

# Godparents and Trading Partners: Social and Economic Relations in Peruvian Amazonia\*

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*Abstract.* Through an ethnographic account of contemporary relations between Ashéninka men and *mestizos* on the Ucayali River in Eastern Peru, this article examines how individuals use specific cultural idioms in their attempts to counteract the exploitative nature of economic relations. Specifically the article considers how the institutions of *ayompari* trading partners and *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) are used by Ashéninka and *mestizo* individuals respectively to understand and try to control their relationships within the local economic system of *habilitación*. The article concludes by noting the continued importance of these individual relationships in light of recent changes to Peru's forestry laws.

*Keywords:* Peru, Amazonia, godparenthood, *habilitación*, trade

## *Introduction*

While oil and gas extraction, tourism and cattle ranching all provide sources of income in various parts of the Peruvian rainforest, on the Ucayali River timber is currently at the centre of the local economy. This is the latest commodity in a line of extractive industries in the region, following the epoch of rubber gathering and a shorter period of rosewood (*Aniba roseadora*) collection. From a concentration on just the most valuable trees, Mahogany (*Swietenia* sp.) and Cedar (*Cedrela* sp.), loggers now extract a wide variety of timbers. All timber passes through Pucallpa which, since the building of a road connecting it to Lima in the 1940s, has become a sprawling

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city of over 220,000 people and the capital of its own department.<sup>1</sup> Unlike other lowland areas (particularly in Brazil), the rugged terrain and lack of local roads has meant that along the Ucayali the industry has been slow to mechanise. Instead, regional timberwork has relied on the use of manual labour to find, fell, shape and transport timber. The industry involves people from all sectors of Peruvian society: finance comes from its upper-echelons, saw-mill owners and transport companies act as intermediaries, while poor *mestizo* and indigenous people provide its labour.

This article examines the integration of Ashéninka<sup>2</sup> people into the timber industry in this region and the relationships that they form with *mestizo*<sup>3</sup> timbermen who come from Pucallpa to extract timber. In distinction to previous approaches to Asháninka groups' integration into outside economic systems, the article focuses on the day-to-day relations enacted between individuals in this system, and argues that it is only at this level that the interaction between the two groups and the implications of their economic integration can be fully understood. Through this focus the article addresses the ways in which peripheral groups are linked to wider national, and international social and economic systems. While all individuals on the Ucayali can be understood to be part of the global system of capitalist production, my aim here is to bring out the opportunistic and creative ways in which both *mestizo* and Ashéninka individuals draw on their diverse cultural ideas and experiences.

Specifically, I argue that while actors are aware of the different points of view that distinct individuals bring to these relationships, and of the political and economic disparity that usually exists between them, they attempt to control these relationships through the use of particular cultural institutions and idioms associated with morality and social order. In particular, the article considers how Ashéninka individuals use the practices associated with *ayompari* trading partners to try to make their *mestizo* counterparts feel a duty to give them fair recompense. In parallel, it argues that *mestizos* use the idiom of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) to foster ideas of loyalty and support among those Ashéninka whom they rely on for labour. Neither strategy completely masks the inequalities of power and wealth

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Ucayali was previously the southern part of the Department of Loreto, the capital of which is Iquitos, the old centre of the Peruvian rubber trade.

<sup>2</sup> The Ashéninka are part of a larger ethnic group now known as the Asháninka, and previously referred to as the Campa. I will use the term Asháninka when referring to previous ethnographic and historical work done on various groups and the group as a whole and the term Ashéninka when describing the specific people with whom I worked. All Asháninka groups are, in turn, part of the greater pre-Andean Arawakan linguistic group which includes the Yanesha, Matsiguenga, Nomatsiguenga and Piro (Yiné).

<sup>3</sup> This is a term used locally and self-referentially by people of mixed-heritage. It stands in contra-distinction to being 'indigenous'.

inherent in the local economic system of *habilitación* or the wider capitalist economy, but through their use individuals seek to emphasise the social connections that accompany economic transactions. In the contemporary situation, in which new forestry laws favour large timber companies over independent *mestizo* loggers, it is suggested here that the importance of long-term ties of trust and loyalty continue to be of vital importance.

### *Extractive Industries and the Asháninka*

During the first major extractive period in the region, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, rubber barons depended on *mestizo* and indigenous peons and slaves for their workforce. Global demand for rubber, the wealth that could be made from it and the need for labour to collect it from widely dispersed trees meant that labour was in great demand in this relatively unpopulated region.<sup>4</sup> Infamous men such as Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald, as well as the process of engaging workers as peons within the system of *habilitación*, played off internal and external tribal rivalries to get different groups to conduct slave-raids among enemies in return for guns and other goods.<sup>5</sup> Outsiders also built up large workforces through the lure of goods or the use of force. The terrible labour conditions of these workers, in addition to epidemics of European diseases and outright massacres, decimated the indigenous population and intensified outsiders' search for labour.<sup>6</sup> Even with the end of the rubber trade, the enslaving of indigenous groups continued and the use and trade of Asháninka slaves was reported in some regions until recent decades.<sup>7</sup> In general however, the worst excesses ended with the collapse of the rubber market, and the physical enslavement of Asháninka people gave way to making all individuals more explicitly part of the economic system of *habilitación*. Even then however, and as Santos-Granero and Barclay note, in an economy 'that lacked a mass of disciplined laborers dispossessed of means of production, all forms of recruitment, retention, and organization of laborers entailed a dose of

<sup>4</sup> Michael F. Brown and Eduardo Fernández, *War of Shadows: The Struggle for Utopia in the Peruvian Amazon* (Berkeley, 1991), p. 57–8, cf. Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay, *Tamed frontiers: economy, society, and civil rights in upper Amazonia* (Boulder, 2000) and Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing* (London, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Stefano Varese, *Salt of the Mountain* (Norman, 2002 [1968]), p. 126; see also Brown and Fernández, *War of Shadows*, p. 60. <sup>6</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, p. 127.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Gray, 'Demarcating Development: Titling Indigenous Territories in Peru', p. 169 in A. Parellada and S. Hvalkof (eds.), *Liberation through Land Rights in Ucayali, Peru* (Copenhagen, 1998), pp. 165–216 and Gerald Weiss, *Campesinos ribereños*, p. 52, in F. Santos-Granero and F. Barclay (eds.), *Guía Etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía, vol. V* (Panamá, 2005), pp. 1–74.

coercion'.<sup>8</sup> This system (also referred to as *enganche* in other parts of Latin America<sup>9</sup>) has long been used in the region<sup>10</sup> and, as indicated below, has significant resonance with the Ashéninka's own system of trading. The most important aspect of the *habilitación* system is that a *patrón*<sup>11</sup> advances goods on credit to his workers which the latter must then work to pay off. By establishing debt before any work has been carried out and by enforcing his own role as commercial middleman, the *patrón* gains a powerful claim over his workers.

Bodley suggests that when he worked with the Ashéninka in the 1960s, this economic system was still 'highly disruptive to traditional patterns' and that it was 'an inherently unstable adaptation' only entered into by Asháninka individuals because it was their only means of obtaining industrial goods.<sup>12</sup> This led him to argue that if they did not reject contact altogether then the adaptation of Asháninka groups to *habilitación* would only ever be an intermediate or transitional phase in their movement towards full integration in the market economy. The option of complete rejection of outsiders has indeed been used by many Asháninka groups throughout the historical record, from the time of their first contact with missionaries, through the period of colonisation, rubber trade and the worst excesses of *patrones*. This rejection has either taken the form of their dispersal into the more inaccessible regions of the forest or their physical rebellion against outsiders.<sup>13</sup> The reality, however, was that the attraction of outside goods and the unending interest in the region showed by outsiders meant that as the twentieth century progressed Asháninka groups found it increasingly difficult to remain outside the regional economic system. The continued existence of Asháninka groups and the fact that many of the groups still depend on the system of *habilitación* rather than a full market economy

<sup>8</sup> Santos-Granero and Barclay, *Tamed frontiers*, p. 34. Brown and Fernández (*War of Shadows*, p. 59) note that even during the rubber epoch 'Traders went to great lengths to maintain the illusion that Indian tappers worked voluntarily, though everyone knew there was no escape from the labyrinth of debt servitude'. However, by the second half of the twentieth century the Asháninka appear to have gained relative freedom in their economic transactions.

