacher and the various officials make speeches. After singing various patriotic songs, the children and other members of the *Comunidad* march past the flag, saluting the *jefe* as they pass him (see Plate VI). As Gow writes, such festivals are meant to make all of the participants aware that they are ‘*Peruanos*’ (‘Peruvians’) and part of the wider nation state (Gow 1991: 233). The ritualised performances and the specifically-defined area of the school provides people with an arena in which to “rehearse and perform modern ways of being” (Rival 2002: 175).

The extent to which the importance of these ritualised performances was inculcated in people was demonstrated at the end of the school year when a ceremony was held to mark the official closure of the school in Pijuayal for the holidays. At the very start, the two teachers asked everybody to stand to sing the national anthem. We all duly rose and I watched as the children in front of me stood smartly at attention with their hands on their hearts and started to sing as I had seen them do every morning of school that year. I then turned to look at the rest of the adults to find that they were doing exactly the same thing and were singing in unison as well. During the nine months I had been there, there had been no comparable situation before and I had never seen an Ashéninka adult do such a thing. Only then did I realise the power that national education was having on the group as a whole.

This attachment to the nation state is also more than symbolic. The creation of a school and *Comunidad Nativa* brings with it more concrete obligations and connections to the state. As ‘citizens’ all members of the *Comunidad* are meant to have a DNI – ‘National Identity Document’. Furthermore, once one of these has been issued, it is obligatory for each holder to vote at every national election. Spaces on the document must be filled with an appropriate sticker collected from the polling stations at each election. If one is not filled then there is a fine to pay, or the offender can be jailed. As such, an individual’s schooling, and his consequent connection to the state, becomes a means to control behaviour. In this sense it acquires a coercive rather than an enabling dimension. Hvalkof makes the point that individuals without identity documents have no rights and, in some sense, ‘do not exist’ (1998: 123). While this is true, acquiring official recognition does not simply endow the benefits of ‘existence’. Once officially-

recognized indigenous people can find it difficult to maintain their legal positions and to avoid falling foul of other laws and legislation. They thus find themselves being drawn into more ‘civilisation’ than they had perhaps bargained for.

As well as introducing Ashéninka to new forms of behaviour and of identifying with a wider nation state, living in geographically-defined *Comunidades Nativas* also changes Indigenous Groups’ relationships with the land on which they live and with other settlements and groups around them.

Comunidades and Land Titles

Gow writes:

For native people, a *Comunidad Nativa* is a combination of the following elements: a named village with a defined territory, and an associated group of people. These people are known to be in the *Comunidad Nativa* because their names are written in the list of *Comunidad Nativa* members. This document and the title of property given to the community by the state embody the *Comunidad Nativa*. The territory of the *Comunidad Nativa* is known to all adults, and in the case of Santa Clara, a cleared path runs the entire length of the boundary (Gow 1991: 205-6).

For the Piro, who have long lived in relatively close-knit settlements, the creation of *Comunidades Nativas* did not represent as great a change as it did for the Ashéninka, for whom these defined settlements and ‘communities’ were novel. If the importance of gaining official recognition of a *Comunidad* was, for the Ashéninka, derived primarily from its delivery of a school, once it was formed, this newly introduced way of living and the official parameters associated with it, would have unforeseen consequences.

In La Selva, Silo, a young man in his late twenties, described how the people from Amaquaria had once come to La Selva in a group demanding that the boundary between the two *Comunidades* be changed. The inhabitants of La Selva, on hearing this, came out in a large group, complete with flags and bows and arrows, to stop the Amaquarians at what they considered to be their border. Silo described how a vocal standoff and acrimonious exchanges had ensued, and laughed at the remembrance of how enraged my *comadre*, Melita, had been, and how she had threatened to kill the

‘invaders’. The Amaquarians had brought government *ingenieros*, hoping to gain official backing for their desire to change the original boundaries laid down in the 1980s. In the end, however, the *ingenieros* were forced to rule in favour of the status quo because of the gardens present on the La Selvan side right up to the boundary line. I noted that *chacras* still border this line today. Such stories allude to the manner in which land rights encourage collective action in defence of this new found ‘property’.

By granting titled land to groups of people that have formed into a *Comunidad Nativa*, the government can be seen to have introduced not only a new sense of ownership but also a new impetus for frequent communal cooperation. For in assigning land to one specific group of people, this creates a separation between ‘us’, sharing title to this land, and ‘them’, intruders and those from neighbouring communities. Moreover, given the size and dimensions of the titled lands, the group must work together if it wants to protect these effectively.

This fact was proved to me most forcefully by a particular episode that I observed in Pijuayal. Events began at a communal meeting when the issue of a neighbouring *Comunidad’s* encroachment into Pijuayal land was raised. It was alleged that the inhabitants of Santa Rosa de Ranuya (see Map 6) were intent on stealing territory, and hence timber, from Pijuayal. This had apparently long been suspected, yet little had been done about it before.

New impetus to take action was precipitated by a number of things. Firstly Antuco, Agustin’s oldest son, had been elected *Agente* of Pijuayal¹²⁰. Antuco was caught by a new fervour to turn Pijuayal into a ‘proper’ *Comunidad*, a conception based on what he had learned in school and from other *mestizos*. As such, he had started arranging for the complete clearing of the communal and school grounds, and – with considerable effect – attempted to enforce attendance at meetings. Hence, at the next communal meeting, Antuco made an effort to get as many families there as possible, and a sizeable number turned up to decide on what action to take against the Santa Rosans. Between these two meetings, another important event had occurred that roused my informants even more.

¹²⁰ This is one of the official positions in a *Comunidad Nativa*. In Pijuayal and La Selva, the *Agente* was considered to be in charge of the internal management of the settlement: the upkeep of the communal areas, buildings and paths, along with keeping the peace.

