

# The Angry Earth: Wellbeing, Place, and Extractivism in the Amazon

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## Abstract

In this article, I argue for a broadening of the conceptualisation of wellbeing in the scholarly and policy literature on the topic. I do so as, despite the calls for the inclusion of place in analyses of wellbeing, the literature on the topic still carries a dominant conception of wellbeing as a measurable index based on Euro-American practices and discourses, with their associated views of humanity and nature. I will advance the discussion on wellbeing's intimate connection to place and place-based consciousness through an ethnographic engagement with *kametsa asaiki* ('living well together'), an ethos of wellbeing pursued by indigenous Ashaninka people in the Peruvian Amazon. This is a revealing context as Peru exemplifies how extractive development initiatives tend to misrecognise or underestimate their socio-natural consequences on local pursuits of wellbeing. I argue that an understanding of the role of place and place-based consciousness in wellbeing is key to enhancing the concept's utility in policy and practice, especially due to its centrality in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, I call for further ethnographic explorations of the link between wellbeing models and understandings of humanity and nature.

[Keywords: Natural Resource Extraction, Development, Human-non-Human Networks, Peru, Ashaninka]

## Introduction: Wellbeing sits in places

In this article, I argue for a broadening of the way in which wellbeing is conceptualised in scholarly and policy circles. This broadening, through the incorporation of different place-based perspectives of what it means to 'live well', is a necessary reconceptualization to enhance the utility of the concept in policy and practice. I make this case because the mainstream Euro-American version of wellbeing, with its associated views of humanity and nature, dominates the scholarly and policy literature on the concept (see Ferraro and Sarmiento Barletti n.d. for a critique). This domination is a reflection of the neglect, and subordination, of place-based subaltern notions of 'living well' from other socio-cultural contexts, in favour of the naturalised global development paradigm. This paradigm conceives of wellbeing as a measurable individual pursuit, evaluated in terms of health and/or material prosperity that is based on Euro-American practices and discourses.

In what follows, I write against this paradigm and the subordination of alternative notions of 'living well', by engaging ethnographically with *kametsa asaiki* ('living well together'), an ethos of wellbeing pursued by my indigenous Ashaninka collaborators in the Peruvian Amazon. This is a timely opposition due to the centrality of wellbeing in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—its post-2015 Development Agenda (see Haddad and Jolly 2013). My engagement with *kametsa asaiki* is framed by my collaborators' experience of Peru's civil war (1980-2000), their own project for reconstruction in its wake, and their experience of a rapid expansion in large-scale extractive projects in their territory as part of the Peruvian state's post-war reconstruction agenda. By exploring *kametsa asaiki*, which is conceived of as collective wellbeing in which human wellbeing is inseparable from that of the other-than-human beings with whom they interact in the everyday, I make a case for those understandings

of wellbeing that stem from networks of socio-natural relations that stretch beyond biological understandings of humanity. Thus, to engage with *kametsa asaiki*, is to engage with an approach to wellbeing that is based on a way of knowing and experiencing the world that does not share the division between humanity and nature that is central to what Bruno Latour (1993) calls the 'modern ontology'. The primacy of the 'modern ontology', and its imposition in different geo-cultural contexts through intellectual and policy circles, partly explains why the wellbeing of nature and other-than-humans is absent from mainstream concerns of wellbeing. Addressing this absence, my analysis pays special attention to the negative effect that the violence of war and extraction has had on *kametsa asaiki* through its impact on the other-than-human beings with which my collaborators posit that they engage in their everyday lives. Through this, I present an ethnographic exploration that asks critical questions of the link between people's conceptions of wellbeing, and their understandings of humanity and its relation to nature.

Following Arturo Escobar (2001: 151), I deal with place as 'the experience of, and from, a particular location with some sense of boundaries, grounds, and links to everyday practices'. My focus on place does not assume a disconnection between the local, in terms of Ashaninka everyday experiences, and wider national or international processes. These layers are definitely connected in the contexts of war and extractive development that I engage with in this article. Instead, I engage with place as a position from which to produce knowledge of the world and experience it.

The view I present here is necessarily partial. While my collaborators and the kinds of lives that they live inform this text, this article is not a claim of a single Ashaninka understanding of wellbeing. Yet, that the voices that you are about to read exist, highlights the threat of the ignorance of local concepts of wellbeing in contemporary development initiatives. I now move on to present insights about the current disregard for place in wellbeing scholarship, to then introduce my Ashaninka collaborators, the context they live in, and their conceptualisation of *kametsa asaiki*. I will follow with their accounts of the impact of extraction on their lives, their relations with other-than-human beings, and *kametsa asaiki*. I will close by considering the repercussions of policies that ignore the concerns set by approaches to wellbeing like those of my collaborators, and the lessons this holds for development interventions.