<sup>9</sup> This practice is referred to as '*enganche*' particularly in relation to agricultural labour on the Peruvian coast (cf. Michael J. Gonzales, 'Capitalist Agriculture and Labour Contracting in Northern Peru, 1880–1905', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1980), pp. 291–315. <sup>10</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, p. 125).

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this article, and for reasons that will become apparent, I will retain the Spanish term *patrón*, commonly used throughout the region, rather than using English translations such as 'boss' or 'employer'. I will also refer to such people as 'timbermen', a translation of the local Spanish word '*maderero*'.

<sup>12</sup> John H. Bodley, 'Campa Socio-economic adaptation', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, Bodley, 'Campa Socio-economic adaptation' and Brown and Fernández, *War of Shadows*.

suggest that their reactions have been more varied than Bodley previously predicted.

Bodley's account followed a particular anthropological view of capitalism as an inexorable hegemonic system that destroys or incorporates all other economic systems that it comes in contact with. In this view, indigenous societies have little choice but to be fully incorporated into the system or wiped out. Varese, in the first extensive ethnographic examination of the Asháninka, took a different position, arguing that the Asháninka understood the power of outsiders and reacted to them in their own terms.<sup>14</sup> Such a vision, that does not portray the Asháninka merely as victims of the wider society around them but instead shows their cultural vitality and inventiveness in the face of outside threats, is compelling. It parallels Bodley's view, however, in emphasising the continued separation of the two economic systems, though, similarly, it also fails to illustrate how the Asháninka's everyday interactions with outsiders actually occurs. Later anthropologists would make some effort to address this issue, as can be seen in the work of Chevalier who worked in the community of Puerto Inca on the Pachitea River, a tributary of the Ucayali, in the 1970s. Arguing against this dual economies approach, Chevalier argues that 'peasants' and 'capitalists' on the Pachitea should be seen as completely intertwined. He argues that if individuals are able to sell their products for cash and/or work as paid day labourers, then the logic of the capitalist system overrides and individuals, explicitly or implicitly, equate the value of all of their activities in relation to the income that could be earned by engaging in paid labour.<sup>15</sup> Having made this argument, and even using it as a base to 'rethink the notion of capitalism itself',<sup>16</sup> Chevalier chose not to extend this same analysis to the Asháninka. Instead he merely echoed Bodley's arguments that they must make a choice between complete integration or complete rejection.

Thirty years later I suggest that the Ashéninka on the Ucayali are in much the same position as Chevalier described the 'peasants' on the Pachitea. That is, they are integrated and knowledgeable participants in a wider capitalist economy. The nature of the capitalist system, however, does not mean that its ideology is all pervasive nor that it is necessarily connected to complete transformations of a society. More recent anthropological writings have turned away from the absolute categorisation of different 'modes of production' and the contrasts between 'capitalist' and

<sup>14</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques M. Chevalier, *Civilization and the Stolen Gift: Capital, Kin, and Cult in Eastern Peru* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 121–2, see also Charmaine McEachern and Peter Mayer, 'The Children of Bronze and the Children of Gold: The Apolitical Anthropology of the Peasant', *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, no. 19 (1986), pp. 70–7.

<sup>16</sup> Chevalier, *Civilization and the Stolen Gift*, p. 105.

‘pre-capitalist’ economies.<sup>17</sup> These distinctions become meaningless when we note that many facets of indigenous societies, for example the widespread use of plantains in Amazonia, have been affected by Europeans.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, capitalism itself is not a single economic system but rather has many variations. Thus, da Matta notes that the form of capitalism that emerged in Latin America was itself of a particular form and can not be directly equated with the capitalist economies of the Iberian peninsula or other Western states.<sup>19</sup> Subsequent work moved beyond seeing clear separations between different societies involved in economic interactions while retaining the idea that different people brought their own cultural understandings of the situation. Gow, in his discussion of the involvement of the Yiné, the Ashéninka’s neighbours, in the system of *habilitación* on the Lower Urubamba, argues that:

There is no real contradiction between the facts that the native people of the Bajo Urubamba are the main labour force for the commercial extraction of lumber and that they live in communities based on the sharing of labour and of food between kin and affines. The first fact does not make them dispossessed proletarians any more than the second fact makes them an ‘isolated tribal society’.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, rather than arguing that these are separate systems, Gow writes that ‘while subsistence production and consumption is very different from commercial relations on the Bajo Urubamba, together they form a single economic system which shows no signs of evolving into a purely commodity economy’.<sup>21</sup> This situation is similar to my own observations on the Ucayali, among the Ashéninka some twenty years later.

The people with whom I worked are inextricably part of the regional economy that is still based on the system of *habilitación*. This, in turn, is part of the now global and capitalist economic system. What is of interest is that the Ashéninka, even as they have become increasingly enmeshed in the capitalist system, both as producers and consumers, have retained and utilised their own understandings of the relationships in which they are engaged. In fact, as is argued here, both Ashéninka and *mestizo* individuals use culturally specific, non-economic notions to try and control the manner in which their relationships are played out. As I have indicated, the

<sup>17</sup> Terence Turner ‘Production, Exploitation and Social Consciousness in the “Peripheral Situation”’, *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, no. 19 (1986), pp. 57–63. See also Harold Wolpe, *The Articulation of Modes of Production: Essays from Economy and Society* (London, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, ‘The Price of Indulgence’, *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, no. 19 (1986), pp. 85–9.

<sup>19</sup> Roberto da Matta, ‘Review of Chevalier and Taussig’, *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice*, no. 19 (1986), pp. 57–63, pp. 61–2.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Gow, *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia* (Oxford, 1991), p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*, p. 90.

Ashéninka have undoubtedly been faced by considerable exploitation in the past. In the present context they still find themselves at the bottom of political and economic networks in Peru. My argument, however, is that it is misleading to portray them as nothing more than victims in this process. As Veber notes ‘Being a victim is as much a mental condition as it is an objective state of affairs. Few Ashéninka would agree to being presented as victims. On the contrary, they would rather be presented as masters of the universe – if I have understood them correctly’.<sup>22</sup> The Ashéninka’s conceptualisation of their relationships with timber *patrones*, and their attempts to gain some control of them, have had some interesting results on those with whom they interact. The following section provides a brief introduction to the cultural and social characteristics of the Ashéninka with whom I worked on the Ucayali River.

### *The Ashéninka on the Ucayali*

To the observer, the Ashéninka way of living appears remarkably atomised. Men and women generally form isolated and independent households centred on a single conjugal pair. Each household lives in its own cultivated land some distance through the forest from other households. The ideal is everyday self-sufficiency and families can spend long periods with little contact with others. Against this backdrop of autonomous nuclear families, however, there are two cultural institutions that facilitate social interaction. One is the practice of holding periodic gatherings in which one household invites others to come and join them in drinking freshly prepared manioc beer (*masato*). The other is the practice of forming enduring, formal relationships with trading partners (*ayompari*) from distant areas. These two practices work at the local and distant level respectively to draw individuals and families into wider networks while allowing them to maintain their autonomy and independence. The *ayompari* networks have, throughout history, provided families with access to scarce goods and potential marriage partners.<sup>23</sup>

My fieldwork was carried out in two Ashéninka settlements on the Ucayali River: Pijuayal and La Selva. Both are now officially recognised *Comunidades Nativas* (Native Communities)<sup>24</sup> with schools at their centres, however,

<sup>22</sup> Hanne Veber, *Gendered Spaces and Interethnic Politics: The Pajonal Ashéninka case* (Copenhagen, 2000), p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> F.-M. Renard-Casevitz, ‘Guerriers du sel, sauniers de la paix’, *L’Homme*, 126/8 (1993), pp. 25–43.