Two *ingenieros* had turned up specifically to look at the state of the *Comunidad's* boundaries. They appear to have been part of a commission from AIDSESP¹²¹ that was checking on the status of the *Comunidades Nativas*¹²². Although they went no further than to confirm the two boundary markers closest to the community itself (which were never in dispute), their presence galvanised the Pijuayaliños. Firstly, it suggested that 'the state' was on their side and considered such matters to be important. Secondly, the *ingenieros* themselves encouraged the Pijuayaliños to take care of their own boundaries and reiterated the official doctrine of the inalienability of indigenous land titles. Finally the *ingenieros* also used hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) machines which, they told my informants, told them exactly where the boundaries were. This final piece of more practical information was crucial in suggesting the manner in which my informants could take control of the situation for themselves, and for getting me involved.

For a few months my Ashéninka friends had seen me wandering around their houses and gardens with my own GPS machine. To my relief, they had never been overly perturbed by this piece of electronic wizardry. They calmly accepted my explanations that it was like a 'compass' and helped me find my way and measure how far away I was from things. Suddenly, however, the *ingenieros* had opened their eyes to a new potential for my gadget. Antuco was quick to ask me whether I could help them with my 'machine'. After I had agreed, he called the second meeting. What followed was the most rigorous piece of planning that I had ever seen in Pijuayal. A work party was organised while other men pledged to supply food for us and the women agreed to produce *masato* for a party on our return, which would coincide with the 28th of July the *Fiestas Patrias* (Peruvian Independence Day). We all agreed to meet on the following Monday morning at a deserted timber camp that, it was generally agreed, lay on the boundary of the communal territory and would be our starting point¹²³.

¹²¹ AIDSESP: Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo en la Selva Peruana (Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle), the national umbrella organisation for regional and local indigenous organisation in the Peruvian Amazon (see Hvalkof 1994:29 and 1998).

¹²² Unfortunately they did this during a week I was away in Pucallpa and so I was never able to confirm exactly what had precipitated their visit at that time.

¹²³ It had, apparently, been marked as such by the very first *ingenieros* who had come when Pijuayal's land was first titled.

The following Monday morning, I hitched a ride with a timbermen to the old deserted camp and then sat alone amongst the dilapidated thatched huts, wondering if I had been wrong to believe that my fiercely autonomous friends would actually turn up *en masse*. Finally, however, I began to hear a faint cry emanating from the forest on the opposite side of the river. As it got clearer, I recognised it as human and made out the call of ‘*Kītaiteri ayompari!*’ (‘Good morning friend!’). Slowly, more and more voices started to join in, from all different directions and I stood up to shout back the same words in greeting. Soon I was surrounded by men and, after a round of greetings, we set off.

This journey was the part I had been truly dreading, and I almost wished that I had been left alone in the camp. The terrain in this area was difficult, being hilly and with narrow but deep gullies cutting through steep hills. Everything was covered in thick undergrowth and I had trouble keeping my footing. To make matters worse, our task was not only to walk through this terrain but also to clear a path. We were not following any existing trails, but rather we had to cut a virgin path in a straight line through whatever stood in our way – always keeping the boundary line completely straight. My job was to lead, keeping us on a heading of exactly 230 degrees¹²⁴. Two men kept me company to clear the front while the others lingered behind widening and clearing it properly. Progress was slow but relatively steady. As the day drew to a close and we had only managed under 2 km, a decision was made to return to the old timber camp. As I walked back down the newly cleared path I was amazed by the number of Ashéninka who had joined us during the day: 15 in total. I was also slightly appalled by the size and state of what my companions had done. As I had marched on ahead they had cleared a twenty-foot swathe through the forest, cutting down all the trees and plants in the way. Thinking both of the impact that we were having on the forest and about how such zealotry would slow us down, I suggested to a few of my companions that perhaps we could make the path a little narrower. Turning down my suggestion, they told me that this was the correct way to mark a boundary.

¹²⁴ I was at times worried that I was in fact ‘leading’ the whole expedition – in the manner that I had seen other outsiders do (see Chapter Four). However, I was careful never to suggest any action myself, but rather always do what general consensus seemed to think was necessary. As such, I do not think that my own presence and actions, beyond my access to a GPS machine, precipitated the boundary-cutting exercise.

This work was to continue for another two days, with nights spent back at the timber camp or in a nearby house, until finally the enthusiasm of my companions wore off and we decided to head home to give us time to prepare for the next day's *fiesta*. Even though the work was not fully completed, I was still surprised – after my numerous experiences of the uncoordinated labour usually carried out by purely Ashéninka groups – by the concerted and planned nature of this communal action.

I have already shown how, for my informants, the desire for official recognition of *Comunidades Nativas* was linked to their desire to educate their children. It did not stem from indigenous desires for land; nor was it a mechanism for fighting slavery, maltreatment by *patrones*, or the loss of land to outsiders (see García Hierro 1998, Hvalkof 1998 and Gray 1998). Instead, the cutting of boundaries and the very idea of land titling can be seen as part of the actions that the Ashéninka thought were necessary to gain a school. In this view, which sees land titles as a consequence of official recognition of *Comunidades Nativas* rather than as the original stimulus for gaining government recognition, government policies have created a new preoccupation and reason for association for the Ashéninka.

It was only once the *Comunidad* had received recognition and *ingenieros* had come to the area to show individuals the importance of maintaining their boundaries that such ideas took hold and led to determined communal effort. This was an effect which, having occurred when Pijuayal was first registered, was re-enacted in the episode that I observed. The election of a younger, schooled member of the *Comunidad* to a position of authority, coupled with a visit by official representatives of the government's laws, stimulated Pijuayaliños to take this concerted action. I never saw any evidence that Santa Rosans were actually taking timber from Pijuayal's land; rather, the concern must be understood in terms of new ideas about the importance of acting 'properly' in recognising and defending communal land.