### **Place and Wellbeing**

As Emilia Ferraro and I have noted, both in the Introduction to this thematic issue, and elsewhere (see Ferraro and Sarmiento Barletti n.d.; see also Sarmiento Barletti 2011), there is a noticeable disregard for place-based imaginaries and place, as more than a mere backdrop to human activity, in the policy and scholarly literature on wellbeing. This disregard is puzzling, especially as so much has been written across disciplines about the centrality of place in the lived experience of humans (e.g. Feld and Basso 1996), and of the mutual constitution of place and identity (e.g. Keith and Pile 1993).

For example, Edward Casey (1996) proposes that place is not pre-cultural as it has ontological priority in the way in which human societies generate their everyday existence as 'to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in' (1996: 18). Expanding on this, Casey argues that '*lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them*' just as '*places belong to lived bodies and depend on them*' (1996: 24; emphasis in the original). Similarly, Christopher Tilley (1994: 18) notes that 'place is an irreducible part of human experience—a person is "in place" as much as

she or he is “in culture”, and Escobar (2001: 150; see also 2008) highlights that the connection between people and their territory ‘results from an active engagement with it, rather than a reflection of “tradition”’. In the same vein, Arif Dirlik (1999: 164) notes that ‘social relations, and the categories in terms of which we conceive them, make most sense if we conceive of them in terms of place-based manifestations’, and Henri Lefebvre (1991: 68) writes that places are constituted by a ‘particular mix of social relations’. Indigenous activists and grassroots movements have also argued for the key role of place in their everyday lives and political discourses (e.g. Kopenawa and Albert 2013).

However, even within the literature that calls for a more critical attention to the role of place on the topic, there exists a dominance of a Euro-American version of wellbeing. Studies emphasise the individual attributes of wellbeing, and concentrate on its health and psychological dimensions, based on bio-medical models of the body and illness (e.g. Atkinson, Fuller, and Painter 2012; Schwanen and Atkinson 2015; see also Mathews and Izquierdo 2009 for an anthropological model of wellbeing involving health, happiness, and prosperity). This is a reflection of the analytical neglect of non-Euro-American wellbeing practices in most non-Anthropological analyses of wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, scholars who do write about wellbeing outside of the global north, all too often equate “culture” with “country” (e.g. Diener 2009). Importantly, these approaches are commonly anthropocentric and make no reference to planetary wellbeing, despite the link between the security of human beings and that of nature that has been made very clear by academics and activists writing on the Anthropocene (e.g. Dalby 2013; Hackmann *et al.* 2014). We have been warned, ‘society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization. Either we will change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us’ (Bruntland *et al.* 2012: 7).

Deploying Escobar’s (2001: 141) assertion that place is ‘an important arena for rethinking and reworking Eurocentric forms of analysis’, is therefore key to engaging critically with wellbeing. This is especially so for any concerted attempt at advancing global wellbeing through development that is fair, in socio-environmental terms, for the stakeholders of the areas in which it is applied. I take this position in connection with Dirlik’s (1999) assertion that neglecting place in categories of social analysis makes these categories susceptible to becoming instruments of hegemony, under the assumption that the local occupies a subordinate position to a Euro-American informed global. This position understands ‘places and place-based consciousness (...) as a project that is devoted to the creation and construction of new contexts for thinking about politics and the production of knowledge.’ (Dirlik 1999: 151-152) These new contexts can provide alternatives that act as avenues out of the current position that capitalism occupies at the centre of development narratives, ‘thus tending to devalue or marginalize possibilities of noncapitalist development’ (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 41; see also Klein 2014 and Graeber 2013). For the purpose at hand, we could replace capitalism with ‘Euro-American-centric thought’ when it comes to wellbeing. The reworking of Euro-American-centric forms of analysis is critically necessary at a time when the ontological assumptions that allow modernity to produce an ‘autocentric picture of itself as the expression of universal certainty’ (Mitchell 2000: xi), have taken centre stage in the mainstream scholarly and policy approaches to wellbeing. In particular, this has led to a failure to acknowledge the consequences of what is now

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<sup>1</sup> For the anthropological literature see, e.g., Corsin Jimenez (2007); Mathews and Izquierdo (2008); Fischer (2014); Napier *et al.* (2014); Sarmiento Barletti (2011).

known as 'extractive development', and to attempts to measure wellbeing with universalising indices that are unrepresentative of the local lived experience (see Colby 2008 for a critique of these indexes).

