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Evan Killick

University of Sussex, e.killick@sussex.ac.uk

Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti

Center for International Forestry Research, juanpa.sarmiento@gmail.com

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Indigenous transformations in the *comunidad nativa*: rethinking kinship and its limitations in an expanding resource frontier

Evan Killick

University of Sussex
United Kingdom

Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti

Center for International Forestry Research
Indonesia

Introduction: Indigenous transformations

Of Mixed Blood represents Peter Gow's initial, monographic attempt to understand Yine people's place and perspectives in the early 1980s. As such, it stands as the foundational text for what became his career-long interest in engaging with Indigenous Amazonian Peoples' place in history, but also, and more importantly, their own interactions with and understanding of history. As with all his work, in part a testament to Peter's doctoral training in anthropology at the London School of Economics under Joanna Overing, his analysis was based on ethnographic theory and fieldwork. This is reflected in the fact that the two central preoccupations of the book — the emphasis that Yine people placed on “mixture” in the creation of their kin and communities and the central importance they gave to the legally recognized *Comunidad Nativa* (“Native Community,” collective titled Indigenous territories in the Peruvian Amazon) and its associated school — were both based on his ethnographic observations.

The first issue, which gave the book its title, was prompted by the fact that when Peter arrived in the village of Santa Clara (now the *Comunidad Nativa* Santo Domingo), as he says:

While it was obvious that many of the people around me were speaking Piro [Yine¹], and were identified as [Yine] both by themselves and others, I could not feel confident that I was actually among [Yine people]. (Gow, 1991: 4-5)

He connects this fact to the fluidity of people's associations with different identities, “*Piro*,” “*Campa*” (an outdated and derogatory term for Asháninka/Ashéninka people² then in common use), and “mixed,” but also their habit of describing themselves as “*gente nativa*” (native people) and emphasizing that they were “*de sangre mezclada*” (of mixed blood). Peter shows how, in an important sense, being “of mixed blood” means being “Yine” – the essence of being Yine is not to have an essence. Ultimately, Peter's perspective is primarily informed by that of the Yine people in the area. That is, while there was a fluidity and flexibility to local identities and cultural forms, there is still a salience to those differences and a distinction particularly around their forms of sociality. This argument, that his work was an ethnography of Yine people, is ultimately implicit in how he frames the book, even if he never fully articulates it in such bold terms and elides the issue in his emphasis on the importance of mixture.

This raises the question of how other Indigenous groups in the area fall within this conception, and how they perceive these same processes. Peter's second key observation was that:

When I tried to collect data on the social organisation of these native communities (...) far from appealing to kinship, marriage, or chieftainship as principles of social organisation, native people endlessly appealed to two institutions: the legally recognised *Comunidad Nativa* and the school. (*ibid.*: 6)

1. Peter used the term “*Piro*” in all his writing, reflecting the ethnonym that was in common usage in the region at the time. In this text, we use, and replace in Peter's writing, the preferred current auto-ethnonym “Yine.”

2. As with Peter's use of the term *Piro* for Yine people, his writing used the term “*Campa*” to refer to people who are now known as Asháninka and/or Ashéninka. Given the mixed cultural and geographical origins of many of these people in *Comunidades* in the area, we will use the term Asháninka/Ashéninka in the rest of this article.

What struck him was the apparent centrality of these institutions to how local people thought about their communities and the relationships they had with other people, even though “Santa Clara had only been a registered *Comunidad Nativa* for five years” (*ibid.*). Santa Clara received its title in 1975, making it one of the first formally recognized *Comunidades* in the Bajo Urubamba valley.

Taken together, these two observations appeared to point to a group that might be considered “acculturated;” that is, an indigenous group that had lost much of their “traditional” culture. At first sight, Peter worked with Indigenous people who were not monolingual but fluent in both Spanish and other indigenous languages as well as their own, who emphasized their “mixed” heritage and placed great importance on non-Indigenous forms of social organization and solidarity. They would therefore appear to fit definitions of “acculturation.” This perspective, as Peter puts it, would view them “as victims of history, damaged by the penetration of European and national societies” (*ibid.*: 1). The prevalence of such understandings at the time is evidenced by John Bodley’s *Victims of Progress* (1975), in which he describes Ashéninka groups that neighbored the Yine as undergoing an ethnocidal process driven by national and international policies (see also Chevalier, 1982 on Asháninka groups on the Pachitea).

The key insight and strength of Peter’s analysis was to flip this sort of understanding on its head. Instead of dismissing such people as, at best, “victims of history” and, at worst, as unworthy of anthropological attention at all, he invites us to consider how an emphasis on mixture, along with the use of outside institutions to defend both families and social solidarity, could be understood precisely as Indigenous responses par excellence to the new realities of Peruvian Amazonia. In his approach, Peter not only demonstrated the continuing power of anthropological analysis, but also emphasized exactly why anthropologists should not set arbitrary limits on which groups were of significance based on labels of authenticity or indigeneity set by outsiders.

With both of us having been Peter’s students, this approach and insight can be seen in much of our own work. We have both worked in the same region of the Peruvian Amazon with neighboring communities inhabited by both Asháninka and Ashéninka people. Like Peter, we have been constantly aware of how apparent transformations of social relations and institutions, while superficially distinct from traditional practices, can often be understood as underpinned by older cultural forms. Examples from our work include Evan’s (Killick, 2008b) depiction of how relations of *habilitación* (a local form of debt peonage) can be understood in terms of Asháninka/Ashéninka *ayompari* relations, or Juan Pablo’s (Sarmiento Barletti, 2021) examination of conflict resolution in the wake of the Peruvian internal conflict in terms of Asháninka/Ashéninka interactions with other-than-human beings. However, despite the geographical proximity to the area where Peter worked, our engagements with our interlocutors are framed by a distinct historical moment marked by the expansion of the extractive frontier, a different legal regime of access to land and resources in *Comunidades Nativas*, and expanding populations of Indigenous Peoples living in smaller and increasingly degraded areas. Degradation and deforestation have been driven by natural resource extraction in those regions, mainly logging (Killick, 2020; Sarmiento Barletti, 2022a) and the extraction of natural gas in the Bajo Urubamba (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016b, 2021). As we have noted for this context, resource extraction governance has encouraged individual strategies in rural communities to escape economic poverty (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016c, 2022a; see also Arellano-Yanguas, 2011; Bebbington & Hinojosa Valencia, 2011 for the Peruvian Andes). These strategies are increasingly based on setting different pathways to make money through a more intensive use and increased commercialization of natural resources that — from afar — may be read as going against expected Indigenous environmental management practices or even “culture” (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022b; Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021).