<sup>24</sup> The first Law of Native Communities was passed on June 24, 1974 under the military government of General Juan Velasco Alvarado. Article 161 of the 1979 Constitution, which further advanced this law, gives clear recognition to the *comunidades nativas* of the

in line with the description of Ashéninka households signalled above, individual families differed in how much they felt part of a defined ‘community’. Thus, although most households in both settlements were some ten to fifteen minutes walk apart, some were situated over an hour away from their nearest neighbours. This geographic separation was particularly prevalent in Pijuayal, while La Selva, in contrast, was more geographically and socially tight-knit. All families in both areas depended on their own agricultural plots, *chacras*, for their subsistence needs as well as from hunting and fishing in the surrounding forest. While some cash crops such as rice and maize were grown and chickens and pigs raised for sale the most important source of income for all households was that generated from timber. A few men tried to work timber themselves, felling it with axes and then rolling the logs to the riverside with close family or through collective labour. The majority, however, entered into relationships with outsiders, usually *mestizo* men from Pucallpa, who either ‘bought’ specific trees off individual men or paid individuals for their labour in helping to remove the logs.<sup>25</sup> In fact, all of these forms of timber work were essentially indistinguishable. Men who rolled the logs to the riverside had little choice but to sell their timber to visiting timbermen since they lacked the powerful outboard motors needed to safely guide the logs to the main river and then to Pucallpa. Equally, men who were ostensibly selling trees to timbermen were expected to help the buyer extract the timber, a form of manual labour for which they would not be paid. This meant that all men ended up working in the same manner for outsiders and being paid roughly equal amounts.

The work is hard and dangerous and most men spend at least two full months engaged in this activity every year, with many spending the majority of their time engaged in it in one form or another. Most of the *mestizo patrones* are relatively poor themselves, working directly for another man based on the main river or dependent on timber merchants in Pucallpa for cash advances and then the sale of their timber. As with earlier extractive

jungle as ‘judicially autonomous entities in their organization, communal work and use of the land, both economically and administratively speaking, within the confines established by law’, Roque Roldán & Ana María Tamayo, *Legislación y Derechos Indígenas en el Perú* (CAAAP, 1999), pp. 101–2, my translation, see also Fernando Santos-Granero & Frederica Barclay, *Selva Central: History, Economy, and Land Use in Peruvian Amazonia* (Washington, 1998), Ch. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ownership of individual trees was often disputed. By law the community owns all land and its natural resources communally. However, given the independence of Ashéninka families, in Pijuayal and La Selva ownership is usually linked to use. With timber, men make marks on the trunks to denote ownership, however, as trees are usually in the deep forest where no one is actually working, one tree may have several marks on it. Thus, when timbermen come to extract the trees there are inevitable disagreements. These are usually resolved by the splitting of the payment.

industries, outsiders are keen to gain as much as possible from their interactions with indigenous groups. It can be argued that the continued existence of subsistence agricultural activities means that timbermen are able to pay their local workers less, as they do not rely on their wages for their everyday sustenance.<sup>26</sup> However, this ability to survive without wage labour and, moreover, the relative ease with which Ashéninka families can relocate themselves means that the power does not all lie with the timbermen. As Santos-Granero and Barclay note, the relative paucity of labour in this region has long been one of the most important limiting factors for industries in the region.<sup>27</sup> This complex social reality means that simple analyses of exploitative relationships are inadequate. Instead, in what follows, I will examine how both *mestizos* and Ashéninka have their own conceptions of relationships which mask the underlying economic basis of these, while also shaping them for both moral and practical purposes. The next section commences with an examination of the Ashéninka social institution of *ayompari* trading partners, with which, I contend, the Ashéninka equate their relationships with timbermen.

### Ayompari and Habilitación

Bodley described the indigenous *ayompari* trading system thus:

In what may be called the *ayompari* system, an individual agrees to trade on a regular basis with another individual ... a man will give his *ayompari* a set of arrows thereby establishing a debt relationship, and ask him to give a steel knife in return. The second man will have an *ayompari* in another region who is perhaps in contact with White *patrones* or traders and from whom he can trade for a knife. Eventually the first man will get the knife he requested and the debt will be paid.<sup>28</sup>

The Franciscan missionary Biedma noted that this form of trading system in the seventeenth century, centred on the movement of salt from *El Cerro de Sal* (The Mountain of Salt) in the Chanchamayo valley.<sup>29</sup> The basic articles for exchange seem to have been *cushmas* (woven cotton robes), animals and their pelts, and other jungle and garden produce. However the most important goods were those that were not available locally, most notably bronze axes from the Andes and ceramics produced by other ethnic groups.<sup>30</sup> With the arrival of Europeans, iron tools were quickly incorporated into the system and those with access to missionary forges formed new foci

<sup>26</sup> Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 86, see also Gow, *Of Mixed Blood*, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> Santos-Granero and Barclay, *Tamed frontiers*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> Bodley, 'Campa Socio-economic adaptation', p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Manuel Biedma, *La Conquista Franciscana del Alto Ucayali* (Lima, 1989 [1682]).

<sup>30</sup> Allen Johnson, *Families of the Forest* (California, 2003), pp. 28–9.

within the system.<sup>31</sup> The *ayompari* system can be seen to have maintained a degree of social cohesion among the geographically disparate Asháninka and allowed young men access to distant, unrelated brides.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately space does not allow me to discuss this aspect of the system further. Instead I wish to focus on its obvious similarities to the system of *habilitación*.

The clearest parallel between the two systems is that they are both based, at least in theory, on the idea of delayed and balanced reciprocity and that, for the Asháninka, they offer access to otherwise unavailable outside goods. At the time of Bodley's fieldwork the Ashéninka appear to have kept these institutions separate. In his typology the *ayompari* system was only retained by those who refused contact with outsiders, while others gave it up completely as they integrated fully into the market system.<sup>33</sup> As suggested above, in my field sites this 'all or nothing' choice was not the case. Whereas Bodley<sup>34</sup> and Varese<sup>35</sup> have both argued that in the past non-Ashéninka were specifically excluded from the *ayompari* 'chain of credits and debits', my experience was that timbermen have now become the preferred form of *ayompari*. Moreover, by placing timbermen in the position of *ayompari*, the Ashéninka have tried to counteract the power of the *patrones* while still maintaining access to desired goods.

At its heart the *ayompari* relation is centred on delayed reciprocity and is associated with ideas of trust and loyalty.<sup>36</sup> It is a relationship that emphasizes the debts that exist between individuals and uses them as a means of strengthening and prolonging the bond between them.<sup>37</sup> In everyday situations the Ashéninka are noted for their generous hospitality,<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Enrique Rojas Zolezzi, *Los Ashaninka: un pueblo tras el bosque* (Lima, 1994), p. 52. See also Fernando Santos-Granero, Templos y Herrerías: Utopía y Recreación Cultural en la Amazonía Peruana, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Etudes Andines*, XVII/2 (1988), pp. 1–22.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Renard-Casevit, 'Guerriers du sel, sauniers de la paix' and Manfred Schäfer, *Ayompari, Amigos und die Peirsche*, unpubl. PhD diss., University of München, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Bodley, 'Campa Socio-economic adaptation', p. 54. <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Manfred Schäfer, Ayompari 'El que me da las Cosas', in P. Jorna, L. Malaver and M. Oostra (eds.), *Etnohistoria del Amazonas* (Ecuador, 1991), p. 60 and Fernando Santos-Granero, 'Of fear and friendship: Amazonian sociality beyond kinship and affinity', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13/1 (2007), pp. 1–18, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> I contend that rather than being preoccupied with drawing individuals into relations of consanguinity or 'actual affinity', or viewing outsiders as enemies, the Ashéninka retain the term *ayompari* to refer to a distinct, separate and enduring type of relationship (cf. Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay, *Guía Etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía*, vol. V (Panamá, 2005), p. xxv, Santos-Granero, 'Of fear and friendship').