### **Ashaninka people and *kametsa asaiki* ('living well together')**

There are around 80,000 Ashaninka people, most of whom live in villages along the rivers of central Peruvian Amazonia. Most contemporary Ashaninka people live in villages within *comunidades nativas* ('native communities')—collectively held titled territories that have been granted to indigenous Amazonian groups by the Peruvian state since the late 1970s. Ashaninka people focus their production on garden agriculture and hunting, which they supplement with the small-scale planting of cash crops, timber extraction, and work for local employers. This article draws on ethnographic research carried out with Ashaninka groups in the neighbouring valleys of the Bajo Urubamba, Ene, and Tambo rivers. This is an area where the only massively planted commercial crop is coca, which is used for cocaine paste production. The area also has a large presence of extractive industries (natural gas, oil, and timber), and was a violently contested region during the Peruvian civil war (1980-2000).

The Peruvian civil war was the result of *Sendero Luminoso's* (Shining Path) attempt to topple the Peruvian state. *Sendero's* initial discourse of social justice had some early support in the Andes. Yet, *Sendero* soon turned violently repressive of local populations, leading to a war that resulted in 70,000 deaths and disappearances. It is noteworthy that two thirds of the victims spoke an indigenous language as their mother tongue, when this is true of only 16% of the Peruvian population. After *Sendero* took control over the Ene and Tambo valleys in the late 1980s and early 1990s, around 7,000 Ashaninka people were left dead, and 10,000 were internally displaced. *Sendero* destroyed 51 of the 66 Ashaninka villages in the area, and scattered their populations into 57 forest camps. At the height of its power in the area, each of these camps had 200-300 people who were charged with manual labour. *Sendero* lost control of the area by 1993 due to a combination of attacks by the Ashaninka militia comprised of men from the free villages in the Tambo River and the Peruvian Army; a cholera epidemic; and the malnourishment of the captive Ashaninka population.

The first internally displaced groups started to return to their original *comunidades nativas* by 1995. Some groups found that the state had given large sections of their *comunidades* in concession to multinational extractive companies, and others that local governments had supported Andean peasants in taking over their territories. This experience of dispossession has been aggravated by the state's extractive agenda, and its refusal to grant new titles or extensions to existing *comunidades*. These pressures, added to most Ashaninka people's desire to access schools and medical posts, have led to post-war villages of 200-1000 people, instead of the pre-war dispersed kin-based settlements of a few dozen people. The larger concentration of people also allowed for the defence of *comunidades* from further *Sendero* attacks, which carried on throughout the following two decades.

Despite holding collective titles to their *comunidades*, and their opposition voiced through strikes, the invasions of extraction camps, and international campaigns, Ashaninka people are threatened by extractivism. Extractivism is central to Peru's post-war strategy, which favours the reconstruction of the country's economy after record-breaking hyperinflation, issues with raising revenue, and destroyed physical infrastructure, over social repair. Extractivism makes up just over 40% of Peru's total

tax income; funds that are portrayed as the solution to poverty reduction and social investment, and the reconstruction of a weak state. As the resources in the subsoil of *comunidades* legally belong to the state, the latter has imposed extraction projects throughout indigenous territories in Peru, granting concession blocks that overlap half of all Amazonian *comunidades*. Currently, the adjacent Bajo Urubamba, Ene, and Tambo valleys are flanked by large oil and gas concessions. One of Repsol's—a multinational oil and gas extraction company—spans 8,800 km<sup>2</sup>, ten times the average area of a *comunidad*. The area is also affected by planned hydroelectric dams in the Tambo (Tambo40 and Tambo60) and Ene (Pakitzapango). The latter is projected to affect 10,000 people by flooding 734 km<sup>2</sup> of titled territories in the Ene River valley.

This extractive agenda affects my collaborators at two interrelated levels. At one level, it has done so by jeopardising their legal ownership of their *comunidades* through the granting of extractive concessions and the concomitant opening of roads to exploration and extraction sites in the forest. These roads have expedited the invasion of titled territories by coca leaf growers, as well as the illegal extraction of timber. The associated disturbances in the forests and rivers due to extractive activity and increased boat traffic have also affected my collaborators' ability to feed themselves, as game animals and fish have moved in reaction to these disturbances. There is also the real threat of flooding of their villages from the planned hydroelectric dams in the area.

