

Chapter 8

Tribe and State in a Frontier Mosaic

The Asháninka of Eastern Peru

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FROM the seventeenth century onward, Spanish chroniclers in Peru had frequent cause to lament the ferocity of an Amazonian people whom they called “the Campa tribe,” now more accurately called Asháninka. In the course of three centuries, Asháninka warriors martyred more than a score of Franciscan missionaries. Stories of violent encounters with Asháninkas and accounts of homicidal raiding within Asháninka society itself became the stock-in-trade of Amazonian adventurers beginning in the nineteenth century. Leonard Clark, an explorer whose book *The Rivers Ran East* was read by thousands of adolescent boys in the 1950s and 1960s, devotes page after page to lurid descriptions of Asháninka savagery, the following passage being fairly typical:

We caught the movement of hundreds of vultures circling in the sky; others were perched in the taller trees along the banks . . .

All this was an indication to our Indians of death, of stinking bodies lying in the underbrush, the grim tally of the internecine wars of the Campas. (Clark 1953: 151)

Clark's narrative is easy to dismiss as feverish hyperbole, yet his tale echoes stories of Asháninka belligerence that circulated widely in Peru at the time of the author's expedition.

On the face of it, the Asháninka would appear to illustrate the processes that Marvin Harris (1984) sees as endemic among tribal populations of Amazonia: high levels of warfare ultimately caused by competition for areas rich in game animals. In this chapter, however, our goal is not to make a contribution to what has come to be called the Great Protein Debate, which seeks to explain tribal violence in ecological terms.¹ Our observations instead register the links between warfare and contact with larger polities, most notably colonial and postcolonial states. In this respect our work parallels that of Robert Murphy (1960) among the Brazilian Mundurucú, Jane Bennett Ross's study of the Ecuadorian Achuará (1984), and Brian Ferguson's reanalysis of the Yanomami case (this volume), all of which show how the influence of distant powers and their local representatives shapes the form and frequency of conflict in apparently pristine Amazonian settings.

At the heart of any assessment of Asháninka history must be a careful look at the nature of the state with which the Indians were drawn into contact. In the literature on colonialism there is a tendency to reify the state, as if it were a well-integrated social unit following a consistent, rational policy of domination.² While a degree of coherence might be found in the imperial policies of some modern nations, most native peoples have found their contacts with colonial powers to be characterized by contradiction. Missionaries importune them with one set of demands, administrators with another, traders and labor recruiters with yet a third. Official policies can change overnight according to the political currents that prevail in distant capitals. Moreover, the interest of the state in frontier regions such as the Upper Amazon is typically spasmodic, growing and ebbing in response to large-scale economic processes in the metropole.

By reviewing in a schematic way the history of a native people on the frontier of the Latin American state, our principal aim is to expose how the frontier's changing nature and its own inconsistencies affected Asháninka attempts to maintain a degree of political and cultural autonomy. The rich historical evidence shows that Asháninkas, as shrewd social actors, responded to the stresses and opportunities of contact in various and

sometimes conflicting ways: accommodation, resistance, flight, increased intratribal warfare and banditry, and millenarian revitalization. Indeed, during four centuries of contact history, the internal contradictions of the state created multiple political spaces that native populations could occupy and exploit, depending on their assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of each. This undoubtedly contributed to internal differentiation within Asháninka society that may in some instances have inhibited collective action in defense of tribal sovereignty (Fernández 1988: 31). But the sociopolitical mosaic that emerged in eastern Peru also made the Indians harder to organize and classify, and therefore to control. The Asháninkas' skill at finding and exploiting these differentiating spaces helps to account for the persistence of Indian social identity in a region with the longest history of contact in the Peruvian Amazon.

CULTURAL BASELINE: THE PRECONTACT PERIOD

Contemporary Asháninka communities are found in the sizable region defined by the Perené, Pachitea, Ene, Tambo, Apurímac, and Ucayali rivers (fig. 8.1). Estimates of the contemporary Asháninka population range widely, from a low figure of 28,000 to a high of 45,000 (Hvalkof 1989: 145). "Traditional" Asháninka communities have been defined as "dispersed neighborhoods" led by male leaders who correspond in certain respects to Melanesian big-men (Bodley 1971: 79).