<sup>38</sup> Søren Hvalkof and Hanne Veber, 'Ashéninka del Gran Pajonal', p. 80 in F. Santos-Granero and F. Barclay (eds.), *Guía Etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía*, vol. V (Panamá, 2005), pp. 79–279. In particular they quote César Calvo, *Las Tres Mitades de Ino Moxo y otros brujos de la Amazonía* (Proceso Editores, 1981, p. 325), when he writes that the Asháninka 'Son sin embargo hospitalarios en extremo, pero exclusivamente con quienes los visitan en paz'.

furthermore, as Hvalkof and Veber have noted,<sup>39</sup> this hospitality is not based on ideas of reciprocity but rather on the idea that everyday items and, most importantly, food and drink, must be unilaterally given to all visitors.<sup>40</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, this obligation to give is paralleled by a cultural emphasis on not relying on others, such that Ashéninka individuals can be seen to strive to avoid situations in which such giving or receiving is necessary, and indeed this seems, in part, to underlie their desire to live apart.<sup>41</sup> The *ayompari* relationship for the Ashéninka thus stands in distinct contrast to everyday relations and is, as we shall see, based on particular ideas about the bond and obligations that the delayed and reciprocal exchange of goods places on the two individuals involved. It also stands in contrast to the immediate reciprocity of everyday economic transactions as they are carried out in local shops and markets.

In drawing outsiders into this form of relationship, I believe that Ashéninka individuals attempt to make them feel the same social and moral obligations that they feel themselves.<sup>42</sup> The first evidence of this emerged during my fieldwork from the way Ashéninka talked about timbermen. While

<sup>39</sup> Hvalkof and Veber, 'Ashéninka del Gran Pajonal', p. 217.

<sup>40</sup> cf. Weiss, *Campa ribereños*, p. 33 and Santos-Granero and Barclay, *Guía Etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía*, p. xxix. In the past this hospitality appears to have only been extended to other Ashéninka or even just close relatives, however, I believe that this, as has occurred with the *ayompari* relation, has been expanded to include all visitors, even those who are non-Ashéninka. This generosity stands in contrast to the giving that has been observed in other societies, particularly hunter-gatherer societies such as the Hadza of whom Woodburn writes 'We often think of sharing as deriving from generosity. The emphasis in these societies is quite different. Shares are asked for, even demanded. We have what can appropriately be called demand sharing. People believe that they are entitled to their share and are not slow to make their claims. The whole emphasis is on donor obligation and recipient entitlement', James Woodburn, "Sharing is not a form of exchange": an analysis of property-sharing in immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies', p. 49, in C. M. Hann (ed.), *Property Relations: Renewing the anthropological tradition* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 48–63.

<sup>41</sup> Killick, E. n.d. Ashéninka Amity: Beyond Kinship in Peruvian Amazonia, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>42</sup> It might be argued that an Ashéninka individual's initial demand for a good from a potential partner is a form of 'demand sharing', see Nicolas Peterson, 'Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity among Foragers', *American Anthropologist*, 95(4), (1993), pp. 860–74 and Woodburn 'Sharing is not a form of exchange'. Woodburn has described how the Hadza often obtain things they want from their more powerful farming neighbours through various forms of demanding and begging. He writes that 'The Hadza, recognizing that they are stigmatized and realizing that nothing that they do is likely to gain them must respect, are not much interested in maintaining face and respectability', James Woodburn, 'Africa hunter-gatherer social organization: is it best understood as a product of encapsulation?', p. 51, in Tim Ingold, David Riches and James Woodburn (eds.), *Hunters and Gatherers 1: History, evolution and social change* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 31–64. This is, I contend, precisely the opposite of what Ashéninka individuals are trying to achieve in asking for goods from outsiders. While they have interest in the goods themselves, the key idea is that an enduring relationship with the outsider is formed and that this is a relationship between equals.

the Spanish term, *patrón*, is generally considered to be equitable to terms such as ‘boss’ or ‘employer’, the Ashéninka instead used it relatively interchangeably with the word *amigo* (friend). This seemed a slightly strange equation given the undoubtedly exploitative nature that these relationships could entail. But the link was made clearer when Jorge, the man in whose house I lived, told me the story of ‘mosquito’. The story itself was not of particular importance but what caught my attention were the words that Jorge used to describe the men who had come to the mosquitoes’ village with goods. At first he called them ‘Ashéninka *patrones*’ saying that they brought goods, pots, machetes and *cushmas* to trade. Later he used the term *ayompari* and then interchanged this with the word *amigo*. This suggested that the correlation was between *ayompari* and *patrones*, via the equation of *ayomparis* with the Spanish term *amigo*, and emphasised that such people were viewed in primarily social terms.<sup>43</sup>

Having gained this insight I slowly realised that it was a common perception and that people even used the terms interchangeably about me. Further aspects of these relationships attested to the link between *patrones* and *ayomparis* in the minds of my informants. People always associated *patrones* with individual men. They would ask another man when ‘his’ *patrón* was arriving and complain about their own lack of a *patrón*, or compare their own unfavourably with another man’s. In a context in which many of the men would be working for the same person and Ashéninka men would often seem to move quickly from working with one *patrón* to working for another, such talk seemed slightly odd. Yet, in relation to Bodley’s description of the *ayompari* system in which one man forms a particular bond with one other, the view of these relationships as those between individuals makes sense. The specific ideas that underlie this institution and how the Ashéninka try to impose their own sense of morality on its conduct were made clear to me when I was drawn inadvertently into such a relationship early on in my fieldwork.

The relationship started a couple of weeks after my arrival when I accidentally destroyed Jorge’s watch, which I had been trying to mend. In order to avert a catastrophe so early on in our relationship I immediately offered to lend him my own until I had an opportunity to take his watch to Pucallpa to be mended properly. Over the next few weeks Jorge increasingly pestered me about how he wanted to buy the watch from me and kept demanding to know how much it had cost. I was reluctant to agree to this,

<sup>43</sup> All of these terms have undoubtedly gone through various semantic shifts through history. This is attested to in the first instance by the fact that the term *ayompari* itself appears to be derived from the Spanish word *compadre*, Schäfer, ‘Ayompari “El que me da las Cosas”’, p. 50. Such changes would have gone hand in hand with changes in the nature of, and ideas connected with, the relationships concerned.

not least because I liked the watch but also out of some deeper and, I now recognise, ‘Western’ idea that ‘friends’ should not be monetarily indebted to each other.<sup>44</sup> He kept coming back to the subject however, so in the end I told him an approximation of the watch’s real price, 150 *soles* (approximately 6 weeks wages), hoping that this figure would be enough to deter him. In fact it had no such effect. When I next returned from a brief trip to Pucallpa and presented him with his repaired watch he refused it saying that we had ‘agreed’ that he would buy mine from me. At this point we had a strange conversation in which we seemed mostly to be talking at odds with each other. First I tried to tell him that the watch had been a gift to me and that I was too attached to it to part with it. He rapidly dismissed this argument along with other increasingly feeble excuses I presented, such that finally I accepted that I had no choice but to acquiesce. At this point I suddenly felt terrible that he would be 150 *soles* in debt to me and I tried to bargain the price down or even to get him to accept it as a present. Now, to my surprise, he became even more animated than before and refused to accept any change in the settlement. Instead he started to argue that he could ‘easily’ pay such a ‘small’ amount or even more if need be. Here I felt that we entered a realm of surrealism as my attempts to bring the price down were met with statements of bravado on his part and then accusations of my treachery and lack of friendship for him. As I became more and more bewildered by his arguments and increasingly embarrassed that this man upon whose hospitality my entire enterprise depended should feel in debt to me, I decided to leave the matter alone.