Ashaninka groups have reacted differently to these issues. In the Ene, where there are projects in exploratory stages, people have presented a united front against extractivism. People in the Bajo Urubamba and Tambo, areas of established extractive activity, have opposed new projects, demanded the cancelation of exploratory concessions, and attempted to negotiate compensation from on-going projects. Indigenous political organisations in areas with on-going projects have consistently demanded funds, as of yet unsuccessfully, from extractive companies and local governments, who receive part of the taxes from extraction in their region, to develop productive (e.g. fish farms and cacao and coffee planting) and health (e.g. medical centres) projects. Some groups, resigned to extractive activity in their territories, have lobbied companies to pay them monthly wages as compensation. These demands for funds and compensation payments are not sought because Ashaninka people 'own' the resources extracted from their titled or traditional territories, but because of how extraction affects their ability to survive. Ashaninka demands address the perceived lack of food and worsening of health caused by extractivism (see Izquierdo 2009). A minority of people from this area has moved to local towns looking for paid work, or to the Ashaninka Communal Reserve in the Tambo and Ene valleys. I have not worked with these latter groups, but living outside of *comunidad* life may imply different approaches to wellbeing than those I discuss here.

At another level, my collaborators experience extractivism as a threat to the networks of socionatural relations they take part in in their pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*, their ethos for 'living well together'. *Kametsa asaiki* means 'to live well/beautifully/peacefully together' in the physical sense of being in one place. This ethos of wellbeing deals with the creation of *Ashaninka sanori* ('real Ashaninka people') and of social relations between human and other-than-human beings (e.g. Earth, animals, plants, spirits) through three interconnected sets of knowledge. The first set is the control of antisocial emotions like anger and stinginess, and the everyday practice of the socially constructive ones like love and happiness. The second set is adopting and displaying an ethos of hard work, as 'real' people should be socially productive beings who share the products of their work, who are open to receiving the products of the work of

others, and who share in the happiness involved in this. The third set is associated with relationships of care (e.g. feeding and protecting) between people who relate to each other as *Ashaninka sanori*. These relations emphasise commensality and the enjoyment of socially productive substances (e.g. what they consider as 'real' food). This is all about the hard work that goes into the creation of *cuerpos fuertes* and *caras felices* (strong bodies and happy faces).

These networks rest on a relational sense of humanity that is inherent in the term *Ashaninka* ('we the people'). However, the term does not encompass a biological consideration of humanity, as it includes other-than-human beings that have *ishire* ('heart'), containing their memories, soul, and thoughts. These beings include *aipatsite*, usually translated into Spanish as *nuestro territorio* ('our territory'). Yet, whilst *aipatsite* is the place where human and other-than-human beings interact in the everyday, it is also an other-than-human being that allows Ashaninka people to grow food, find medicinal plants, and build their houses, among other things. Another example of these beings are the *ashitarori*, the 'owners/masters' of plant and animal species (see Fausto 2008). For example, the *ashitarori shintori* ('owner/master of peccaries') feeds and cares for his animals, and will release them to be hunted if hunters respect them by giving them clean deaths and staying away from their deep forest residence. At the same time, it will also protect his animals from over-hunting by making hunters or their families ill. The deep forests are also to be avoided out of respect for the *maninkari*, the spirits who lead the souls of the dead to the afterlife. This spares them from becoming demons and making their former kinspeople ill.

My Ashaninka collaborators conceive of their post-war project of the re-fabrication of people and place as a single process aimed at restoring the socio-natural relations between Ashaninka people and their other-than-human neighbours that were undone by the violence of war, and are still being undone by extractive development projects (see Sarmiento Barletti 2011). Indeed, in this context the links between humans, other-than-humans, and place are such that the wellbeing of one is impossible without that of the others. This is further proof that any concerted attempt at truly advancing global wellbeing thorough development is unfeasible without policies that address and reflect the place-based subtleties of human everyday lived experience, and how they inform local discourses and practices of wellbeing.