These strategies are a departure from the sort of *Comunidad* that Peter found in Santa Clara, which resembled a single productive unit where all inhabitants were kin or on the way to becoming kin. For his Yine interlocutors, intermarriage of different kinds of people allowed them to live in real villages (in *Comunidades*) and learn civilized knowledge (in schools). However, we will show how ways of relating and differentiation within *Comunidades* since then have transformed as *Comunidades* have grown larger and resources have dwindled. Where Peter showed how both the school and the legal community were idioms of kinship as history, in today's context, we suggest that it is more compelling to understand them as idioms of relatedness that people strategically use to *avoid* becoming kin to be able to continue producing human life in an expanding resource frontier.

3. *Base de Datos de Pueblos Indígenas u Originarios*, available at <https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblos/yine>, accessed 5th March 2022.

4. *Base de Datos de Pueblos Indígenas u Originarios*, available at <https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblos/ashaninka>, accessed 5th March 2022.

Re-reading *Of Mixed Blood*: perspectives from work with Asháninka/Ashéninka people

Of Mixed Blood is based on the two years of ethnographic fieldwork that Peter conducted on the Bajo Urubamba River from 1980 to 1982. Located in the southeastern part of Peru's Amazonian region, in Atalaya Province of the Department of Ucayali, the area was historically understood as Yine territory. The community that Peter lived in and focused on was Santa Clara, a Yine village that had been officially recognized in 1975 as a *Comunidad Nativa*. Today, Yine people number somewhere between 2,821 and 8,871 people in Peru, depending on the definition used, and, like their Asháninka/Ashéninka neighbors, are speakers of an Arawakan language.³ Yine people are present in various geographical pockets in the Atalaya area, but also in Madre de Dios in the southeastern Peruvian Amazon. With a small population relative to Asháninka/Ashéninka people, their recent history and location have been impacted by the steady growth and migration of Asháninka/Ashéninka groups in the region. Peru's Asháninka/Ashéninka population is much larger than the Yine, with estimates stretching closer to 150,000 people.⁴ Today, Yine groups are interspersed with contemporary Asháninka/Ashéninka *Comunidades Nativas*. As is evident in Peter's descriptions, coresidence and intermarriage with Asháninka/Ashéninka families were not uncommon in the early 1980s, and many Yine settlements had a large proportion of Asháninka/Ashéninka families.

Both of us authors conduct fieldwork in the same region as Peter. Part of Juan Pablo's doctoral work focused on the Asháninka/Ashéninka *Comunidad* of Nueva Esperanza, which was founded by Santa Clara inhabitants and grew as its direct neighbor in the Bajo Urubamba valley. Evan conducted fieldwork in Pijuyal and La Selva, Asháninka/Ashéninka *Comunidades* further down the Ucayali River in Iparia district, after the point where the Ucayali is created by the confluence of the Bajo Urubamba and Tambo rivers. As such, the area is connected by river, but also by the interactions that Indigenous communities have with a wide range of non-Indigenous actors. This region is Peru's foremost logging area and has different hydrocarbon extraction and exploration sites (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022a).

Partly, our engagement with *Of Mixed Blood* is prompted by the co-presence of Yine and Asháninka/Ashéninka people not just in the region, but specifically in Santa Clara. In fact, for two people who have worked with Asháninka/Ashéninka people, there is a tension in rereading *Of Mixed Blood*. Beyond the fact that, when Peter first arrived in Santa Clara, he was not entirely confident he was "actually among the [Yine]" (1991: 4-5), he also noted that there were many "*Campa*" (Asháninka/Ashéninka) in the community, and that individuals would regularly play with their own and others' identities:

One woman contrasted herself as a [Yine] woman to some visitors who were [Asháninka/Ashéninka], while a week later she announced to other visitors... "I am [Asháninka/Ashéninka]" (ibid.: 5)

In places, Peter argues that these “types” (“razas,” following the non-racial local usage of the term) of Indigenous Peoples were not locally important, with the emphasis rather on individuals’ positions on the “continuum” between “*gente nativa*” (native people), with “*indios bravos*” (wild indians) at the extreme of that category, and “*gente blanca*” (white people), the extreme example of which are “*gringos*” (white foreigners) (*ibid.*: 86). In other places, he suggests that a key marker was money, and that people with more money, or at least better access to credit within the local *habilitación* system, were understood as “white,” while those without access to money were the most indigenous “forest people” (*ibid.*: 113).

In an illuminating passage, Peter describes how these understandings play out around potential marriage partners, and specifically how Victoria, a Yine girl, has a clear preference for one “civilized” man over his “*Campa*” rival based on his access to money (*ibid.*: 144-5). Yet, even as such examples emphasize the non-cultural aspects of such identities and others point to their flexibility, Peter’s ethnography reveals that there were salient cultural differences between these “types” of peoples. In the example of Victoria, Peter argues that, while money was a key consideration in her choice, the use of the terms “civilized” and “*Campa*” to describe the two rivals emphasizes that cultural elements were also important. Of particular significance is Peter’s description of a key way in which Asháninka/Ashéninka people are understood to be inferior, as shown by one man’s remark:

“Look at those [Asháninka/Ashéninka]. They like to marry among themselves. They live off there in the forest and never share their game with other people. That is why they never get ahead and civilise themselves, and why their children grow up as ignorant as their parents.” (Gow, 1991: 149)⁵