In part, this action can be seen in terms of the Ashéninka's willingness to join together for specific purposes that I outlined in Chapter Four. However, what is important is that this defence of communal lands is a new preoccupation for the Ashéninka. As was also discussed in Chapter Four, the Ashéninka have always had a sense of local affiliation and have been willing to take action against those who threaten them. While this

suggests the existence of definite continuities between pre-existing Ashéninka notions of place and community and those formalised through state decree and the titling of land, there are two reasons why I consider the latter to have introduced definitive changes. First, groups are now associated with definite and prescribed areas of land that they actively monitor, and second, these groups are now less flexible as they are based on formal membership rather than, as previously, on chosen allegiance and friendship.

I contend that in Pijuayal the act of entitling a particular piece of land to a defined group of people has brought into existence a new form of community where hitherto there had only been an ephemeral grouping. Furthermore, this state of affairs is characterised by its supposed permanence. By connecting a specific group to a specific territory the flexibility inherent in the old system is taken away. Firstly, the group is no longer able to separate, as sub-groups cannot claim new territory and hence, have nowhere to go. Secondly, and more importantly, the *jefe* has acquired a new and more permanent prominence, by virtue of his dominance of the surrounding land and claims over the school whose construction he instigated. If individuals choose to wander away they must leave the *Comunidad* altogether and take their children from the school. While it is possible for them to move to an entirely new *Comunidad*, they cannot effectively deny the power of the *jefe*, or move their allegiance to another individual while remaining in the same area and having access to the central features of the *Comunidad*.

As the differences between living patterns in La Selva and Pijuayal demonstrate (see Maps 3, 5 and 6), the contemporary agglomeration of the Ashéninka into *Comunidades Nativas* and their sense of ownership of their land by no means encompasses all individuals, nor has it in all cases become more powerful than individuals' own sense of independence and autonomy. But it is strong enough to bind people together in new ways and to underpin new forms of communal action. It was this new ideology that, I believe, underlay the boundary-cutting experience. The central point here is that in granting land titles communally, and in making official recognition dependent upon living in settled and defined communities, such policies have actually made the Ashéninka come together more than they would choose to under normal circumstances.

Having discussed the large-scale consequences of the process of land titling and the setting up of *Comunidades Nativas*, I now want to look at the effects of these processes on a more individual level.

Change in Land Use Patterns and Individual Rights Over Land

Once when I was out walking through the jungle, examining potential timber trees with the timberman, Melvin, we came across Vicente, an Ashéninka man who lived with only a nephew for company in a house and garden away from everyone else. Some distance from his house he was cutting a wide path through the jungle. When we asked him what he was doing he told us that he was cutting a ‘boundary’ so that everyone would know that this was his land and that they could not take it from him, whether they were from Ranuya, Pijuayal, or even an *ingeniero* from Pucallpa¹²⁵. This incident suggests that ideas of communally-held property are now influencing ideas about individual property.

The allotting of individual plots of lands, within the communally held territory, was a practice gaining ground during my time in La Selva. To some extent this had already been accomplished by virtue of the fact that houses in the centre of the settlement were now understood to be fixed. When a new Ashéninka family from upriver asked to move into the *Comunidad*, they were told to find a plot of land some way from the centre of the settlement since these plots had already been taken. By the same token, when one young *mestizo* family left the *Comunidad*, there was some discussion over who should be allowed to take their house. Finally, when one of the *mestizo* teachers left the settlement, he made it known that he would be willing to *sell* his house. The price went beyond the mere cost of the wood and labour involved in its construction to reflect the position of the house on the central square.

This idea of ownership of land was also slowly being extended outwards to encompass gardens and their surrounding forest. Melita, my *comadre*, and her husband Arnulfo had spent the last few years clearing and planting a number of adjacent gardens in an area about half an hour’s walk from the main settlement of La Selva. Once crops had been

¹²⁵ Again, a connection was made to the importance of timber in this process, as Vicente then set to discussing with Melvin when he would move to this area to begin felling and extracting all of Vicente’s timber as he had promised.

harvested from these areas, they had then sown pasture, on which they had put two goats, and planned to put cattle. The whole family proudly showed this cleared area to me and told me that the *Comunidad* now recognised that this was theirs. Elias, the *mestizo* head of the Adventist church, had likewise laid claim to a plot to the north of the settlement and was now heading a committee that would oversee the carving up and assignment of the remaining attractive but unclaimed land in the immediate vicinity of the settlement to specific individuals. If such trends continue, then it is possible to foresee a time in which all of the central land of the *Comunidad* will have individual claimants, as has happened in the nearby Shipibo community of Amaquaria.

This new individual control of land seems to go hand in hand with the increased planting of cash crops. *Mestizo* informants told me how important it was to plan the planting of crops, so as to ensure that they were planted at the optimum time, and properly cared for. In the plots immediately behind their house Arnulfo had a number of gardens in various states of maturation, following a pattern that consisted of maize, followed by beans and then pineapples, as a progressive production of cash crops. These sedentary fields were used more for such crops than for the traditional manioc which, people said, would not grow very well after a couple of years of repeated planting. Plantains were generally agreed to be better suited to such gardens and to involve less weeding and general maintenance. This change was accompanied by a marked increase in the consumption of plantains and a decrease in that of manioc in La Selva in comparison to Pijuayal.