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

<sup>44</sup> See both Olivia Harris, ‘The earth and the state: the sources and meanings of money in Northern Potosí, Bolivia’, p. 247, in J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds.), *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 232–68 and Steven Rubenstein, ‘Fieldwork and the Erotic Economy on the Colonial Frontier’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29/4 (2004), pp. 1041–71, for detailed discussions of similar situations.

notes that he had obviously just received, leaving himself with only around 50 soles. Again I tried to lower the price further but again this was futile and he immediately walked off.<sup>45</sup>

In a manner typical of so many ethnographic encounters this event concerned me but helped to indicate the importance and the intricacies of exchange and trade and the relationships that they entailed for the people I was working with. In fact the more I considered the pattern of the events the more I realised that it was exactly parallel with older ethnographic descriptions of Ashéninka trading within the *ayompari* system. For example, in Varese's description of the Ashéninka *ayompari* relationship, he talks of the importance of discussions between the two partners over their debts to each other. He argues that 'because basically this is the renewal of an oath or contract, what is sought is revitalisation of the consecrated word ... In these [arguments] ... there are insults and accusations ... the word is charged with dangerous powers that must be countered with other words, shouted more loudly in the face of the opponent and reinforced with gestures'.<sup>46</sup> This is what had been happening during my seemingly surreal conversation with Jorge. He felt that I was questioning not only his ability to pay, and thus our essential equality, but also the very nature of our relationship and that he was defending himself and restating the bond between us. Whereas this display scared me, to him it was a normal part of such a process. Varese goes on to show that at the end of the exchange 'each of the traders will go on his way. There is no ill will, only the certainty of having wisely used the force of the spoken word'.<sup>47</sup> For all of my apprehension during the verbal exchange, it certainly never led to any animosity in my relationship with Jorge.

Beyond this specific example, however, the experience led me into a deeper analysis of the importance of, and the ideas associated with, reciprocity and debt, and relations with outsiders in Ashéninka society. Varese argued that the *ayompari* relation was 'an eminently religious feature'.<sup>48</sup> He seems to have had in mind Mauss's discussion of the *hau* ('spirit') of the gift among the Maori,<sup>49</sup> which while compelling, as Lévi-Strauss notes, seems

<sup>45</sup> While Jorge's repayment of his debt to me may appear to have carried the danger of ending our relationship, by this time our relationship had developed much further and we were bound together by a year's worth of shared objects and experiences that meant that there was no danger, in either of our eyes, of our relationship dissolving. Rather, Jorge's payment for that initial, and large, gift of the watch I believe was intended to emphasize our equality. The only other time Jorge made a specific request for a large gift from me was on the very final day of my fieldwork in 2003 when he asked me to buy a fishing-net and associated items and told me he would pay me back in fish when I returned in the future. I believe that this was his own way of ensuring our relationship would continue and that I would return in the future.

<sup>46</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London, 1950), p. 12.

to bear a danger of over-mystification.<sup>50</sup> Yet Varese's discussion points to a definite sense that, for the Ashéninka, this trade carries a moral obligation to the other and is more than 'just' trade. Sahlins,<sup>51</sup> in his discussion of Mauss's work, offers a reworking of the idea of the 'spirit of the gift', when he argues that the power of gifts should not be understood in terms of the objects themselves but rather in terms of the social mores that govern their exchange and usage.<sup>52</sup> It is, therefore, the immorality of withholding a gift or acting inappropriately with it that carries the danger of bringing retribution. I believe that this understanding of the power of 'gifts', or more widely of any exchanged objects, is helpful in analysing the situation of the Ashéninka. Ashéninka individuals, I contend, try to make the goods that they exchange with their *patrones* serve a similar function to the one that they had for their *ayompari*, that is to draw them into a long term and mutually beneficial relationship. Of significant importance to Jorge in my act of giving him my watch was the fact that I was an outsider. Coming so soon after my first arrival and before I had made any real connections with anyone, this opportunity to form a relation of indebtedness offered Jorge his first chance to establish links between us. By being in debt to me he felt that we now had something that would tie us together, giving him a hold over me to force my return in search of repayment and giving me a claim over him. If we had both been Ashéninka and felt bound by the same social and moral code, that single exchange would have been enough to bind us in a particular form of enduring relation. Unfortunately for the Ashéninka the social and moral prescriptions that they feel come with the exchange of goods are not always shared by visiting outsiders. However, the possible power of this strategy was shown to me by the fact that *mestizos* who interacted with Ashéninka often did seem to have relationships that were based on more than just economic ties.

### *Contemporary Ayompari*

Melvin is one of only a few *patrones* who have worked continuously in and around Pijuayal for many years. He began logging in the area in the mid-1990s. Starting with only basic tools, he steadily used his earnings to buy boats, motors and chainsaws until he began to employ other *mestizos* from

<sup>50</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss', in M. Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1966), p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago, 1972), p. 153–7.

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted here that the term 'gift' in this context should be distinguished from the 'pure gift', that is a good which is given 'with no desire for any kind of return', see Jonathan Parry, 'The Gift, The Indian Gift and The "Indian Gift"', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 21 (1985), pp. 453–73. When Jorge took my watch he was very sure that he would, eventually, give me something in return.

Pucallpa to act as his foremen, enabling him to work a number of different sites simultaneously. He comes to Pijuayal every year for up to six months, felling, preparing and then rolling timber logs to the river before floating them downstream to Pucallpa during the rainy season. He would often describe to me how the first time he came alone to Pijuayal he had had only a canoe and one chainsaw and depended upon the Ashéninka in the area for everything else. Through all of this he has been well aware of the importance of the Ashéninka's acceptance of him and over the years he has built up close relationships with some of them; links he is still keen to maintain.

When Melvin first started coming to Pijuayal, the Ashéninka man on whom he relied most was Nelson. The latter let Melvin stay in his house and together they went out to find suitable trees to cut. Then, along with Nelson's sons and other Ashéninka men, they felled the trees and rolled the logs to the river, always depending on Nelson's gardens for food and his wife to prepare their meals and *masato* (manioc beer). Nelson and his wife, Margarita, now live an hour and a half's walk or canoe ride up-stream from the centre Pijuayal. Of their nine children only their penultimate son, 16-year-old Percy, still lives with them, along with their six-year-old granddaughter, Nancy. Over the years, their other children and grandchildren, as is common amongst the Ashéninka, have all moved away. One daughter now lives with her husband within the vicinity of Pijuayal but the rest have moved to more distant settlements, including their youngest son, who is attending school. Nelson and Margarita are still self-sufficient, cutting and planting their own gardens and depending on fish caught in the river. They seldom visit other Ashéninka in the area nor hold their own beer parties, only occasionally attending those held by others. As for many Ashéninka couples they seem to value their independence and autonomy and show little desire for more company. Given their age and lack of connections to other people they are no longer of much use for Melvin's activities. This reality, however, does not seem to have diminished Melvin's relationship with them.

Nelson himself told me numerous times of the various things that Melvin had done for him over the years; helping him take his children to a health post when they were sick, providing clothes, books and pens for their schooling and always willing to put him and his family up on the occasions when they had gone to Pucallpa. He also told me how Melvin had been instrumental in helping Pijuayal get a government paid teacher and then bought and brought the materials needed for building a school. Melvin also said that he felt responsible for helping Nelson and particularly his children. When he gave things to Nelson he always couched them in terms of gifts for his children and grandchildren and many of the gifts were specifically linked to the children's education. He gave Nelson these things

even though the ageing Ashéninka man no longer actually worked for him. Nelson, meanwhile, now depended on Melvin to bring him those things that he had no other means of acquiring. Sometimes he would specifically ask Melvin to bring new things from Pucallpa, such as a machete or an axe but often, usually as Melvin was heading downstream with his timber, Nelson would ask for some of the things that Melvin would no longer need, such as his cooking pots, mosquito nets or old clothes. Occasionally they would argue over particular things or Melvin would barter his old pots for a chicken or plantains. More often, they would give each other things as 'gifts', either noting that this was 'for nothing' or specifically linking it to something that had been given in the past or would be returned in the future. In general it was the latter form of transaction that seemed to be preferred by both men. As I have argued above, the emphasis on delayed-reciprocity is linked to Nelson's understanding of this relationship in terms of the Ashéninka institution of *ayompari* trading partners. Melvin's emphasis on his 'gifts' as helping Nelson's children suggests that Melvin equates this relationship with that of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood).