Our own work has paralleled Peter’s in our focus on how our Asháninka/Ashéninka interlocutors have come to terms with living in *Comunidades Nativas* in recent decades and the adaptations that appear to have occurred as these settlements have grown in size and scope. We have argued that Asháninka adaptations have included the use of bi-residence patterns (Killick, 2008a), hybrid forms of house-building (Killick, 2021), and a focus on preventing the manifestation of physical violence between coresidents (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016a, 2022b) and with foreigners (Sarmiento Barletti, 2021). The description of “*Campa*” as living “off there in the forest” rings true for our experience of Asháninka/Ashéninka people, who are keen to avoid the tensions of communal living that is too physically close and too socially demanding. This also fits with the historical record of how Asháninka/Ashéninka groups lived before the introduction of boundaries in the forest, and of schools brought by the institution of the *Comunidad Nativa* (Killick, 2008a). Yet, even as these everyday differences appear in Yine and Asháninka/Ashéninka strategies for everyday life in a *Comunidad*, they place similar importance on its institutions and its school as a means of protecting themselves and their kin and for better preparing their children for future interactions with outsider agents. For both ours and Peter’s Yine and Asháninka/Ashéninka interlocutors, schools are perceived to be key to securing the future of their children and grandchildren (and thus their communities) through the knowledge “*para defenderse*” (“to defend themselves”) in their interactions with outsiders – from government actors to timber and hydrocarbon company representatives (Killick, 2008a; Sarmiento Barletti, 2022a).

It is this tension, as well as the manner in which social, political, and economic changes over the last 40 years have impacted on the conceptualization and functioning of *Comunidades Nativas* in this region, that inform the rest of this article. In this way, we seek to build on Peter’s key insight that Indigenous forms can maintain an internal coherence even as they transform, while we also explore his specific arguments about the role of kinship and non-native institutions for Indigenous people in the region.

Both ours and Peter’s methodologies rest on participant observation, that is, living and engaging with village life in all of its mundanities, vagaries, and periodic excitements. Peter

5. In a similar vein, and perhaps telling of regional cultural idioms, Juan Pablo’s Asháninka/Ashéninka interlocutors in the Bajo Urubamba and Tambo commonly described their grandparents as *campitas* (“little *campas*”), emphasizing their lack of schooling, of knowledge to engage non-Indigenous actors, and even their use of *kit-sarentsi*, the Asháninka/Ashéninka traditional cotton tunic.

lived in the house of Mauricio Fasabi and Clotilde Gordón and participated in and observed the life around him. Both authors had similar experiences with particular Asháninka/Ashéninka families, becoming part of the social lives of the communities in which we lived. While this approach emphasizes letting people's own preoccupations and perspectives lead the research and its questions, it is nevertheless true that theoretical trends and concerns also color our focus. For Peter, two key issues of the time were acculturation and the manner in which Amerindians created consanguinity out of alterity; the influence of Joanna Overing, his doctoral supervisor, is palpable. Before we turn to our comparative ethnography, we will first spend a moment examining the theoretical background and influences of Peter's work.

Theories of kinship and acculturation

In the unpublished manuscript of what would have been Peter's third book, he recounts how:

A week after returning from doing the initial fieldwork on the Bajo Urubamba, at a conference in Manchester, a well-respected social anthropologist and ethnographer of South America lamented that I had just wasted the past two years of my life, and said, "But [Yine people] have no culture!" When I replied that [Yine] people do have a culture, albeit of sorts, this anthropologist, who to my knowledge had never been to Peru, far less met a [Yine] person, remonstrated, "No, no! They don't even marry their cross-cousins!" (Gow, n.d.)

This anecdote neatly encapsulates the central importance (yet limited understanding) that kinship still had in anthropological thinking in the 1980s, as well as Peter's preoccupation with the question of acculturation. As he went on to note in relation to this story, the idea that Yine people did not marry their cross-cousins meant that they lacked "that sine qua non of a real indigenous Amazonian society, *l'alliance symmetrique*, the most elementary of Lévi-Strauss's elementary structures [1969]" (*ibid.*). In this understanding, kinship — or at least the rules that governed its reproduction — was culture, and therefore those peoples that no longer had prescriptive kinship rules had lost the key component of their differentiation from "modern" societies.

Beyond Amazonian studies, anthropology's preoccupation with kinship can be understood as still reflecting the discipline's early attempts to "establish ethnology as a science as exact as physics or chemistry" (Bouquet, 1993: 114) by anthropologists "who saw in the apparent laws and structures of kinship the potential for a methodology more akin to that of the natural sciences" (Killick & Desai, 2010: 4; see Holy, 1996: 144–155). In this regard, Peter's time as a doctoral student coincided with the emergence of a new style of kinship studies that, following Schneider's (1984) radical critique of traditional anthropological approaches to the subject, placed emphasis on how kinship, along with wider social relations and identities, was socially created rather than biologically determined. The importance of this turn is reflected in the diverse studies that were showcased in the volume Peter edited with Penny Harvey (Harvey & Gow, 1994), and in subsequent years by other works produced by contemporary and later students at the London School of Economics (e.g., McCallum, 1990, 2001; Belaunde, 2001; Astuti, 1995; Carsten, 1997). These texts shared an avoidance of the narrow and traditional, biologically-based definitions of kinship and instead offered more expansive understandings of social relations and forms of relatedness as well as the distinctions and transformations of gender roles. Peter himself often also spoke of his intellectual debt to Marilyn Strathern, gained from in-person discussion with her as well as her writing on these issues (e.g., Strathern, 1981, 1992a, 1992b).

A third way in which kinship was a major theoretical concern at the time of Peter's doctoral work was in the growing debate around the relative primacy of conviviality or affinity in Amazonian societies, following the legacy of Levi-Straussian studies of kinship and the emphasis on both the production of difference and of similarity. As the literature on Amazonian societies had grown since the 1970s, so had a preoccupation with what characteristics might

be shared between them, and whether it was possible to deduce a common overarching logic of Amazonian sociality. In the debates that followed, the quest for a universal study of kinship was replaced with an emphasis on local idioms and the interpretation of kinship (and other logics). In the two broad camps that Viveiros de Castro has described as emerging at this time, one emphasized “the moral economy of intimacy” and the other “the symbolic economy of alterity” (1996: 189; see also Santos-Granero, 2000: 268). We understand Peter – in his wider work – as drawing from both his mentor (Overing) and *compadre* (Viveiros de Castro) in his interest in both how kinship is experienced and produced through everyday relations, and in how kinship participates in the production of different kinds of bodies whose truth resides in extraordinary forms of discourse and experience (e.g., Gow, 1993, 2007). Yet, perhaps in *Of Mixed Blood* the influence of the former is more obvious.