Although information about prehistoric Asháninka society is scarce, we now know that the eastern forests of Peru were more cosmopolitan than once thought. The various regional Asháninka subgroups comprised a population of many thousands of Indians who lived in close proximity to other native groups, including such related Arawakan peoples as the Machiguenga, Nomatsiguenga, Yanesha (Amuesha), and Piro.³ It is likely that Asháninkas were also in contact with Panoan populations on the Ucayali River, including the Conibo, Cashibo, and Shipibo. The Machiguenga and Piro engaged in raiding and trading relations with Andean peoples during the Inca empire, links that may date to the Tiahuanaco state early in the first millennium A.D. (Camino 1977; Lathrap 1973). By extension, one can infer that Asháninkas sustained similar contacts with highland polities, most notably the Inca, though no Andean state was able to impose its political institutions on the peoples of Peru's tropical forest.

The prehistoric development of long-distance trading relations between Andean polities and Amazonian populations—the key feature of pre-Conquest Peru's "internal frontier" (cf. Kopytoff 1987b)—may have changed native settlement patterns and institutions, perhaps fostering

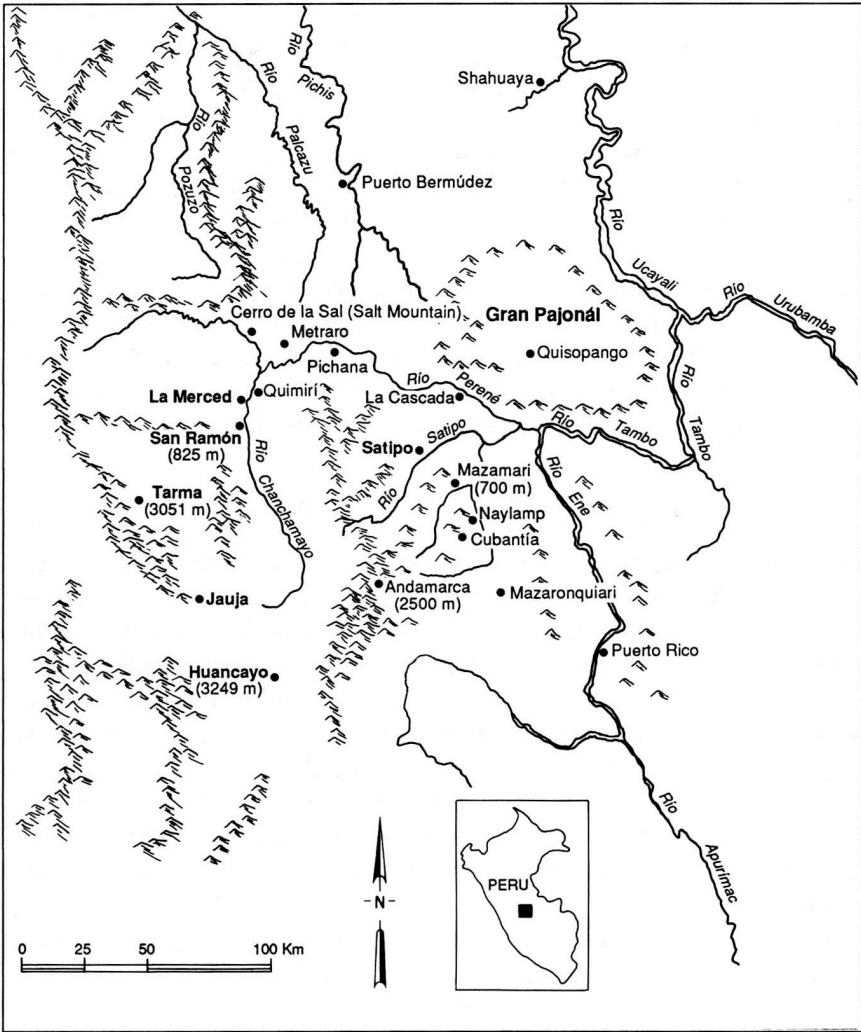


Figure 8.1. Central jungle region of Peru, including sites mentioned in the text. Altitudes (in meters) are noted in parentheses. (Drawing by Katrina Lasko)

conflict between Asháninkas and their neighbors, though it is just as likely to have produced a network of peaceful trade. It is, however, reasonable to assume that internal feuding was a part of Asháninka life long before the arrival of outsiders.

Prehistoric Asháninkas shared with their modern descendants a mixed subsistence regime of horticulture, hunting, and fishing. Leadership roles,

most significantly, that of *curaca* or *cacique* (local leader, “chief”), fell to senior men with acknowledged competence in hunting, diplomacy, and warfare. So far as we know, there is no evidence to suggest that Asháninka constituted a “tribe”—that is, a circumscribed, corporate, ethnolinguistic group—in any meaningful sense prior to European contact.