These differences in crops and land use were linked to changes in the use and sharing of labour, and in how these practices are perceived. In La Selva the practice of *minga* seems to be more in keeping with *mestizos'* understanding of it. Unlike in Pijuayal where, as I showed in Chapter Three, shared sociality is the most important feature of a *minga*, in La Selva, *mingas* are held with the specific purpose of sharing the labour of arduous tasks. Thus, in La Selva, *minga* is reserved for labour-intensive activities, such as planting and harvesting, whereas in Pijuayal it can be called for any activity from felling a garden to weeding it; from helping to build a house to hollowing out a canoe. My informants in La Selva also stressed that food and drink had to be provided to 'pay' people for their attendance. Hence, there is much less *minga* in La Selva than in Pijuayal. Furthermore there was an obligation that attendance, and the work itself, should be directly

reciprocated by the holders when others needed them. In short, *minga* was much more of a rational exchange of labour and individuals saw it in primarily economic terms. Time had become a commodity and a definite separation between ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ time had occurred: a distinction seldom considered in Pijuayal.

In the context of this new distinction, football has come to play a major role as *the* focus of non-work time and of socialising with others. Every afternoon in La Selva, around 4pm after everyone had returned from their various activities, men congregated on the football pitch to decide upon teams and then play a game or two. In a similar vein, Ashéninka around the Ariapo river (see Map 5) invited people to come and play mini-football on most weekends. All of the houses in this area had set up rudimentary football goals on their patios next to their houses, while a few had even cleared larger grassy patches specifically for this purpose. As with *minga* in Pijuayal, it quickly became apparent that participating in the football was less important than just being present and sharing in the *masato* that was always provided. Also as at *mingas*, comments were made over who had or had not attended and my increasingly common attendance seemed to make a big difference to how people in the area accepted me.

While these various practices show the gradual increase of sedentism in La Selva, this process was not necessarily an inevitable one. So far, my thesis has shown the independent nature of the Ashéninka, stressing how they transform outside ideas and institutions to render them subject to local control. This area of activity need not necessarily be an exception. However, I was struck during my research by the discernible matrix of developments that are interconnected and self-reinforcing. This was illustrated with respect to the introduction of communal land rights, which seem connected to the increase in individual property ownership which, in turn, gives individuals the ability to plan and control the systematic growth of different crops. This more structured form of agriculture then leads to the growing importance of labour as a manageable resource along with the corresponding separation of ‘leisure time’ from ‘work time’. As with any such schema, however, the process is unlikely to follow exactly the same pattern in different places and situations. Moreover, even while many Ashéninka in La Selva manifest some aspects of this development, they still integrated these within their own underlying cultural ideas about agriculture, lack of ownership and labour. Thus, whereas *mestizos* were slow to give away their crops, Ashéninka

families were still keen to show their generosity. Similarly, *mingas* held by Ashéninka still retained more of an emphasis on socialising than purely on work, and few Ashéninka men I met were as driven to hard work as their *mestizo* counterparts.

Having examined how newly acquired titles to land have introduced the Ashéninka to new ideas of property and have made relationships in and between indigenous communities increasingly rigid, I will now discuss the differing conceptions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ that underlie indigenous and non-indigenous interactions.

‘Progress’ and ‘Development’

One timberman described to me his time on the Tamana river, a tributary of the Ucayali on its eastern bank, where Ashéninka also live. There, he said, the Ashéninka still lived in a dispersed state, lacking even such small settlements as Pijuayal. He told me proudly of how he had rounded some of them up to work for him and then encouraged them to form a settlement. He said that other timbermen had had a similar effect there, attracting people with the promise of goods and then ‘helping’ them to form settlements, procure land titles, and then secure the services of government-paid teachers. As we have seen, the Ashéninka are enthusiastic about gaining such schools. Furthermore, it is also in the interests of the timbermen to help indigenous groups gain land titles as this also grants *comuneros* rights to the timber, and hence legalises its extraction. What is striking, however, is the idea that the timbermen, like the government teachers I described above, seem to see their role as one of deliberately ‘civilising’ indigenous peoples.

In his study of Gran Pajonal Ashéninka, particularly in the area of Oventeni, Hvalkof (1992) argues that the *mestizo* colonists who arrived saw themselves as ‘the vanguard of Peruvian civilisation’. This idea is most clearly expressed in their use of the word ‘civilised people’ to describe themselves in contrast to the Ashéninka *‘niños salvajes de la naturaleza’* (‘wild children of nature’). In this view, it is not only the colonists’ ‘right’ to come into the Ashéninka’s land and to ‘civilise’ them, but it is in fact their ‘duty’ as Peruvians to do so (*ibid.*: 155). Hvalkof notes the Cartesian cosmology of the colonists in their separation of mind and body, subject and object, nature and culture. The former is the realm of the Ashéninka and the latter their own.

They consider the Ashéninka as mere obstacles of development and progress, not explicitly because they are occupying lands or ‘not producing’, but because they are conspicuous signs, symbols of un-development, an image of the un-civilised and the natural, bad omens for the progress of human kind’ (*ibid.*, my translation)¹²⁶.

Similar views were held by the *mestizo* timbermen that I met in the jungle. Beyond wanting to make personal profit and gain control over Indians for their own personal advantage, they felt it was right that they should be bringing the Ashéninka out of their isolated form of living. When Ashéninka individuals did not seem to want this, rejecting the advances of the timbermen and retreating to their dispersed homes, the timbermen saw this as proof of their backward ways, and as license to exploit them further.

The *mestizo* teachers have a similar idea to that of the timbermen. For them, Pijuayal is a malfunctioning *Comunidad*, judged in relation to other *Comunidades Nativas*. I often heard Wagner, the *mestizo* teacher in Pijuayal, saying, ‘*Este Comunidad no es un comunidad*’ (‘This *Comunidad* isn’t a community’). Another wondered why I wanted to stay on in the *Comunidad* during the school holidays asking me ‘*Que va a hacer solito, sin nadie?*’ (‘What will you do alone, with nobody here?’). *Mestizos* seemed unable to understand the nature of the settlement in Ashéninka terms, as a natural progression from their customary form of living. Instead, they measured their advancement by a number of criteria: their ability to speak Spanish, their style of dress, their knowledge of the wider world, and their adherence to larger ideas of ‘civilised’ ways of living. For the *mestizo*, these are all part of the formation of settled communities and a group’s integration into national society. For them, all the other trappings are things that are in contrast to the ‘backward’ life of an Indian who has spent his entire life in the forest. Indians who make no obvious attempt to ‘progress’ in such a fashion are beyond contempt and almost deserve to be treated badly by others.