Based on her own fieldwork among Piaroa people in the Venezuelan Orinoco Basin, Overing emphasized their central preoccupation with conviviality as a means of making those who begin as “dangerously different in kind” become “of a kind” (Overing, 2003: 300). As she describes it:

People who live together are also continuously involved in a process of mutual creation... 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. (2003: 308-10)

Indeed, it can be argued that in the very title of the book and in his engagement with his interlocutors’ idiom of “of mixed blood,” Peter used Overing’s understanding of and emphasis on the importance of consanguinity. That is, if consanguineous means “of the same blood,” ultimately Peter’s argument is that his Indigenous interlocutors emphasized the importance of being “of [the same] mixed blood” — an Indigenous expression of Overing’s argument of the production of a “community of similars” from a history of relations with unfamiliar. This idiom of being “of mixed blood” is also a bold proposition by Indigenous Peoples in a continent where the history of interactions across ethnicities has usually been framed by idioms of *mestizaje* controlled by the ruling classes (e.g., Wade, 2003, 2005).

This, then, explains some of Peter’s preoccupation with kinship and the novel manner in which he approached it. First, there was the fear that an apparent lack of prescriptive kinship rules could be understood to exclude such a people from anthropological study. Second, an intellectual atmosphere in which the study of kinship was opening up beyond a focus on biological underpinnings. And third, the burgeoning debates about the relative primacy of consanguinity and affinity in Indigenous Amazonian societies. Driven by the fear of the wider dismissal of Yine people as “acculturated,” what his monograph does brilliantly is tie these threads together to show how Indigenous logics of kinship and consanguinity continued to work. Thus, Peter revealed that these people had not lost their culture — it was still there, but transformed. He showed that their subversion of acculturation was done in a way in which “native peoples” were not only still recreating kinship and thus their culture, but doing so through an updating of their own idioms of kinship.

Below, we will engage further with Peter’s assertion of the primacy given by people in Santa Clara to both the officially recognized *Comunidad Nativa* and its school, which he argued was due to their being understood “to defend kinship, to sustain an ideal of the community as a place in which kinship is created and sustained” (Gow, 1991: 203). While we will interrogate the limits of this argument even in Peter’s own work, his key insight on the defense of kin, and above all of children, remains true. We will engage with our own as well as his ethnographic material and arguments in *Of Mixed Blood*. In what follows, we aim to show the power of his engagements by critically examining some of their aspects and then thinking through what has changed since his original fieldwork in the early 1980s. We begin this section with food and its central importance in the creation of kin.

Making food and kin

The centrality of food and drink in Indigenous Amazonian societies, not just to sociality but to the creation and maintenance of society and physical bodies themselves, is well established in the ethnographic literature (e.g., Belaunde, 2001; McCallum, 2001; Conklin, 2001; Londoño Sulkin, 2017). It is a key characteristic of Viveiros de Castro's (1998) understanding of the "multinaturalist" perspective. In this understanding, the production, eating, and sharing of "real food" — often centered on manioc and/or manioc beer (known in the Peruvian Amazon as *masato*) — serves both as proof of a shared humanity and as the means of producing that shared humanity by reinforcing an individual's type of body.

These ideas are clear in Peter's ethnography of Yine people, and particularly in the way they related to him when he first arrived and their concern with whether he liked "*comida legítima*" ("real food") — that is, boiled plantains, river fish, and manioc beer (Gow, 1991: 7-8). Once it was clear that he was happy with such food, this became a key aspect of his integration into everyday life and the social life of the village. As he noted elsewhere, more than biology, "kin ties, for native people, are generated by acts of being fed as children by adults: acts which are subsequently extended by productive adults in memory of care given as children" (Gow, 1995: 49; see also Gow, 1989).

This is the same for Asháninka/Ashéninka people. For example, elsewhere, Evan has noted the Asháninka/Ashéninka imperative to serve manioc beer, *masato*, to others, even to those considered to be dangerous outsiders (Killick, 2009: 709). This is reminiscent of Olivier Ordinaire's account of his travels in Asháninka/Ashéninka territory at the end of the nineteenth century, and his citation of their maxim: "If you are hungry, I will share my game, fish and the fruits of my garden with you, because you are [Asháninka/Ashéninka] and the [Asháninka/Ashéninka] must care for each other with true friendship" (1988 [1897]: 91). In that context, Evan argued that "[i]n the contemporary context I believe that the ideology of helping other 'Campa' or 'Ashéninka' has been extended to include all who are considered to be 'people', which now even extends to outsiders such as mestizo timbermen and foreign anthropologists" (2009: 709). In a similar vein, Juan Pablo has written on how his Asháninka/Ashéninka interlocutors in the Bajo Urubamba understand the refusal of hydrocarbon workers to drink manioc beer in their *Comunidades* as a refusal to enter into relationships of care with them and recognize them as beings with *i/oshire* (his/her heart/soul), the seat of a person's ability to feel, remember, and make choices (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022b; see also Weiss, 1975).

It was this broad approach of the connection between sharing food, sociality, and substance that underpinned what Peter described as Yine people's desire for all people to become like them through mixture — or rather, for all people to become more like each other. In our experiences with Asháninka/Ashéninka people, however, we observed that clearer limitations were placed on this potentially unbounded inclusion. In the Ucayali communities he worked in, Evan has argued that Asháninka/Ashéninka people limit the notion of direct, consanguineous kinship to a smaller grouping while expanding sociality potentially infinitely. Moreover, he noted that "[s]haring *masato*, in other words, did not have any longer-term consequences, and nor did it carry ties of obligation. The sharing of sociality lasts only as long as the event itself, a fact that is reinforced when such a gathering ends in recriminations and even violence" (Killick, 2009: 711). This strategy of limiting ties of both kinship and sociality has become more pronounced in the contemporary situation, in which access to land and food has diminished, both because of the territorial limits introduced by the *Comunidad Nativa* and due to forest degradation from extractive activities and more intensive agricultural practices.