EUROPEAN CONTACT

Even before Spain established permanent settlements in the tropical forests of eastern Peru, the Spanish conquest of Peru’s coastal and Andean regions may have changed the Asháninka world in significant ways. There is tantalizing but still controversial evidence that highland Indians escaping Spanish oppression made their way to Asháninka territory in the seventeenth century. One refugee community, Pucutuguaru, was rumored to have a population of six thousand or more (Lehnertz 1974:45–48). These settlers may have affected Asháninka settlement patterns and health status, especially if the refugees carried European diseases.

The first recorded European contact with Asháninkas was made by the Jesuit missionaries Juan Font and Nicolás Mastrillo during an expedition that began late in 1595. Padre Font was impressed by the Asháninkas’ apparent interest in the Christian faith, but he fretted about what he saw as a lack of centralized leadership, complaining that “one cannot make much progress with them, principally for being so few and so scattered, without authority or leader” (quoted in Varese 1973: 125).

The Spaniards’ inability to identify the proper scale of indigenous political units led them to oscillate wildly between over- and under-specificity in naming jungle peoples. Asháninkas, for instance, were referred to generically as *chunchos*, a broad term for jungle Indians, or by the inevitable labels “infidel” and “savage.” Yet during the same period and in the same general region, travelers alluded to contacts with a score of specifically named “tribes”—for example, Andes, Amages, Pilcozones, Canparites, Anapatis, Pangoas, and Satipos—most of whom were probably local groups of Asháninkas. These “tribal” designations were often based on place-names or the name of a local *cacique* known to Spanish authorities (Fernández 1987:337).

A sustained missionary effort among the Asháninka began with the ministry of Fray Jerónimo Jiménez, a Franciscan who in 1635 founded the mission at Quimirí, near the site of the present-day town of La Merced. Quimirí had strategic importance because of its proximity to Cerro de la Sal, or Salt Mountain. Located just north of the junction of the Chanchamayo and Perené rivers, Salt Mountain is veined with mineral

salt that was exploited by several different Amazonian peoples, including the Asháninka, Yanasha, Conibo, and Piro, as well as by Indians from nearby Andean communities. Trade in salt tied into a regional network that included commerce in cotton cloth, metal tools (from the Andes), vanilla pods, feathers, and animal pelts. The missionaries concluded that the site would offer them access to a captive audience drawn from all the heathen tribes of the region.

Fray Jiménez and a fellow priest became the first martyrs to the cause of Asháninka conversion when they were murdered in 1637 on the Río Perené—evidence, according to the Franciscan historian Bernardino Izaguirre, of what the Indians’ “barbarous breasts could conceive and their inhuman arms could undertake” (Izaguirre 1922 (book 2):163). The issue leading to the martyrdom was one that became a persistent source of Franciscan-Asháninka friction: the Church’s opposition to the polygamous marriages of Asháninka headmen.

Both the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who had also established missions in the region, fell victim to the inconsistency of Spanish colonial policy in the mid-seventeenth century. Although the viceroy supported the friars’ efforts to gather Indians into Christian settlements, he also approved military expeditions that negated years of diligent missionary work. One such expedition was that of Pedro Bohórquez Girón in the late 1640s. An Andalusian soldier of fortune, Bohórquez obtained Dominican support for an expedition to Salt Mountain in search of gold. During the months that he and his band of freebooters controlled Quimirí, they rustled cattle from nearby highland communities, murdered a native headman, abused the wives of Asháninka converts, and abducted Indian children for use as servants. Their behavior became so intolerable that all of the Asháninka converts fled the mission (Santos 1986).

The Franciscans endeavored to reestablish a stable mission system in 1671 but were thwarted in 1674 by a bloody revolt in Pichana. They tried again in 1709 with missions along the Perené River and, about 15 years later, in a remote grassland called the Gran Pajónal. Another Asháninka uprising in 1737 proved that the mission system was still only precariously rooted.

Why did the Asháninka resist the missions so resolutely? After all, the actual area controlled by the stations of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was small—so small, in fact, that the historian Jay Lehnertz (1974:63) observes a process of “progressive encystment” among the missions of the 1720s and 1730s. Lehnertz reports that the largest number of residents for the nine missions of the *conversión* of Tarma was recorded in 1718, when there were 1,287 Indians. (This figure apparently includes significant numbers of Quechua Indians brought

from the highlands to provide military security and expertise in essential crafts.) Figures for later years are considerably lower, reaching as few as 605 in 1730 (Lehnertz 1974:390). Mission records reveal a high turnover rate within this population. Many more Indians may have had direct contact with stations, at least for brief periods, than the census would imply, but few were thoroughly integrated into the mission world.⁴