As Jorge’s comment about how Ipaúlita might as well ‘live in the hills, without salt or matches’ indicates, many Ashéninka now hold similar ideas to those of the *mestizos*. However, even as they are keen to embrace the contemporary world, they find it

¹²⁶ “Consideran a los *Ashéninka* como meros obstáculos al desarrollo y progreso, no explícitamente porque están ocupando tierras o ‘no producen’, sino porque son signos conspicuos, símbolos del no-desarrollo, una visualización de lo no civilizado y lo natural, malagüeros para el progreso humano” (Hvalkof 1992:155).

difficult to conform to all the forms of modern life. I never met an Ashéninka who did not want manufactured goods (see Chapter Five), and although some might question the use of extensive education, all wanted their children to at least learn to read and do basic arithmetic. Yet, the point of living together, in settlements, is always the aspect that people found most difficult to grasp. They often asked me about how I lived in my own country, and when I talked of large cities and towns, they understood that this was how ‘white’ people lived. Similarly, they accepted that the Shipibo and Piro along the Ucayali and Urubamba lived in neatly-organised villages. They seemed to respect this form of living and to understand that it was ‘good’ for those types of people, yet still they could not disguise their dislike of the idea of having to live like that. While Jorge linked civilisation to ‘not living in the hills’, this was his shorthand for ignorant people, who lacked knowledge and could thus easily be exploited, rather than a comment on their actual choice of where to live.

To be ‘civilised’ for my informants was less a matter of compact living and more a matter of being educated. Thus, while the Ashéninka certainly feel a pressure from outsiders to form settlements, they are not entirely convinced by the need to reproduce themselves completely in the image of ‘modern’ peoples with all the necessary trappings of ‘civilisation’ as *mestizos* and other non-Ashéninka might understand them. In Pijuayal, as we have seen, even while individuals will consider themselves to be *comuneros* – official ‘community members’ – they do not build their houses close together, nor undertake any of the communal projects and activities that occur in other settlements. In La Selva, while houses are geographically close together and they hold official *fiestas*, most Ashéninka still live some distance apart and even those in the centre take care to hide their houses from public view. After almost twenty years, La Selva still has not turned into a grid of streets, in contrast to its Shipibo equivalents. Thus the Ashéninka are still retaining certain ideas about how to ‘live well’ even as they are encouraged to follow the settlement patterns of others.

Moving Apart

During the occasional meetings held in Pijuayal, the *mestizo* teacher, Wagner, often berated those present for the lack of the sense of ‘community’ in the *Comunidad* ¹²⁷. He

¹²⁷ Wagner’s comment, quoted earlier, ‘*Este Comunidad, no es un comunidad*’ (‘This *Comunidad*, isn’t a community’), was often said in this context. His desire for the Ashéninka to live and act more

rambled on for extended periods of time describing how too few people came to the meetings, how no one helped him with the problems in the school and how people never organised parties to celebrate national holidays. In his view, the *Comunidad* was supposed to be growing under his influence and becoming ‘*civilizado*’, with everyone living in ordered houses centred on the school and football pitch. Instead, he observed the lack of change that had occurred during his two years there and grew increasingly frustrated. During one meeting, he started predicting what would happen once all the timber in the area had been sold off and the people had nothing left to sell for goods. He talked of how currently there was no other income apart from that provided by the *madereros*, and of how people always spent whatever money they received on short-lived goods. For this reason, the *Comunidad* was in a poor state and had none of the ‘modern things’ of other communities. Warming to his theme he suggested that even the little evidence of the *Comunidad* that currently existed would slowly disappear as work dried up and everyone would be forced to retreat back into the forest and revert to the ‘*vida antigua*’ (old life), living on their own in the forest, apart from others and knowing nothing of the outside world. By the time he finished he was waxing indignant, insisting that such a reversion should not occur and evidently hoping that his audience would agree with him. Meanwhile, Ernesto, an older man sitting at the back of the schoolroom next to me, was nodding sagely. Finally, as Wagner wound down his oration, Ernesto turned and whispered to me that the teacher was right – that is exactly what they would do. He seemed impressed, less by Wagner’s damning of this probable future than by the fact that he had obviously understood the Ashéninka way of living.

Holshouser describes how, at the time of her fieldwork in the 1970s in Nevati, the main Seventh-day Adventist mission station in the area, “a significant exodus from the community was under way because of disenchantment with the mission, and respondents mentioned other periods in which many families had entered and left Nevati” (Holshouser 1975: 101). This exodus merely involved abandoning their community houses and returning to live full-time on their agricultural plots. Teachers I met who had worked in other Ashéninka *Comunidades* described very similar circumstances. For my informants, there seemed to be a number of reasons why they found living in such settlements unsatisfactory. One of the more practical aspects of

‘communally’ was linked to the general *mestizo* notion, noted above, that Peruvians have a ‘duty’ to civilise indigenous groups.

living in official settlements that my informants disliked was the sheer expense of effort that it seemed to demand. My own experience bore this out.