Let me show you what I mean by delving into how my Ashaninka collaborators explain the shortages of game, fish and land productivity that they are currently experiencing, and the impact of these shortages on their wellbeing. Early in my doctoral fieldwork (2007-2010) I assumed their perceived food shortages were a result of recent changes in their social organisation as, since the late 1980s, they have progressively moved from small and dispersed kin-based settlements to nucleated villages of up to 1000 inhabitants. However, with time I learned that my Ashaninka collaborators rationalise this lack of game and productivity as *aipatsite* ('our earth/territory/soil') being angry after the events of the internal war, and the growth in oil and natural gas extraction projects and concessions in the post-war period. These events have disrupted the socio-natural relations between *aipatsite* and Ashaninka people.

*Aipatsite* includes much more than soil: it is where Ashaninka people develop their desired ways of living, including their social interactions with agents that fall under the remit of 'nature', but that my collaborators consider as 'human'. These agents include some that are physically visible (e.g. plants and animals), and others that can only be seen by shamans like the *ashitarori*, the masters of animal/plant species, or the

*maninkari*, the good spirits that guide the dead to the afterlife. Yet, like in the rest of Latin America, the expansion of the extractive frontier in Peru is an obstacle to any constructive interactions with these social agents. In this region, like in other post-colonial contexts, states refuse to treat beings like those my collaborators posit are involved in *aipatsite* as such, and instead consider them part of a long list of natural resources ready for extraction. Whilst some Amazonian states such as Bolivia and Ecuador have introduced legislation displaying an inclusive turn (Law of the Rights of Nature and *Buen Vivir* policies respectively), their recent extractive records confirm that these moves are strategic appropriations of convenient points within indigenous versions of wellbeing to help them further their development agendas (e.g. see Whitten and Whitten 2015 for the Ecuadorean context).

### **Ashaninka theories of food scarcity**

"Ay [Juan]," Gali told me, "had you come twenty or thirty years ago you would have eaten game every day! (...) There was so much game back then," she laughed, "that even you would have been a good hunter!" I like to think that Gali was trying to comfort my frustration as I had returned empty-handed from a hunting trip. Shortages in game, and to a lesser extent fish, are a serious worry for my Ashaninka collaborators. Game and fish, are traditionally considered as *comida legitima* ('real food'), substances necessary for the fabrication of the beautiful and strong bodies of *Ashaninka sanori*. Yet, due to their scarcity, game and fish now share their central place in Ashaninka diets with tinned anchovies in tomato sauce, spaghetti, rice, and beans. Local everyday diets are still dominated by roasted or boiled manioc and plantains, and manioc beer.

I initially never asked people to expand on what had led to these shortages as I associated food scarcity with the fast rate of population growth in the area. Between the mid-1980s and 90s there were mass migrations of Ashaninka people from the Ene and Tambo river valleys fleeing *Sendero Luminoso* and the war. To this we must add the steady migration of indigenous Amazonian men looking for work in the timber industry, and of landless Andean peasants that moved in to plant coca for the large coca paste production enterprise in the area. Recent years have also seen a massive increase in boat traffic as part of PlusPetrol, a Spanish-Argentine extractive company's, natural gas extraction activities in the area. My Ashaninka collaborators highlighted the connection between the passage of the boats and shortages of fish, and I was told that the boats "*molestan el rio*" ('disturb the river'). In fact, every village downriver from Las Malvinas, PlusPetrol's base in the Bajo Urubamba River, receives a few thousand pounds every three years as compensation for what the company calls "*disturbios fluviales*" ('fluvial disturbances'). Again, even though I did not know much about aquatic life it all seemed logical: the disturbances caused by the daily traffic of boats had caused some species of fish to alter their migratory routes.

Yet, it all became less logical a few months into my fieldwork, when I joined a meeting held at OIRA (*Organización Indígena Regional Atalaya*), the local indigenous political organisation in Atalaya, the district capital for most of the Bajo Urubamba valley. The meeting had been set by OIRA for indigenous representatives from all the villages by the Bajo Urubamba, and some by the Ucayali River, to discuss an increase in compensations for fluvial disturbances with PlusPetrol representatives. During the meeting, the delegation from the Unini River argued that they too deserved compensation as they were experiencing a serious scarcity of fish, and the plants in their gardens were either taking longer to grow or rotting too quickly, and were not as large, beautiful, and satisfying to eat as they used to be. Other delegations from

different rivers in the area expressed similar worries and demanded either a closure of PlusPetrol operations or a large increase in compensation payments. Some spoke of a few million rather than a few thousands of dollars.