On the Bajo Urubamba, food shortages have become an important discourse to mark the state of current interactions between Asháninka/Ashéninka people. A key observation of Juan Pablo's interlocutors is that natural resource extraction from forests, and the increased river traffic

to maintain it, have led to diminished fishing and hunting. This was compared to times before the expansion of extractive activities, when, he was repeatedly told, there was so much game available that even he would have been a good hunter (Sarmiento Barletti, 2016b). Although this may be a story about change with a local meaning rather than a history of change, shortages were described as having caused a redefinition of relatedness in *Comunidades*. In general, everyday interactions were described as having undergone a transformation throughout time. Whereas everyone used to be treated as *nosháninka/noshéninka* (“my fellow Asháninka/Ashéninka”), and the giving and receiving of food was a general expectation within these kin-based settlements, population growth within settled communities and an associated reduction in food resources had encouraged people to reassess who fell within the category of *sanori* (“real”) family and who might be treated *como familia* (“like” family), or who belonged to the less distinct and more socially distant categories of *vecinos* (“neighbors”) or *comuneros* (“villagers”).

Further, in direct contrast to Peter’s observation in the early 1980s that Yine people were adamant that “real food” could not be sold but only shared with others (Gow, 1991: 114), food was now regularly sold both within and outside of the communities Juan Pablo worked in. Given the relative scarcity of food, the key thing that can still be shared on the Bajo Urubamba is individuals’ labor, and specifically their participation in *mingas* (collective work parties) organized by other households. As one of Juan Pablo’s interlocutors explained, “The only thing we can share is our time” (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022b). In this context, *mingas* have become key to the contemporary Asháninka/Ashéninka moral economy, as they allow people to create and renew relationships by sharing their work and showing openness to receiving the work of others.

Mingas are organized by individual families who invite their male kin and friends to work with them on particular labor-intensive tasks, such as clearing forest for a new garden plot, sowing and harvesting, timber extraction, and house building. As well as achieving a given task, *mingas* can also be understood to serve a social purpose in renewing bonds of friendship and reciprocity within the *Comunidad*. Attendance is always voluntary, but there is an expectation of reciprocation and that individuals should both host such events as well as attend those hosted by others. Peter described *mingas* in Santa Clara (Gow, 1991: 103-4) in similar ways to how both Evan and Juan Pablo have experienced them, with an emphasis on shared labor, but also the sharing of *masato* and an ideal of reciprocation in both hosting and attendance. Crucially, however, where Peter noted that food “may also be provided,” in our communities food has become an expectation, and our interlocutors commented on the quality of food offered at different *mingas*.

Moreover, particularly in Asháninka/Ashéninka communities on the Bajo Urubamba, everyday food is not enough, but rather hosts offer special meals, often of roasted chicken or chicken soup with spaghetti and potatoes. That is, *minga* hosts offer meals to participants that consist of at least some foods that would not usually be eaten within the household (e.g., chickens, which, while raised by households, are usually sold or kept for eggs), or that have been bought from outside the community (e.g., spaghetti and potatoes). This choice emphasizes *mingas* as special occasions, marked out from the sharing of everyday food stuffs that occurs within the more circumscribed kinship groups described above.

Interestingly, Peter observed a similar distinction between “real” and “fine” foods (“*comida legítima*” and “*comida fina*”) and their significance in relation to forms of hospitality at “festivals” (commonly parties celebrating the anniversary of a *Comunidad*’s foundation or legal titling), when inhabitants from neighboring communities would be invited to visit, play football, drink, and eat. As Peter writes:

Chickens are normally raised only for sale, and seldom eaten, while rice must often be bought specially for the festival. As such, the festival food is like food stripped of all its connotations of work in marriage and the ties of caring between kin. (Gow, 1991: 224)

6. Spanish term used locally to refer to various forms of manufactured cane liquor of varying strength and quality.

For Peter, these choices emphasized how the distinct types of food drew a line between close kin and more distant relations. Peter goes on to highlight how, during such festivals, his interlocutors referred to visitors as “*vecinos*” (neighbors), a term that we now observe as being used within communities in a similar manner, to emphasize a category of social relation outside of immediate kin.

Arguably, a similar process is occurring with drink, as forms of alcohol other than manioc beer become more available and the latter becomes more closely restricted to particular occasions or a more socially narrowed form of consumption. Where previously individuals and small social groups, especially of young men, would seek out a house in the community known to have *masato*, now they might gather at an informal shop or bar that has bottles of manufactured alcohol, either beer or *trago*.⁶ This focus on *trago* not only disconnects such groups from the labor of women that is necessary to produce manioc beer, but also hardens a distinction between food and drink that was always less defined for *masato*, as evidenced by its inclusion in the category of “*comida legítima*” (cf. Viegas, 2012: 543). Now, men tend to purchase and consume alcohol without the participation of women (although, interestingly enough, in our experience it is mostly women who sell *trago* in communities), and with a complete absence of food. Negotiations will occur between members of the group as well as with the shop owner over who is paying and how much to consume. Inevitably, a limit in the amount of money individuals hold or the level of credit the owner is willing to give is reached, which limits both the scope of the drinking and the length of time the group socializes for. Similarly, while drinking *masato* in someone’s house has no obvious limitations on who can join, groups drinking purchased alcohol will be more circumspect about whom they invite to join them, unless they think that person is likely to buy more alcohol themselves. In this way, we can see how both the substances consumed, and also the manner in which they are acquired — through either direct labor or money — interact with the nature and forms of social relations.

In *Of Mixed Blood* — when it is discussed at all — Peter only really portrays money in a positive manner, as something that is desired by all, and particularly by women, who are the least able to access it. There is something of a question here whether this was a lacuna in Peter’s analysis, or perhaps a deliberate avoidance of the topic after some well-known discussions of the role of capitalism in the region (Taussig, 1980; Chevalier, 1982). We would argue, however, that it reflects a genuine change in the region. That is, not only has money become more ubiquitous and available for Indigenous Peoples in the region, but also, as communities have become larger and the kinship and social ties between residents less tight, money and the commodities it buys have become a means of fostering social relations, but, crucially, also a means of marking off different types of relations and setting limits to sociality itself.