If being forced to drink vast quantities of *masato* was the hardest part of ‘traditional’ Ashéninka culture for me, the hardest part of ‘modern’ living was undoubtedly cutting the football pitch. Every so often the *agente municipal* would decree that on a certain day every one should turn up outside the school for *trabajo communal* (communal work). At about six in the morning, at the very first hint of sunlight and while I was still safely ensconced in my mosquito net, I would begin to hear the distinctive sounds of machete blades swinging back and forth cutting short grass. Usually, I could fend off my guilt for a little longer, but inevitably I would feel compelled to join in and the next few hours would pass crouched down in a very uncomfortable position moving very slowly across the expanse of a football pitch. On bad days, after we had finished the field, the *agente* would then find some other area or path to clear or a part of the school to fix. La Selva was even worse than Pijuayal, as there was even more to be done. There were four communal buildings to be looked after – the school, kindergarten, communal meeting house and hut for the *agente* – as well as the paths to neighbouring *Comunidades* to be cut, and the boundary to be maintained. Furthermore, there were various government initiatives to help with, such as the collection of powdered milk for expectant mothers and young children from the district capital. Then there was the official record of births and deaths to keep updated, along with the minutes of every meeting and various official letters to be written. Before long, I had started to understand why many of my informants told me that it was too much work to live in a *Comunidad*.

More crucially, however, and as I outlined in Chapter Two, my informants talked of their dislike of living in settlements because it did not allow them to *vivir bien* (‘live well’). By this they meant their desire for autonomy, without molestation from others. In my time in La Selva, I certainly witnessed more overt quarrels and even physical violence than I had in Pijuayal. Disagreements often arose over the damaging activities of animals or over the mistreatment of animals by others. But the biggest fights were over accusations of sexual impropriety. Older Ashéninka grumbled about the increased incidence of violence, attributing it to the fact that people were forced to see each other all the time.

After my initial visits to La Selva, I took to staying with Melita and her family. She was an older Ashéninka woman born in the area and was the daughter of one of the original founders of La Selva. She had, however, lived in a variety of places, including Pucallpa, and had had a number of husbands, the latest of which, Arnulfo, was a *mestizo*. Her outlook exemplified the ambivalence that many of my informants felt towards defined settlements. She had originally set up home in the centre of La Selva, as she told me, in order to be close to the school so that all her children could be educated. But she lamented the lack of privacy there and complained that everyone knew where she was at every moment of the day. It was for this reason that she had set her house back from the main square and taken pains to grow a tall hedge all around the compound. I fully understood the importance that privacy had for her when I witnessed her reaction on the day that one of her sons, Añer, cut the hedge down to waist height. On first seeing it, after having been in the *chacra* all day, she immediately flew into a rage, and then after shouting at Añer for a while she went to the kitchen and burst into tears. Her major complaint was that now everybody would be able to see her. While Añer and his brother Wilder both seemed to like the idea of living in full view right on the central square, and laughed at their mother's reaction, other young Ashéninka were not so ready to adopt this style of living. Another of Melita's sons, Edbin, built his own house some way off the main path and, after each of his numerous violent arguments with others, returned to the house vowing to cut his next garden near his brother's timber camp up at the base of the hills so that he could move there. Similarly, all the Ashéninka now living on the other side of the Ariapo (another river, slightly away from the centre of La Selva, see Map 5) told me that they had left because they had tired of all the disagreements that occurred in the centre and of always having to see people when they did not want to.

If my informants were willing to be drawn into closer living conditions, they were also sceptical of how long such increased sociality was likely to last. As with the *masateadas* that I described in Chapter Three, there is always a sense that, however enjoyable increased sociality is in the short term, it cannot last. The Ashéninka do see value in forming settled communities, primarily with respect to the benefits that their children gain from formal education. They have also grown accustomed to the idea of being able to have control over a certain piece of land and, most importantly, the timber on it. They are also not adverse to the idea of becoming part of a wider Peruvian society and

of having better access to material resources. However, even as they associate some of these ideas with ‘civilisation’ and the recognition of official *Comunidades Nativas*, they are not completely willing to give up their own personal privacy and freedoms. For them, ‘modernity’ need not involve increased sedentism and agglomeration, but can be attained even as they live in their separate and independent households. The choice of where to lie on the continuum between isolation and integration is, as with all things in Ashéninka culture, left to individuals to make for themselves.

Conclusion

Having dealt with the Ashéninka’s interactions with Peruvian national society in this second half of the thesis, this chapter has dealt specifically with how outside influence is affecting Ashéninka sociality. Earlier in the thesis, I demonstrated that the Ashéninka prefer to live in a dispersed manner. Here, I have shown how contemporary circumstances, in various ways, act against this centrifugal tendency. I demonstrated how the contemporary *Comunidades Nativas* of Pijuayal and La Selva are more tightly defined than previous settlement patterns, and how living in *Comunidades* places new pressures on the Ashéninka to bind together as a ‘community’. This was especially emphasised to me in Pijuayal in the way my informants organised a large communal workforce to cut its boundary lines. In discussing the original formation of these *Comunidades*, however, I argued that it was the government’s promise of the provision of a school to registered communities, rather than a desire for land rights or freedom from ‘slavery’, that was most important in the minds of the Ashéninka in the area.

The effect of schooling and the influence of *mestizos*, mainly in the form of teachers and timbermen, can be seen to be putting pressure on the Ashéninka to adopt new ways of behaving, to become ‘*civilizado*’ and to become part of the nation. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Ashéninka have still retained their own ideas about how best to ‘live well’. Specifically, they often refer to the fact that returning to a more dispersed form of living is always an option and that ‘being civilised’ and living in defined settlements are not, in their view, necessarily linked. In short, even as they feel certain pressures to move into more settled forms of living, the Ashéninka still yield to the older cultural compulsions that keep them living apart.