The PlusPetrol representatives denied any scientific basis for these complaints as the Unini, an affluent of the Ucayali, does not receive any PlusPetrol-related traffic, and could not receive any pollutants in case of a spill, as it would be physically impossible for it to move upriver to the Unini. The delegates vociferously demanded payments, and the organisers had to call for order. The meeting was adjourned, the PlusPetrol team left, and I sat confused. Weeks later I met a PlusPetrol representative in a restaurant in Atalaya, who emphasised that locals would do anything for money; even try to fraudulently claim that their territory was being polluted, when it was scientifically impossible for any pollutants to reach that area. As I listened to him, I promised myself I would read more on the 'hard' science behind this, to better understand how PlusPetrol's activities were affecting the Unini.

But even when I travelled far from PlusPetrol's area of influence, I met more Ashaninka people who complained about the lack of productivity of their gardens, and about how they were not eating as much game as they used to in the past and were only catching small fish. At the time I took their statements as a romantic yearning for an idealised past, an understandable response to their recent experiences of war, large-scale extractive development, and attempts by the government to limit their rights to land through the passing of laws that would open up more of their territories to extractive companies.

A couple of months after the meeting with PlusPetrol in Atalaya, I visited the village of Anapati by the Tambo River. Emilio, who had been living in the area since the war, told me how worried he was about the decreasing land productivity and game shortages. Emilio initially associated these changes with the presence of extractive industries in the Tambo, but as our conversation went on, he also blamed those changes on the bloodshed that people and *aipatsite* had experienced during the war; on recent plans for hydroelectric dams in the area; and on cocaine production. He said:

[Plants do not grow] as easy as they used to, the land isn't the same it used to be before the war. We plant like we used to but it's like it doesn't want to produce any longer because of all the violence. It's angry with people for all the deaths, all the people that were killed and that were just left there to rot without burial, *aipatsite* [has] tasted so much blood. Plants start to grow and then they dry up or they rot. And all those chemicals being used when they make cocaine upriver makes it worse, they make *aipatsite* angrier. There are those plans to build the dam at *Pakitzapango* that we hear about on the radio that will flood [the villages in the Ene] (...) and all the companies that the government is bringing.

A few days later, in a conversation with an Ashaninka woman dealing with the same topics, I learned that game shortages in the area were also associated with the actions of *Sendero* cadres and the Peruvian army who. I was told that both of these groups had raped peccaries during the war, which had caused their *ashitarori* to become angry and stop releasing them for people to hunt:

The soldiers and *senderos* have raped peccaries (...) that's why their *ashitarori* is angry, that's why there's no game. [The *ashitarori* of animals] get angry if men kill too many of their animals, or if they hurt them and not kill them (...) It's like



with us, if someone hurts our animals, if someone steals a chicken (...) we get angry too. (...) We ask, who did it? Who hurt it? (...) [A]nd we defend our animals. The *ashitarori* do the same.

These statements made me realise how deaf I had been to what my collaborators had been telling me in previous months about food scarcity and the pollution of their rivers. I had understood their statements, worries, and actions as commentaries on their physical landscape. In doing so, I was unaware that we were taking part in what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004) calls an 'uncontrolled equivocation'. Viveiros de Castro (2004: 9) describes these as 'a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this'. Thus, we may have been using the same terms in our conversations (e.g. land, river, forest, game), but we meant very different things based on our lived experience of the world. As Mario Blaser (2009: 11) explains, 'these misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because the interlocutors are unaware that different worlds are being enacted (and assumed) by each of them.' My collaborators and I may have been using the same terms, but we knew and experienced them as different entities. I know them as objects, as opposed to the positions they occupy as subjects or other-than-humans in the Ashaninka lived experience. This was the same 'communicative disjuncture' that led the PlusPetrol representative I mentioned above to take the statements of Ashaninka representatives about the decreased productivity of their land and their polluted rivers as lies.

### **Re-engaging an angry *aipatsite***

To recap, *aipatsite* is angry both because of its exposure to human cruelty during war, and to the continuation of violence in the area due to the current destructive actions of the state and other outsiders through extractive activity. Is *aipatsite* acting like moral beings ought to in expressing its anger and refusing to provide Ashaninka people with the productivity that leads to *kametsa asaiki*? As I explained earlier, one of the important markers of *kametsa asaiki*, and thus *Ashaninka sanori*-ness, is the ability to control one's negative emotions. Yet, my Ashaninka collaborators highlight that there are moments in which it is reasonable to express controlled anger. Such moments include the ritualised shouting matches in which *ayompari* trading partners demand what is owed to them from their partners, or in the political protests during which Ashaninka people demanded territorial security from the state that took place throughout my doctoral fieldwork (2007-2010).