In the contemporary moment, characterized by the growth of the size of communities and a related diminishment of food availability, we have shown the impacts these changes have had on both the form and characteristics of sociality described by Peter. Above, we noted the evolution of reciprocity through a move away from centering the creation and maintenance of social relations on food to emphasizing other forms of exchange and support. Beyond that, and in direct contrast to Peter’s observation of his Yine interlocutors’ desire to include all others within a “shared blood,” there are attempts, both explicit and implicit, to circumscribe such boundaries, both physically and through the use of particular types of food and drink. As Evan has noted previously, in this understanding, “consubstantiality can exist without consanguinity” (Killick, 2009: 715), such that the sharing of food and sociality while enacting and performing a degree of connection and rapport is not understood as necessarily leading to deeper and more enduring ties. This is particularly true in the use of different types of food and drink, specifically those not produced locally and/or which can be bought for money, to mark out different forms of social interactions and relations. Having

looked at the ways in which kinship and potential consanguinity are more circumscribed, we will now turn to the novel form of kinship idioms that Peter discerned in the form of the school.

Schools and schooling

In discussing the importance of schools, Peter recounts a visit he made to the nearby village of Kinkón, today's *Comunidad Nativa Nueva Esperanza*, where Juan Pablo carried out part of his doctoral research. Peter notes how its core was a group of former workers for a *patrón*, who were then joined by some Asháninka immigrants from the Tambo River. For the residents of Santa Clara, Kinkón was not a community, nor even a village, instead the people there were described to Peter as “just liv[ing] in the forest” (“*viven en el monte así no más*”) (1991: 250). Peter describes his visit there, including a half hour walk from the main river up to where a few houses were spread along paths through the forest, before their guide showed them “another much larger house overgrown with weeds,” which Peter describes as “a beautiful building... which had obviously been made with great care. (...) To my utter astonishment, he explained that this was the schoolhouse.” Peter goes on:

Nothing could express more clearly what it is to be a ‘real village’ on the Bajo Urubamba. As far as the Ministry of Education in Atalaya is concerned, Kinkón does not exist. So, despite the heroic efforts of its inhabitants, it receives no teacher. Because it has no teacher, its children are ‘scattered’, and forced to spend most of their lives away from their kin. Lacking a school, people in neighbouring settlements deny Kinkón any status as a real village: one Santa Clara woman said, ‘Those people live in the forest as if they were animals.’ The school, by transmitting civilised knowledge to the children, establishes the place of coresidence of their parents as a real village. (Gow, 1991: 250-1)

Peter's interpretation of this event places him in contrast to other scholars' analytical engagements of schools as both a sign and instrument of the acculturation process, which they consider as a loss of the original or “pure” culture. In contrast, Peter shows how his Yine interlocutors explicitly embrace the school as an affirmation of their own “civilized” way of living, seeing that they understand the power and tools that a formal education gives them in a positive manner, rather than as forcing them to “lose” something. As he puts it, “native people fear the loss of their children, not their ‘culture’” (Gow, 1991: 286).

Yine people's focus on schools was due to their seeing people who lacked a formal education as being “at the mercy” of those who did not, saying that such people “*no saben defenderse*,” “they do not know how to defend themselves” (Gow, 1991: 233). Evan has echoed such observations in his writings on schools as the central impetus for the formation of *Comunidades Nativas* among Asháninka/Ashéninka on the Ucayali River (Killick, 2008a). In the wider context of the pressures from food scarcity in the area, Juan Pablo's interlocutors made a similarly explicit connection between their aspirations for *progreso* (“progress”) and schooling. As Joel, an Ashéninka man and father of three children, noted:

“You could live eating boiled manioc and bits of fish or deceiving hunger by drinking manioc beer but your children won't be able to study and will suffer (...) [T]hey won't know how to defend themselves and will be cheated by [shopkeepers], companies and the government if you don't work hard [to educate them].” (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022a)

In the Bajo Urubamba valley, the idea of being cheated by extractive companies or the government is framed by the large-scale extractive activity present and its impacts on Asháninka/Ashéninka lives and livelihoods. This contemporary reality is counterposed to the experiences of their grandparents and parents, who lived in a context of food security but did not have the knowledge to avoid being exploited by *patrones* (non-Indigenous bosses). One of Juan Pablo's interlocutors explained:

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

From this perspective, schools are understood to teach people how to “defend themselves,” first through a broader understanding of the nation state and the economic and political reality around them, but also through the practical skills of reading, writing, and mathematical skills. In this way, formal school is understood to make the possibilities of the wider, non-Indigenous world more available to Indigenous people’s children and give them the skills to negotiate with the region’s powerful, non-Indigenous actors. This includes both everyday interactions with shopkeepers, traders, and timber workers, but also the larger negotiations necessary to defend their lands and reach fairer compensation agreements with hydrocarbon companies.

The need for the knowledge understood to come through schooling is most obvious in the written interactions that our interlocutors have with a variety of actors from NGOs, government agencies, and hydrocarbon and logging companies. These documents are typically written in overly formal Spanish and covered with stamps and signatures as requests and agreements move between *Comunidades* and urban centers. These communications aim at securing visits by representatives of companies, organizations, and/or agencies to start a project or resolve a demand. The capacities needed to engage with these bureaucratic formalities are valued locally and seen as a necessity, as the offices of government agencies, NGOs, and hydrocarbon companies are at such symbolic as well as physical distance from *Comunidades*. In fact, in the Bajo Urubamba, adults linked the possibility of “defending themselves” with their ability to receive fair compensation from hydrocarbon companies for their impact on the local availability of game and fish (Sarmiento Barletti, 2022a).