My observations on the Ucayali contrast with the situations described by earlier observers of Ashéninka groups and the accounts of Bodley and Varese in particular. Unlike previous generations, or groups in other areas, Ashéninka of Ucayali have no desire to avoid outsiders completely but rather choose to deal with them based on their own moral and social ideas. This emphasises the fact that even as the economic relations between these people can be understood as working within a single system, each group brings their own cultural understandings to their relationships. Yet, if this all makes sense from the indigenous perspective the next issue is how *mestizos* understand these relationships. As can be seen in Melvin's continued concern for Nelson and his family, he also does not appear to have a solely 'economic' view of this relationship, and yet he also does not use the Ashéninka idiom of '*ayompari*'. It is to this issue that my analysis now turns.

### Mestizos and Compadrazgo

The manner in which Nelson and Melvin conduct their relationship shows how relations between Ashéninka and outsiders have developed since the early histories of exploitation.<sup>53</sup> The fact that outsiders can no longer exploit indigenous groups to previous extents reflects certain facets of the system of *habilitación* as well as the current economic, social and political reality of the Ucayali. Even as relative power in the system of *habilitación* continues

<sup>53</sup> Varese, *Salt of the Mountain*, Bodley, 'Campa Socio-economic adaptation' and Brown and Fernández, *War of Shadows*.

to lie with those who control the money, those on the lower echelons are not powerless. At the heart of the system is the idea that individuals are actually working for themselves, extracting a natural resource to which they have access and over which they therefore have some claim as a saleable commodity. The *patrón*, by equipping them, is thus ‘facilitating’ their work. In return he expects that the extracted product will be ‘sold’ back to him. Instead of leading inevitably to a form of labour bondage, this can actually work in the labourer’s favour in a situation where other *patrones* are competing for the same resources and workforce. In such a situation people can play *patrones* off against each other.

Thus in areas, such as La Selva which was closer to the main river than Pijuayal, people were able to bargain for better deals from a position of relative strength. Moreover, once the initial goods were handed over, workers gain even more power over their *patrones*. As with Melvin, many of the *patrones* were themselves relatively poor or in debt to others in Pucallpa, and they have often put forward a sizeable proportion of their own money in financing an Ashéninka man. This means that they are anxious for this money to be returned and can become vulnerable to their workers’ demands, either in light of the direct threat of the timber being sold to another *patrón* or when faced with demands linked to the timber’s extraction. People often demand more food, axes and machetes once work had already started, arguing that they would not be able to continue without them. Finally, workers’ ultimate hold over *patrones* was that they could just ‘disappear’ for a few weeks to go ‘hunting’ or ‘visiting’ and hold up the process indefinitely as in cases where some *patrones* were forced to leave in dismay. If a *patrón* was ever forced to leave then the Ashéninka had, of course, gained some goods for nothing. Hence, if Ashéninka men are keen to maintain lasting relationships with *mestizos* as their best means of procuring manufactured items, their *patrones* must also nurture their loyalty and dependability. It is this fact which I believe forms the foundation of *mestizos*’ willingness to be drawn into relationships that are more than just economic in nature.

As I noted above, Melvin is very aware of how important his Ashéninka workers were in helping him to get started and continue to be in his work. He also knows that as much as they want him to pay them fairly and to return regularly he also needs them to work willingly and dependably for him each season and not to sell their timber to others. This gives him a pragmatic reason to be drawn into social and moral relationships with his workers. I contend that while Ashéninka individuals use the idiom of *ayompari*, Melvin uses the idea of *compadrazgo* to act as a moral framework for the relationship. I will now examine why Melvin chooses to use this idiom and its implications, beginning with a fuller description of the institution and its associated beliefs.

*Compadrazgo* is a common feature of Catholic countries, particularly in the Mediterranean and Latin America regions. It is based on the Catholic doctrine of infant baptism and at its core consists of three roles – parent, child and godparent, and three relationships – parent-child, child-godparent and parent-godparent.<sup>54</sup> Beyond this core structure, however, the literature attests to the diversity of forms and modifications which different groups have brought to *compadrazgo*.<sup>55</sup> The number of people involved and the importance of each relationship can vary greatly, while the associated religious connections, secular duties and behavioural prohibitions can range from being of central importance to non-existent. On the Ucayali, the institution of *compadrazgo* has been reduced to its simplest elements. Even when it is entered into formally between *mestizos*, any official religious ceremony of baptism is usually dispensed with. Instead, assistance in holding a celebration of the birth or the first birthday party of a child may cement such a relationship, or it may just be entered into by mutual agreement. Further, rather than being between the godparent and child the most important relationship tends to be between the parent and godparent. Between *mestizo* and Ashéninka individuals the relationship has even less formal basis. As I have shown, Ashéninka individuals refer to the people with whom they work as *patrones*, *amigos* or *ayompari*; they seldom use the term *compadre*, unless they are directly echoing a *mestizo* during a conversation. When pressed, *Mestizos* themselves would admit that an Ashéninka child was not their ‘real’ godchild; however, I maintain that – as with the Ashéninka’s one-sided understanding of their relationship with *mestizos* as *ayompari* – *mestizos* equate their Ashéninka workers’ position with that of *compadres*. In order to understand how this conceptualisation shapes the relationship, it is necessary to understand the ideological structure of this institution.

While no general theories of *compadrazgo* have ever been successfully formulated, a few common themes are generally accepted. Mintz and Wolf note that relations of *compadrazgo* tend to be based on ‘vertical’ social differences<sup>56</sup> and it is generally accepted that this is linked to the Catholic symbolic system and ideology that underpins it.<sup>57</sup> Gudeman notes that the

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Gudeman, ‘The Compadrazgo as a Reflection of the Natural and Spiritual Person’, *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (1972), pp. 45–71, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> S. W. Mintz and E. R. Wolf, ‘An analysis of Ritual Co-Parenthood (Compadrazgo)’, in P. Bohannon and J. Middleton (eds.), *Marriage, Family and Residence* (Garden City, 1968), pp. 341–68.

<sup>56</sup> Mintz and Wolf, ‘An analysis of Ritual Co-Parenthood (Compadrazgo)’ see also John M. Ingham, ‘The Asymmetrical Implications of Godparenthood in Tlayacapan, Morelos’, *Man* 5/2 (1970), pp. 281–9.

<sup>57</sup> cf. Chevalier, *Civilization and the Stolen Gift*, p. 310 and R. L. Stirrat, ‘The Compadrazgo and Sri Lanka’, *Man*, vol. 10/4 (1975), pp. 589–606, p. 589.

key idea to Catholic baptism is the washing away of ‘original sin’ and thus the rebirth of a person to Christ.<sup>58</sup> He argues that it is the godparent who stands in the ‘spiritual’ position, representing the child’s spiritual birth and his connection to the holy family and, ultimately, to God. The godparent thus stands in the superior position to both the child and his parents. Gudeman argues that the widespread characteristic of godparents coming from higher social classes and of *compadrazgo* being unreciprocated is explained by this superior, ‘spiritual’ position of the godparent. He notes that while the church has never prohibited reciprocal roles nor promoted the idea that godparents should come from a distinct social position to the child and its parents ‘yet the ecclesiastical idea that the spiritual is higher than the natural seems to have had a profound impact upon folk practices: reciprocal selection is uncommon and when parent and godparent occupy unequal social statuses, the latter normally holds the higher position’.<sup>59</sup>

The parallels between relations of *compadrazgo* and the *ayompari* relationship, as a relationship formed between two individuals, are clear.<sup>60</sup> Yet the important distinction is that *compadrazgo* centres on hierarchical difference rather than the inherent equality of *ayompari*. The Ashéninka do not form ties of *compadrazgo* between each other and *mestizos* would never ask Ashéninka to be godparents to their own children. While the Ashéninka do not give much thought to the relationship, *mestizos* do have particular ideas about what it means and how it should be conducted. They seek out important people in their society to become godparents to their own children. The godfather of one of Melvin’s sons in Pucallpa was the head of the local *barrio* (town district) while that of the other was a timber merchant. In the same manner that Melvin seemed to think it right that such powerful and wealthy men should help him and his children, so Melvin considered that he had some kind of ‘duty’ to help the Ashéninka. He made no reference to ideas of spirituality and religious purity, but the same structural hierarchy is apparent.