If we follow this perspective, *aipatsite* has a high sense of morality and is angry because it kept its side of the bargain, which allowed Ashaninka people to work, live well together, and fabricate autonomous *Ashaninka sanori*. Similarly, the *ashitatori* of different animal species, their spirit master/owners who create safe spaces for the reproduction of the creatures in their care, offered Ashaninka people the opportunity to hunt and fish to feed their families; only asking in return that people treat their animals with respect, allow them clean deaths, and not kill more than they need. But, as I wrote above, peccaries were raped during the war, rivers are being disturbed, and oil and gas exploratory teams enter the *centro* (the deep forest) where the *ashitarori* live. The *ashitarori* of trees can guide people to the best trees if they cut responsible amounts, but the large concessions granted by the state have disturbed these relations. Similarly, I was told by my Ashaninka collaborators that *aipatsite* only asked for the land to be worked productively, in the *Ashaninka sanori* way that I explained earlier, but has now withdrawn its productivity after being drenched in the blood spilled during war. The

other-than-human beings in *aipatsite*, like Ashaninka people, have a heart (*noshire*, 'my heart'), where their soul, thoughts, and memories sit. Thus, these other-than-human beings have the capacity to remember, and are angry about what happened when their autonomy was not respected in times of war and extraction.

But even if Ashaninka concepts of relational humanity, and the role of *aipatsite* in it, are central to their post-war reconstruction project, and thus to the possibility of re-taking their pursuit of wellbeing, it still remains un-recognised in Peru. Why? Because it does not conform to the tropes and narratives upon which the official national policies of post-war reconstruction or indigenous recognition are founded. Based on his ethnographic work among Urarina people in northern Peruvian Amazonia, Harry Walker (2012) recently wrote that 'the concept of spirit masters [among indigenous Amazonians] may have something to do with how and why the protection of the state—its putative role as a "mother", as it were—comes to be seen as a fair price to pay for subordination—its role as a "master" or "owner".' Urarina people, Walker tells us, actively seek to be incorporated into the state in order to become good 'civilised' citizens. Yet, while my collaborators do experience the state as an *ashitarori*, they do not experience it as their *ashitatori*. The state, embodied by the Peruvian president, is experienced as a master of evil beings—like extractive companies and *Sendero*—that it has released on Ashaninka territory to eliminate them and take over their land.

Unlike the Urarina people that Walker works with, my collaborators do not seek to assimilate themselves within the state. Rather, as I have written elsewhere, they seek to become both 'civilised' and Peruvian by unhinging the nation-state. From this perspective, Ashaninka people are Peruvian because they defend Peru, the nation, from a state that seeks to destroy it (Sarmiento Barletti 2011). Instead of engaging with the state in terms of subordination, my collaborators experience it as a powerful yet stingy trading partner to whom they give generously (e.g. sacrificed their lives during war, and their productivity in contemporary days) but it never gives a fair exchange back. From this perspective, the state is subordinate to Ashaninka people in moral terms. My collaborators complain vociferously at their political meetings, like unpaid trading partners do, to show their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, knowing that they will never be compensated. The pursuit of their own ethos of wellbeing in spite of this is a public statement that they can live without receiving what these powerful outsiders owe them.

In this context, the Ashaninka political struggle against extractive development and mega-projects, as well as their internal process of post-war reconstruction, are all part of a process in which Ashaninka people seek to refashion their relations with each other and with *aipatsite* in order to resume their pursuit of wellbeing. *Kametsa asaiki* is subversive to these plans, which act upon Amazonia as if it were an uninhabited source of raw materials. Ashaninka everyday relations with *aipatsite* may not be visible as politics from the outside, but they do have results that are obvious to the state and other outside observers (Sarmiento Barletti 2012). This is evident in how my collaborators have become more resolute in their demands for territorial security as they struggle to show *aipatsite* that they are ready to resume their pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*. The political movement against the building of dams, the exploration of further oil and gas drilling sites and heightened calls for support against illegal timbermen, in spite of violence against indigenous leaders by members of the armed forces and of the extractive industries, are all part of a single process. This is a process in which both Ashaninka people and *aipatsite* must be reminded of the possibility of positive socio-natural relationships in order to eradicate the memory of violence from their *noshire*.