These arguments, that the Ashéninka have their own reasons for wanting to gain official recognition as *Comunidades* and that they do not consider living in these settlements to be a fixed and permanent choice, are my final examples of the manner in which the Ashéninka are living in the contemporary world. As with my examination of their interactions with the timber industry and Christian Churches, my emphasis has been on elucidating the Ashéninka's own understandings of these encounters and on identifying how they transform both alien institutions and their own way of living to adapt to the outside world. This general theme that has run throughout this thesis – the adaptability of Ashéninka culture – as well as the thesis as a whole, will now be concluded in the final chapter.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion

My central concern throughout this thesis has been to give an ethnographic account of Ashéninka society. In particular, I have sought to understand the intrinsic flexibility apparent in Ashéninka culture and to comprehend how this underpins the manner in which Ashéninka individuals interact with the wider world. The challenge of presenting such a project has been to reflect the continuity evident in this process, and thus to show how, while the exact circumstances in which contemporary Ashéninka live is distinct from other periods, their reactions can be compared to those of the past. It is for this reason that the thesis began with an analysis of Ashéninka society, notions of sociality and forms of interaction. Only once these enduring characteristics of Ashéninka culture had been fully elucidated could I go on to analyse the particularities of the present situation of the Ashéninka. By structuring the thesis in this manner, my central concern has been to show how the Ashéninka themselves understand and adapt themselves and outside cultural forms to their own ends. In doing so the thesis contributes to debates over the relative capacity of indigenous societies to retain their own internal coherence in the face of unrelenting intrusion from other groups. All cultures react to the outside world in their own terms. What is of particular interest in the Ashéninka case is the manner in which Ashéninka culture can be seen to retain its coherence even as it adapts to outside ideas and adopts and interacts with foreign institutions.

In the pages that follow, I briefly summarise these Ashéninka processes and strategies and draw out the larger analytical themes and implications that were raised in the thesis.

I began the thesis with an examination of the style in which the Ashéninka prefer to live: in independent, nuclear households spread through the forest. In contrast to those writers who characterise Arawakan societies as living on ‘the family level of sociocultural integration’ (Johnson 2003:1), I argued that, while limiting and defining the forms in which wider interaction occurs, Ashéninka society does incorporate extensive networks of people. In particular, I examined the system of *ayompari* trading partners that connects individuals across large geographical distances, giving them access to scarce goods and potential marriage partners, while also allowing for, and encouraging, individuals and groups to travel throughout Arawakan territory. Another cultural institution that

promotes this generalised sociality is the *masateada*, a form of social gathering centred around the consumption of *masato*. I described how all people are welcome at these gatherings and how they allow for individuals to meet and enjoy each other's company, while still restricting sociality and limiting ties of obligation. Following the way in which my informants talked of them, I characterised the relationships formed by *ayompari* partners and by participants in *masateadas* as 'friendships'. These can be seen as distinct to relationships based on kinship connections of blood or marriage or on other forms of hostile relationships with outsiders. The Ashéninka emphasis on relationships based primarily on 'friendship' can also be compared to the forms of sociality that have been described amongst other Amerindian societies.

Whereas many Amazonian people favour drawing a specific group of people into kinship networks, characterised by constant reciprocity and the shared consumption of substances, my informants, time and again, both explicitly and implicitly, demonstrated to me that in order to live peacefully and well one must *not* live with those others beyond the immediate nuclear family group. I have shown how this challenges the view held by Joanna Overing (1975, 1987, 2000 and 2003) and other writers (see McCallum 2001, Belaunde 1992 and Gow 1991 and 1997) that Amazonian peoples seek to draw others into extended and ongoing relationships based upon conviviality.

Similarly, this thesis has also been a reaction to the writings of Viveiros de Castro (1992a, 1996, 1998 and 2001) and other researchers (see Vilaça 2002 and Descola 1994 and 1996) who stress the importance of difference and separation in Amazonian thought and practice. Such theorists tend to concentrate on processes of symbolic exchange, including war, cannibalism, hunting, shamanism and funerary rites. I argued that while Ashéninka individuals can be understood to be picking out others from the surrounding sea of difference (of 'potential affinity') with whom to make closer connections, by forming 'friendships' with such people they are attempting to escape the dichotomy between establishing either consanguineous or affinal relationships. In everyday life, this means that the Ashéninka are willing – and indeed prefer – for individuals to be regarded and to remain in an alternative category of 'friends'. That is, they desire to form relationships that are entered into voluntarily and openly, rather than being based on the kinds of prescriptions entailed in existing kinship relationships.

This form of relationship is underpinned by the emphasis placed on generosity in Ashéninka culture. The importance of generosity is taught to children from a young age and is most clearly demonstrated in the hospitality that all households extend to all visitors, including completely unknown strangers. In such instances, generosity, and the concomitant idea of forming friendly relations with others, can be seen as a means of controlling dangerous others while simultaneously deriving benefit from them. I argued that this same idea is extended to all people, such that the Ashéninka's preferred form of relationship might be characterised as one of 'friendship'. As I noted above, it is the shared drinking of *masato* at special social gatherings that can then be understood to promote this form of relationship.

The manner in which the Ashéninka prefer to form friendships with others suggests a certain flexibility in Ashéninka sociality. This adaptability is further related to the fact that by placing central importance on 'living well', the Ashéninka do not preclude any form of social life. They are willing to countenance many different ways and modes of living, and seldom pass judgements upon the actions and choices of others. By extension, the primary concern of Ashéninka individuals is to be able to live as they wish, and in peace. As long as individuals do not threaten or encroach on this personal desire of others then they are free to act as they please. While individuals make their own choices about how to live, they are unwilling to make a moral judgement about how others live. Further, there are few religious, political or social constraints on individuals that restrict their conduct or lead to an obsessive adherence to 'tradition' or norms of behaviour that prevent certain choices from being made, or that act against changes in behaviour. This indigenous philosophy is what, I contended throughout the thesis, underlies the Ashéninka's willingness to interact with the outside world and to experiment with new ways of living and acting.