Chevalier’s statistical data from the Pachitea echoes my own findings on the Ucayali – that *mestizo* parents prefer to solicit *padrinos* of higher status – and he concludes that *compadrazgo* effectively allows people to choose

<sup>58</sup> Gudeman, ‘The Compadrazgo as a Reflection of the Natural and Spiritual Person’, p. 47.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen Gudeman, ‘Spiritual Relationships and Selecting a Godparent’, *Man*, 10/2 (1975), pp. 221–37, p. 235.

<sup>60</sup> In *mestizo* society links of *compadrazgo* are also formed between women as *comadres*. The wives of local *mestizos* will call the wives of their husband’s workers her *comadres*. The *ayompari* relationship, however, is generally formed only between men in Ashéninka society and in my experience Ashéninka women do not reciprocate *mestiza* women’s desire to form relationships with them. cf. Hanne Veber, ‘External Inducement and Non-Westernization in the Uses of the Ashéninka *Cushma*’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 1 (1996), pp. 155–82, p. 167.

and form connections with useful and powerful allies.<sup>61</sup> He also follows Gudeman's analysis equating the *padrino* with the holier/higher/purer 'spiritual' side and argues that '(t)here is more *respeto* for a godparent than for a natural parent, not because of what is being given to the *padrino* (a dependent child), but rather because of what he gives to the godchild, namely the gift of spiritual grace and the possibility of eternal salvation for his soul'.<sup>62</sup> In positioning themselves as *padrinos* to Ashéninka children, the inherent hierarchical separation also parallels the wider self-perception of *mestizos* as being at the 'the vanguard of Peruvian civilisation', helping to civilise its 'wild' members.<sup>63</sup> Such ideas are linked to the *mestizo* view that they have a 'right', if not a 'duty', to come into the Ashéninka's land to 'civilise' them.<sup>64</sup> Hvalkof notes the Cartesian cosmology of the colonists in their separation of mind and body, subject and object, nature and culture. The former is the realm of the Ashéninka and the latter their own. Within this ideology their preference for the essentially hierarchical *compadrazgo* relation is clear, even if in this more secular environment notions of spiritual purity have been replaced by ideas of relative progress.

Another case from my field sites emphasises the hierarchical aspect of the *compadre* relationship. It involves Don Fernando, the grandson of a 'gringo cauchero' (white rubber boss). This man, Fernando's grandfather, came to the mouth of the Amaquaria and set up a large cattle ranch which he ran with the help of his son, Fernando's father. Unfortunately, both men died when Fernando was only a baby, and during his childhood the fortunes of the family subsequently foundered. Fernando, however, still has reasonably extensive agricultural land left from the cattle ranch while he also attempts to work as a timberman. His mother is in fact of Ashéninka descent, so Fernando therefore has kinship connections to a number of Ashéninka in the area. Yet rather than attempting to use these connections, Fernando instead puts great emphasis on his identity as a *mestizo* and, as with Melvin, portrays his relationships with Ashéninka in terms of *compadrazgo*. In this case I would posit that the hierarchical aspects of the *compadrazgo* relationship are of even more importance and that he uses it to emphasise his relative separation from and superiority to Ashéninka men. In turn, his own children, all four properly baptised in the Catholic Church, have *padrinos* from Pucallpa.

As I outlined at the beginning of this section, the wish of *mestizos* to portray their relationships with Ashéninka workers in social and moral terms is linked to their pragmatic need that their workers remain loyal to them.

<sup>61</sup> Chevalier, *Civilization and the Stolen Gift*, p. 325.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>63</sup> Søren Hvalkof, 'La naturaleza del desarrollo perspectivas de los nativos y de los colonos en el Gran Pajonal', *Amazonía Peruana*, XI, 21 (1992), pp. 145–75, p. 155.

<sup>64</sup> Hvalkof, 'La naturaleza del desarrollo', p. 155.

Thus, the relationships that I am describing should not be overly romanticised. As Osborn, working with Kwaiker Indians in Colombia, has noted, the political nature of such relationships can become particularly apparent when an indigenous person tries to withdraw.<sup>65</sup> In such situations, Osborn notes, the relationship may emerge as a pure form of ‘enforced clientship’, an observation which leads her to conclude that ‘compadrazgo ties between *mestizos* and Kwaiker constitute, in fact, little more than a patron-client relationship’.<sup>66</sup> Van Den Berghe and van Den Berghe similarly argue that ‘vertical compadrazgo typically falls in the patron-client or paternalistic model of social relations’ and should be seen as ‘a mechanism whereby lower status persons enter, or, more often, reinforce, a client relationship’<sup>67</sup>. As the case of Don Fernando shows, the hierarchical element of the relationship can be used to reinforce and emphasise differences of status between people who are of relatively equal economic status. Moreover, the economics of the relationship are undoubtedly exploitative in nature. While the underlying economic and political disparity between groups still remains, however, my interest has been precisely in how, particularly in the Ucayali case, these idioms are used to counter the worst excesses of deceit and exploitation. Chevalier draws a similar conclusion, arguing that while ‘the *compadrinazgo* mechanism may not lend itself to a revolutionary battle against the capital/labour division *tout court*, yet it does offer – in spite of all its limitations – a means of concrete resistance to the most immediate threats of exploitation and poverty’.<sup>68</sup>

### *Conclusions: Reflections on Contemporary Ucayali*

The recent literature on Amazonian indigenous groups attests to the variation in their experiences of outsiders, nation states and the different strategies that groups have employed. In many cases indigenous groups have set up political organisations and demanded increased recognition and political and financial aid from national governments.<sup>69</sup> On the Ucayali

<sup>65</sup> Ann Osborn, ‘Compadrazgo and Patronage: A Colombian Case’, *Man*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1968), pp. 593–608.

<sup>66</sup> Osborn, ‘Compadrazgo and Patronage: A Colombian Case’, p. 604–5.

<sup>67</sup> G. van Den Berghe and P. L. van Den Berghe, ‘Compadrazgo and Class in Southeastern Mexico’, *American Anthropologist*, 68/5 (1966), pp. 1236–44, pp. 1238–9.

<sup>68</sup> Chevalier, *Civilization and the Stolen Gift*, p. 326.

<sup>69</sup> For example see Rubenstein on the Shuar, Steven Rubenstein, ‘Colonialism, the Shuar Federation, and the Ecuadorian State’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 19 (2001), pp. 263–93; Steven Rubenstein, *Alejandro Tsakimp: A Shuar healer in the margins of history* (Nebraska, 2002), and; Steven Rubenstein, ‘Steps to a Political Ecology of Amazonia’, *Típití*, 2/2 (2004), pp. 131–76; and Turner 1995 on the Kayapó, Terence Turner, ‘An Indigenous People’s Struggle for Socially Equitable and Ecologically

however, Ashéninka groups have been slow to mobilise politically.<sup>70</sup> In my area of fieldwork this seems to be linked to people's continued preference for living apart and their emphasis on autonomy and self-sufficiency. This lack of group mobilisation has meant, as I described above, that the Ashéninka's experience of Peruvian society tends to occur on an individual basis with each Ashéninka entering into their own discrete relationships with incoming *mestizos*. This means that any demand for a recognition of equality must take place on this everyday level rather than at a higher level of political representation. Moreover, *mestizos* also – in part because of their own lack of economic and political power – rely on these individual relationships in order to have an effective workforce.