As with our discussions of kinship and food, the continued importance placed on schools and education in Indigenous people’s defense of themselves and their kin emphasizes some clear continuities from Peter’s observations in Santa Clara. Yet, there are also some differences. The first of these is that, whereas during Peter’s time in the region, *Comunidad Nativa* status was still being fought for and defended, except for in the most peripheral parts of the region (see Hewlett & Killick, forthcoming), these have now become much more settled, and the presence of physical schools is firmly established. This means that the focus has changed from the school itself — the physical building and government support for it, as shown in Peter’s Kinkón example — to the attendance and diligence of the children themselves. Previously, outsiders, and particularly local *patrones*, were in part tolerated or even supported because of the key role they played in helping Indigenous Peoples. As Yine people recounted to Peter, this first entailed such individuals bringing them “out of the forest” and making more permanent settlements (Gow, 1991: 213), but there was also the more common experience of *patrones*, and particularly timbermen, working with locals to gain land titles and then lobby the Ministry of Education for schools (Killick, 2008a: 34). Now that the *Comunidades* and their schools have been firmly established, the focus, as we have noted above, is for children and young adults to use the knowledge and skills they have gained to counteract the power of *patrones* and other economically and politically powerful actors in the region. Another important area of contrast from Peter’s observations is around Indigenous identities, both in relation to the role Peter suggested was being played by the school in relation to kinship and to wider Indigenous political identities.

New forms of kinship?

One of Peter’s most radical suggestions in *Of Mixed Blood*, a suggestion that has never really been taken up by others, was his argument that the new language of the *Comunidad* and school could be seen as a new idiom of kinship. Specifically, Peter writes that coresidents in Santa

Clara would refer to each other as “*padres de familia*,” a term based on the school’s “*Consejo de Padres de Familia*” (“Parents’ Association”). He writes:

This term, I suggest, and the school in general, operates to reaffirm native people’s view of what a ‘real village’ should be. It is at once a civilised usage, from the language of school education, but simultaneously it asserts that the community is a community of kin. (Gow, 1991: 250)

Peter’s argument on the construction of kinship in the *Comunidad* is compelling. However, it must also be understood as the result of a specific history and contemporary worries when Indigenous families were congregating in the newly-formed *Comunidades Nativas*.

Peter’s interlocutors themselves emphasized the contrast between how the “ancient people” used to live in the forest in different “*neru*,” groups spread out through the forest. These included the “*koshichineru*” (“Little Bird People”), the “*nachineru*” (“Hungry People”), and the “*getuneru*” (“Frog People”) (Gow, 1991: 255). Each group was understood to live in separate territories and be physically distinct, and, while all spoke Yine, there was no intermarriage and, according to Peter’s interlocutors, they lived “hating each other and fighting each other” (*idem.*). Given this history, the Yine of the 1980s understood their *Comunidad Nativa* as something overwhelmingly positive, marking the end of cycles of internecine violence and a new form of “civilized” existence. Such communities offered not only a new form of physical existence, out of the forest and in larger, shared communal spaces, but also a new level of social connection. No longer was sociality confined to small kin-based groups, relatively isolated through the forest, but, rather, it was expanded into a new physical and social sphere. In this context, experimentation with new idioms of relatedness makes sense, as Yine people found themselves seeking new ways of categorizing the people and relations around them. In the use of the term *padres de familia*, Peter thought he saw such an emergence.

Yet we would argue that beyond positing this idea, the rest of the monograph does little to support the argument. In fact, other parts of the work seem to emphasize the importance that remained for more traditional forms of kinship, describing the continued use of kinship terms to form and sustain everyday relations. For example, in one account, when Peter asks a young woman to identify a visitor to her house, she calls her “*mi prima legítima*” (“my real cousin”) and proceeds to give Peter an account of exactly how they are related through their mothers. This suggests that, even as the residents of Santa Clara were exploring ways of expanding their social categories, they nevertheless defaulted to tracing kinship when possible.

There is a sense, then, that Peter’s observation reflected his own overly enthusiastic search for a flexibility in kinship and in Amerindian thought that was not entirely there. The specificity of Yine people’s experience up to the 1980s, of a previously dispersed existence and a zeal to defend their newly formed communities and territories, combined with Peter’s own intellectual preoccupations, probably account for the fact that the emergence of such new idioms has not been observed elsewhere in the immediate vicinity or wider region. While, as we have noted above, terms such as “*comunero*” and “*vecino*” might be currently in use to refer to broader, communal categories of sociality, there is no sense of such terms, or the “*padres de familia*” that Peter observed, coming to replace actual kinship, either conceptually or terminologically. In fact, in the communities where we worked, membership of the *padres de familia* was understood as just another burden that gave parents of school-going children extra responsibilities over the upkeep of the school (including feeding its teachers), but with no sense of it being a meaningful source of local solidarity. Meanwhile, the other terms have become markers of social distance rather than proximity. As we noted with the current practices of food and alcohol sharing and their limitations, terms such as “*comunero*” and “*vecino*” are used precisely in distinction from those denoting kinship, which continue to be associated with bonds of care and reciprocity.

Peter argued that part of these new *Comunidades*' function was "to defend kinship," which he then portrayed as an expansive group that was growing for the Yine, potentially to include all coresidents (Gow, 1991: 203). While these official communities are still important for the defense of Indigenous Peoples and those around them (including their close kin), the context created by their more secure nature in legal and political terms as well as their ever-growing populations means individuals currently focus on ever-shrinking familial units within these bigger wholes rather than embracing the *Comunidad*, or an even broader shared, "mixed" identity, as a new form of overarching solidarity.