One final aspect of Ashéninka culture identified as particularly important with respect to understanding their relationship with the non-Ashéninka world is their relationship with leaders. While, in everyday life, the Ashéninka are loath to fall under the authority of their peers, individuals are willing to follow others in pursuit of specific goals or to gain particular benefits. In my fieldsite, this is illustrated by individuals' willingness to agglomerate under the leadership of specific individuals who have shown themselves to be adept at gaining material benefits from outsiders. Such benefits might take the form

of government schools and teachers, or manufactured goods from timbermen and traders. While individuals can be seen to willingly give up some of their autonomy in exchange for personal gain, there is no compulsion to remain in such alliances, and they do so only as long as they continue to benefit from them.

I have also shown how, in selecting potential leaders, Ashéninka individuals display a preference for following outsiders rather than one of their fellow Ashéninka. This is attested to not only by my own findings but also in the historical accounts of Ashéninka uprisings. I have noted that there are a number of reasons for this tendency, including the power that outsiders are perceived to possess and the potential benefits they can offer. However, I also argued that the Ashéninka are willing to follow outsiders as this allows them to retain equal relations with each other, while still working towards a specific end. This final point, reached in the first half of the thesis, further illustrates the Ashéninka's general willingness to interact with outsiders, especially where they see particular benefits in doing so.

In the second half of the thesis I expanded on these observations to analyse the Ashéninka's relationship with non-Ashéninka people and with wider Peruvian society.

One example of the Ashéninka's capacity to change their practices for a particular benefit is their willingness to live in *Comunidades Nativas*. These officially recognised communities offer a different style of living to that which the Ashéninka are accustomed. This new social form encourages the Ashéninka to live and work in close proximity to each other, as well as to maintain and defend communal land and to interact with government bureaucracy and the wider 'nation'. Within Ashéninka society, this form of living has also changed relationships, creating differences between schooled and non-schooled children and adults. It has also necessitated the undertaking of communal activities and introduced ideas of individual property.

I have argued however, that the Ashéninka willingly take on these new ways of living because of their strong desire to gain a formal education for their children. The Ashéninka are well aware of how outsiders can threaten their peaceful forms of living and they see formal schooling as one way of allowing individuals to counteract the ability of outsiders to dominate and exploit them. Hence, while the practice of living in

Comunidades seems to go against many of my informants' desires, it can be understood as yet another example of how individuals choose to give up some of their personal autonomy in exchange for a greater benefit. As I have shown, it is also apparent that living in official *Comunidades* is not a fixed state. Ashéninka people are willing to continue with this situation as long as it works to their advantage. As it ceases to do so, they return to their more dispersed form of living.

This readiness to engage with the outside world is also illustrated by the Ashéninka's long history of interaction with representatives of the Christian church, currently in the form of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This sect's apparent rapid and widespread conversion of Ashéninka people in past decades can, in part, be related to the missionaries' position as powerful outsiders and their control of manufactured goods, aeroplanes and Western medicines. However, their acceptance by the Ashéninka also relates to the latter's own cosmological openness. Yet, even while the Ashéninka are apparently willing to accept, or at least not to reject foreign systems of belief, they are less willing to adapt to new ways of living. This is particularly the case when new prescriptions on their behaviour seem to go against their own cultural ideas of how to 'live well'. This explains why the Adventist Church's attempts to limit and control my informants' behaviour has led to their slow drifting from its teachings. This pattern – of being drawn into interactions with powerful outsiders, apparently converting to new ways of thinking and living, and then rejecting both to return to their own cultural ideas of how to live – has recurred throughout Ashéninka, and wider Asháninka, history. I have argued that this discernible pattern attests to the manner in which the Ashéninka interact with the outside world according to their own cultural ideas.

Ashéninka notions of how relationships between individuals should be conducted were also analysed in terms of the Ashéninka's interactions with timbermen. In the first place, timbermen can be seen to fulfil many of the economic and social functions once fulfilled by Ashéninka trading partners (*ayompari*): providing goods not available elsewhere, giving a chance to socialise and engage in *fiestas* with non-immediate kin, and enabling young men to leave their native areas and seek brides from afar. Further, the Ashéninka's adaptation of the system of debt peonage or *habilitación*, favoured by timbermen in the region, fits with their own ideas of how trade should be carried out by partners who are bound together in a long-term reciprocal relationship. This similarity,

and individuals' own desire to form 'friendships' with outsiders, has allowed the Ashéninka to acquire agency in their relationships with timbermen, drawing them into a relationship closer to that of friends, with all of the social and moral obligations that this kind of relationship entails, than that of a 'boss' or 'master'.

Past commentators on the Ashéninka have noted their willingness to engage with the outside world and concluded that it was only a matter of time before they disappeared, by either integrating into the rest of Peruvian society until they became indistinguishable from the *mestizos* around them, or becoming marginalised and pushed off land and away from resources until they could no longer exist as a viable, independent group. My experience amongst the Ashéninka shows that these scenarios do not do justice to the manner in which the Ashéninka live in the 'modern world'. Rather, as illustrated by the example of the timber industry, and as can also be seen in the Ashéninka's interaction with various Christian sects and the Peruvian government, the Ashéninka are able to adapt both their own ideas and those notions introduced from outside to maintain a robust society.

While many Ashéninka still live in an independent manner, they are not isolated from the rest of the world. Further, they are not, nor do they consider themselves to be, 'victims' of a national society that draws them into new spheres and influences against their will. Rather, they are open to, and seem to be continuously experimenting with, the new social and moral forms that they encounter. It is in this way that the Ashéninka, both historically and into the present day, have continued to 'live well'.

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