The power of capitalism to draw individuals and societies into its system of production and, specifically, to gain hegemony over their labour power has been noted since Marx.<sup>71</sup> My argument here is not that the people on the Ucayali are able ultimately to avoid this system. Rather, in describing both the Ashéninka and the *mestizo* understandings of their relationships my aim has been to show how even as these two groups can be understood as working within a single mode of production, producing timber within a now global economic system, they have each retained, and continue to use, specific idioms to make sense of and try to control these relationships. The continued importance of the local understandings of these relationships and of their adaptability can be seen in the contemporary situation on the Ucayali.

On my trips to the Ucayali in 2006 and 2007, the increased amount of mechanised extraction of timber has been notable. Where previously the industry has been characterised by independent timbermen such as Melvin floating relatively small rafts of twelve foot long, manually-extracted logs to Pucallpa, now there are a number of large barges positioned up and down the banks of the river covered with large stacks of full length trees. In the past the industry relied primarily on flooding tributaries of the Ucayali to

Sustainable Production: The Kayapó Revolt Against Extractivism', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 1/1 (1995), pp. 98–121.

<sup>70</sup> This is in contrast to other regions of Peru which have experienced more pressure for territorial claims from incoming populations, where Asháninka groups have formed political movements and appealed directly to the Peruvian government and public, see Søren Hvalkof, 'The Ashaninka Disaster and Struggle – The Forgotten War in the Peruvian Amazon', *Indigenous Affairs* 2: (1994), pp. 20–32; Søren Hvalkof, 'From Slavery to Democracy: The Indigenous Process of Upper Ucayali and Gran Pajonal', in A. Parellada and S. Hvalkof (eds.), *Liberation through Land Rights in Ucayali, Peru* (Copenhagen, 1998), pp. 83–162; Hvalkof and Veber, 'Ashéninka del Gran Pajonal', and; Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay, *Selva Central: History, Economy, and Land Use in Peruvian Amazonia* (Washington, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* (London, 1990 [1867]). See Rubenstein, 'Steps to a Political Ecology of Amazonia', for a recent consideration of these ideas in the Amazonian context.

extract the logs from the hinterland; now large tractors are dragging it directly to the main river down paths that are kilometres long. This transformation is a clear consequence of the Peruvian government's change in policy towards the granting of logging licences. Whereas previously small-scale workers were relatively free to extract trees where they wished and the onus of obtaining licences fell on buyers of the timber, the new law seeks to control the extraction process itself. The government does this through the public auction of large concessions which bidders must agree to manage carefully with planned yearly extraction and reforestation.<sup>72</sup> The nature of the process and the size of the concessions mean that the system now favours large, organised timber companies. This new law is supposed to promote the sustainable development and use of Peru's natural resources for the benefit of both the rural and wider Peruvian society.<sup>73</sup> It also appears to be aimed at both simplifying the system and making it easier to regulate. From the local perspective, however, it has concentrated even more power in the hands of a small group of powerful and wealthy individuals, while putting even more pressure on both indigenous groups and independent timbermen.

Officially recognised *Comunidades Nativas* are still meant to have control over the natural resources on their land. In some areas, however, timber concessions have been imposed on indigenous lands, meaning that companies are able to do as they wish.<sup>74</sup> Where they continue to hold the rights to the resources on their land *Comunidades* now often find themselves negotiating with large and powerful operations which, while they can offer more extensive material benefits to settlements, are also able to extract the majority of a *Comunidad*'s timber resources within a few seasons.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, as they rely on tractors, trucks and barges to remove the timber they no longer need a local workforce. This means that while companies pay *Comunidades*, for the timber they extract by the foot, individuals are no

<sup>72</sup> See article 10 of Law No. 27308, [http://www.inrena.gob.pe/iffs/iffs\\_conces\\_cp\\_infocomplem\\_normas.htm](http://www.inrena.gob.pe/iffs/iffs_conces_cp_infocomplem_normas.htm) see also ITTO, 'Lag-time of the law', *Tropical Forest Update*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2003), p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> INRENA, 'Laying down the law in Peru', in *Tropical Forest Update*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2003), pp. 10–12.

<sup>74</sup> Tom Griffiths, 'Destructive and illegal logging continues to ravage forests and communities in the Peruvian Amazon', *World Rainforest Movement's Electronic Bulletin*, no. 98 (2005).

<sup>75</sup> Ashéninka individuals and communities can be seen to try to bring these companies, their foremen or owners, into similar style relationships that they have with individual, independent timbermen. This is now usually done through *mestizos* own idiom of *compadrazgo*, by asking the company or its bosses to act as *padrinos* for births, graduations and fiestas. Given either the lack of control of foremen of company funds, or the fact that company bosses seldom visit the communities themselves beyond the initial agreement stage, these strategies generally fail to foster the types of mutual relationships that can be obtained with individual *patrones*.

longer able to gain individually from this process. Independent timbermen, meanwhile, are being squeezed out of the industry. Unable to tender for large timber concessions and increasingly unable to circumvent the system by other means, many of them have little choice but to give up their work altogether and return to the city. As this alternative disappears *Comunidades* are left with no choice but to try to negotiate with the large companies. In the few cases that I observed, the *Comunidades* try to do this according to their notions of *ayompari* traders, that is by dealing with company representatives as if they are the individuals who will control the relationship. Unfortunately, while such representatives are responsive to the sentiments and desires of their indigenous counterparts they are also bound by the requirements of their superiors who seldom visit the *comunidades* themselves and have very particular ideas about how the extraction will take place. As it was in the past, the *ayompari* system is likely to be transformed, or perhaps even discarded altogether as Ashéninka individuals and communities adapt to the present situation. For the time being the Ashéninka individuals I observed still focused on the value of their existing *ayompari* connections.

The clearest remaining option in this new system is for indigenous and *mestizo* individuals to set up partnerships in which the indigenous person's right to extract natural resources within the land of their *Comunidad* is coupled with the *mestizos* continued access to capital, goods and the necessary equipment. For indigenous people who, in this area at least, lack the knowledge of the bureaucracy and the money to fund either the official process or the actual extraction of the timber, their continued partnerships with individual timbermen are vital. Similarly, as I have shown, independent timbermen are unable to comply with the law on their own terms. In this situation the co-dependence of both sides of this relationship becomes even more apparent. Thrust together in relationships of mutual necessity the importance of trust and loyalty become ever more crucial and their relative shared weakness against large companies stresses the similarity between them as poor members of Peruvian society.

This contemporary situation emphasises the fact that the Ashéninka and their *mestizo patrones* are part of the global economy and that they are affected by wider economic, social and political issues. Such a revelation is not new. My aim in this article however, has been to examine how individuals consider themselves within this wider economy and, specifically, how they position themselves in relation to the people with whom they enter into economic transactions. While both *mestizos* and Ashéninka individuals are aware of their relatively weak positions within the wider economy and of that they are beholden to the dictates of distant politicians, their everyday reality is that timber remains their most important source of income. Moreover, while the nature of national laws and the economic market affect the prices they get

for their timber and labour, the most important relationship for them remains the bond between *patron* and worker. The pragmatics of the situation determine that *mestizo* timberman and local Ashéninka are co-dependent, each needing the other in order to make money from timber. Both are keen to form lasting and profitable relationships with the other, based on trust and loyalty. As I have argued, they do this through particular idioms, *ayompari* and *compadrazgo*, that emphasise moral and social connections between individuals and are similar enough to allow both parties to conduct a mutually beneficial relationship while differing in relation to culturally distinct ideas of equality and difference. Through these idioms both sides have been able to accommodate the views of the other and to continue to generate long-term and mutually profitable relationships.