People must show *aipatsite* that they are ready to interact with it, and with their neighbours, in moral and socio-naturally productive ways. This evidences that my collaborators conceive of the production of 'real' people and of positive socio-natural relations with place as a single pursuit of wellbeing.

### **Conclusion: Decolonising wellbeing**

I have not sought to make a case for a 'right' approach to wellbeing, but to advance the discussion on wellbeing's intimate connection with place and place-based consciousness. My intention has been to establish the ground for an improved understanding, unobstructed by uncontrolled equivocations, between different experiences of wellbeing in order to enhance the concept's utility in policy and practice.

Following Escobar (2001) and Dirlik (1999), and based on my ethnographic work with indigenous Ashaninka people in the Peruvian Amazon, I have considered place as a key critical position from which to approach and rethink the primacy of the 'global' over the 'local' when it comes to wellbeing. The place-based critique I offered seeks to de-normalise mainstream conceptualisations of wellbeing, which are heavily influenced by the Euro-American lived experience, by engaging with understandings of wellbeing that arise from networks of socio-natural relations that include other-than-human beings. The central space that *aipatsite* occupies in my collaborators' pursuit of *kametsa asaiki*, highlights the need for an approach to wellbeing that considers indigenous experiences as epistemologically equal to the current policy and scholarly positions on the topic. This also reinforces the need to open up mainstream ideas and applications of wellbeing so as to allow for the incorporation of different conceptions of what it means to 'live well' in different contexts into the scholarly and policy literature on the topic.

What would wellbeing policy look like if, following Viveiros de Castro, we explored what happens when we begin to deploy 'native thought (...) drawing out its consequences, and verifying the effects that it can produce on our own thinking' (2013: 489)? Or, in other words, what would it mean to take the relationship Ashaninka people have with *aipatsite* and its role in *kametsa asaiki* seriously? There is a lot at stake when development policy and initiatives ignore such concepts. My collaborators' pursuit of *kametsa asaiki* has been disrupted due to the physical impact of war and extractivism in their territory, and their less obvious impact on other-than-human beings. Ashaninka people, like other local groups in areas where the large-scale extraction of natural resources takes place, have experienced violent clashes with security forces over extraction, have had some of their leaders assassinated for their stance against extraction. Thus, they mistrust the Peruvian state, which they experience as an oppressive force that has imposed a continuum of violence on their lives. This has not only created further animosity between indigenous groups and the state, but it is also an obstacle to local reconstruction attempts after Peru's civil war. At this level, it becomes clear why, in spite of consistent economic growth, Peruvians rank among the unhappiest people in Latin America (Guillen Royo, 2007).

It also becomes clear that the anthropology of wellbeing can become another front from which to deconstruct Euro-American thought through a defence of place and an awareness of the multiplicity of places, and thus of 'wellbeings'. In doing so, it should extend the provincialisation of any strict nature-culture division to the study of wellbeing as a key step in the decolonisation of its scholarship and policy. Deploying

'native thought' in discussions on wellbeing allows for the incorporation of other forms of knowledge, or 'worlds and knowledges otherwise' (Escobar 2007), in order to effectively address the wellbeing of populations that are affected by extractive development. Taking their own priorities seriously, and working towards a reconceptualisation of wellbeing 'from the perspective of the multiplicity of place-based practices of culture, nature and economy' (Escobar 2001: 170) must, therefore, be a priority in development initiatives that affect their lives. Taking conceptions of wellbeing such as *kametsa asaiki* seriously is part of the wider task of identifying significant discourses of difference, their links to places, and the possibility of deploying them as alternatives to the potentially disastrous environmental consequences of the mainstream pursuit of wellbeing that has led to the Anthropocene. In a very clear way, my Ashaninka collaborators argue that their wellbeing is impossible without that of *aipatsite*, and that the wellbeing of *aipatsite* is not possible without that of humans. This perspective demonstrates an acute awareness that our futures are inextricably intertwined.

This has only been an example from the lives of some of my Ashaninka collaborators in the Peruvian Amazon, but it highlights the need for further ethnographic explorations of the link between wellbeing models and people's understandings of humanity and nature. But it also underlines that any concerted attempt at truly advancing global wellbeing through development initiatives is unfeasible without a 'cultural turn' (Clarke 2004) in the creation of a global wellbeing policy. That is, without policies that address and reflect the culturally-specific and place-based subtleties of human everyday lived experience, and how they inform local discourses and practices of wellbeing.

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