Ethnic identities

As we noted earlier, a central argument of *Of Mixed Blood* is that, if Yine people described themselves as of "mixed blood," the implication was that that mixture was shared. That is, that mixture was allowing for the production of a new "community of similars" from a history of relations with disparate others. Such a view would suggest a future in which the region and its peoples became ever more mixed and therefore cohesive. The fact that this is not the present reality of Indigenous Peoples in Atalaya was starkly apparent at a 2017 event the authors attended with Peter at NOPOKI ("I have arrived" in Asháninka), the intercultural campus in Atalaya of Universidad Católica Sedes Sapientiae. Organized in part to celebrate the translation of *Of Mixed Blood* into Spanish, the event was introduced by a musical performance by students dressed in their "traditional" clothes, clearly marking out different peoples including Yine, Ashéninka, Asháninka, Matsigenka, and Yanasha. To us, this exemplified a particular characteristic of NOPOKI that we think is representative of the broader changes that have occurred in Indigenous politics since the 1980s: the valorization of different ethnic identities and their material culture, a marking of difference and boundaries between peoples that contrasts sharply with the idiom of "mixed blood" in Santa Clara. Peter argued emphatically that:

Consubstantiality is not a metaphor of solidarity on the Bajo Urubamba. Unlike European discourses of 'race'.. on the Bajo Urubamba 'race' is never invoked as a reason for solidarity against outsiders. (Gow, 1991: 253)

This difference between what we observed at NOPOKI and Peter's earlier emphasis on the desire for mixture can, we suggest, be related to a number of changes that have occurred in the region since the 1980s. The first is that, during the time of Peter's fieldwork, Indigenous identities were more openly denigrated by government actors and settler society more generally. As a result, many of our Asháninka/Ashéninka interlocutors told us that they, understandably, played down their specific Indigenous identities to avoid being discriminated against in Atalaya and preferred to speak to their children in Spanish rather than their own language (which today they regret, as they criticize their children for not knowing the Asháninka/Ashéninka language).

In Peter's account, his Indigenous interlocutors contrasted their "mixed blood" with that of incoming people, whom they characterized as "white." From an etic perspective, the "white" category included a wide range of people, many of whom were also of mixed heritage and would be understood as "mestizo" within broader Peruvian society. This understanding suggests both a desire to downplay specific Indigenous identities as well as a nascent pan-Amazonian Indigenous identity (cf. Rosengren, 2003). In contrast, what happened was a rejection of the specific Indigenous terms used at the time, "*Piro*" and "*Campa*," as being pejorative, and their replacement by the auto-ethnonyms of Yine, Asháninka, and then Ashéninka. Indeed, that move to officially recognize a separation between Asháninka and Ashéninka can be understood as further evidence of the political move to reinforce and emphasize specific Indigenous identities over a more collective endeavor. Whereas in the past, "*Campa*," or then "Asháninka," identities were flexible, as attested to in Peter's descriptions, the linguistic diver-

sity across the area they inhabited, and our own early experiences of Asháninka/Ashéninka peoples and their communities, the last decade or so have seen the apparent defining and fixing of linguistic, cultural, geographical, and political differences within the broader group. Distinct ethnic identities have become about solidarity against threatening outside forces, as well as about increased visibility within Peru's own political system. Where Peter envisioned individual *Comunidades* as offering new sites of solidarity and political action, it is ethnic groups and then geographic clusters that have come to fulfill that role. On the other side, the expansive solidarity that he saw as stemming from an Indigenous but mixed heritage has not gained any meaningful traction politically.

Here, we do not have the space to give a full account and analysis of the complex recent history of Indigenous politics in Peru, which would need to include coverage of both a history, and the ongoing reverberations, of inter-Indigenous violence and slavery (Santos-Granero, 2009) and Peru's brutal internal conflict (Sarmiento Barletti, 2021), among other historical episodes. While the relatively delayed rise of Indigenous political movements in Peru has been noted in comparison to its neighbors and especially Bolivia, they are now rising in power and support, particularly in the Amazonian regions, which suggests that the divergence from Peter's account of early 1980s Santa Clara will only continue to grow. For a piece of work started over 40 years ago, this is only to be expected, and, rather than undermining it, only emphasizes its importance as a historical account of a particular moment.

Conclusion: enduring kin

In this piece, we have endeavored to engage with Peter's writing in a critical manner that still highlights the contribution it has made to anthropological debates, the ethnography of Amazonia, and our own intellectual progress. By comparing his observations of Santa Clara in the early 1980s with our more recent experiences of Asháninka/Ashéninka people and communities in the region, we have shown continuities as well as unpicked how and why the future diverged from its apparent direction four decades ago. Part of this was to think about how Peter's own preoccupations with kinship interacted with what Yine people told him and led to his intellectual defense against seeing, or even dismissing, such groups as "acculturated." Peter's key argument was that, rather than being evidence of their domination by Peruvian society, his Yine interlocutors' emphasis on how coresidents in the newly formed *Comunidad Nativa* were able to produce new forms of kinship and solidarity while drawing on the institutions of the *Comunidad* and school could be understood as positive Indigenous responses to the new realities of Peruvian Amazonia.

Our critical engagement with Peter's argument led us to question how far some of his insights could be taken, and to note where his observations have differed from our own. This was particularly the case around schools and the "*padres de familia*" (parents' association) as idioms of kin. In contrast to the new forms of kinship he saw springing up around such institutions, we instead showed how contemporary coresidents seek to create and impose limitations on social relations and claims within their ever-growing *Comunidades*. We wonder if part of this reflects an intellectual pendulum swinging back as the apparent limits of the cultural creation of kinship appear. Yet, we also note how communities' growth has led to relative local scarcity and the increased importance of money, which has pushed local people to rethink how kinship is created and transformed through human interactions. Such observations perhaps go some way to undermine another of Peter's key arguments against seeing Indigenous Amazonians as "victims of progress," but we would argue against going that far. While showing how cultural idioms and forms are shaped by outside forces and circumstances, our work nevertheless follows Peter's in emphasizing the continued importance of local understandings and practices, even as Indigenous Peoples find themselves in new situations.

In a final twist that brought all of the ideas of *Of Mixed Blood* together while appealing to the godfather of Amazonian anthropology himself, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Peter sought to relate the central questions of kinship and acculturation to history. Rather than seeing history as something being done to native people, a set of contingencies impinging on them, he argued for placing them and their perspectives at the center. This twist in perspective was to emphasize Amazonian peoples as “active historical agents” who understand their past, present, and future, according to their own values and accounts. This is not to say that they have complete control of those processes, but to emphasize that they do have a degree of agency in how they respond to them. Whatever else we have shown in this piece, this insight holds true and emphasizes Peter’s longest-lasting legacy, in our work and that of his other students, of “tak[ing] seriously what [our interlocutors] do and say” (Gow, 1991: 1).

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