The Asháninka response to the mission system oscillated between accommodation and avoidance. Trade goods were the principal pull factor; push factors included epidemics, corporal punishment, the uncongenial discipline of mission life, assertions of control over Indian children, and relentless hectoring by monks. The Franciscans also aroused Asháninka ire by using members of enemy tribes as guides during their expeditions in Asháninka country. The warlike Conibos, whose seventeenth-century settlements were apparently concentrated along the upper reaches of the Río Ucayali, supported Franciscans on their explorations of the Perené, Tambo, and Ene rivers. Padre Huerta, for instance, notes in his description of a 1686 expedition: “On the second day of the *entrada* to the Ene, we came ashore to shelter ourselves from the sun; following some human footprints for a short stretch, the [Conibos] came upon some Campa houses and, after surrounding them, they sacked the settlement, kidnapping women and children and taking whatever else was there” (quoted in Varese 1973:146).

As Huerta’s account shows, the Asháninka had come to be known as “Campa” by the late seventeenth century, mostly owing to the influence of the Franciscan explorer and missionary Manuel de Biedma (Varese 1973:135). Nevertheless, local “tribal” names were used with considerable frequency well into the nineteenth century.

Mission documents emphasize that local headmen often brokered mass conversions and the establishment of mission stations. Lehnertz (1974:99) found that friars attempting to convert Indians in the Gran Pajonál had “distributed iron tools to the area’s *cananbiri* [headmen], and presumably that distribution was part of an ongoing exchange which was carried on between the two zones.” The “inconstancy” of the Asháninka headmen, about which the Franciscans frequently complained, may have been caused by the missions’ failure to supply trade goods in quantities sufficient to sustain the headmen’s ambition.

THE REVOLT OF 1742–1752

In late May of 1742, Asháninka converts suddenly deserted the Perené missions. When asked by the friars why they were leaving, the Indians replied that they were traveling to the Gran Pajonál to see “Lord Inca,”

who had come to a place called Quisopango. Under the protection of the local *cacique*, this Inca was holding court and promising to oversee the creation of a new world order.

The mysterious visitor came to be known as Juan Santos Atahualpa.⁵ A wanderer from the Andes, Juan Santos proclaimed a spiritual message that was nativistic in emphasis. He sought the removal of Spaniards from Peru, Indian control of Christian worship, and reestablishment of a native empire over which he was to reign as monarch. As we have seen, a vigorous tradition of Asháninka resistance had taken root long before Juan Santos's appearance. What remains enigmatic about his movement is why this new gospel—which in its allusions to the Inca empire was as alien to Asháninka political practice as the teachings of the Franciscans—appealed to Asháninkas at all. Here was a political vision that was hierarchical in the extreme, that drew on memories of an empire with which Asháninkas were largely unfamiliar. Nor does it seem likely that Asháninkas felt much of a commitment to Christian worship, even if it were in Indian hands. One early description of Juan Santos's encampment hints at the different goals of messiah and followers. Two blacks who visited the rebels testified that the "Amajes, Andes, Conibos, Sepibos, and Simirin-chis" who rendered obedience to Juan Santos shouted that "they wanted no priests, that they did not want to be Christians." But we are told that "the Inca opposed all this and spoke to them in reprimands; the Indians, both Christians and infidels, do much dancing and they are quite content with their new king" (Castro Arenas 1973: 11).

Who was Juan Santos? We know that he had benefited from a formal education, probably from the Jesuit order in Cuzco. Most scholars believe he was attached to a Jesuit priest as a servant or novice. He may well have traveled to Europe, and his revolutionary ideas seem to have been inspired by his visit to Catholic missions in Africa, where black priests regularly said mass.

The incompatibility of Andean and Amazonian world views leads at least one historian, Jay Lehnertz (1972, 1974), to question the Asháninka role in the rebellion. The real support for Juan Santos, he asserts, came from escaped black slaves and highland Indians who had experienced the full brunt of Spanish oppression. Nevertheless, all of the documents related to the revolt mention the involvement of *chunchos*—jungle Indians—in battles against Spanish forces. Nor is it likely that highland Indians could have survived in such a difficult landscape without the active support of Asháninkas. Although there is no reason to think that all or even most Asháninkas were active in the rebellion, there is little question that Asháninka populations played an important part in the struggle.

When hostilities eventually broke out, Asháninka bowmen engaged Spanish forces in areas as far apart as Quimirí, the Apurímac Valley, and the highland village of Andamarca, suggesting broad Indian support for the rebellion. Repeated Spanish attempts to exploit divisions within Asháninka society in such a way as to produce Juan Santos's betrayal harvested only failure. Colonial documents also attest to the movement's ability to cross ethnic lines: Conibo, Piro, and Yanessa communities joined in the uprising.

Spanish attempts to crush the rebellion and capture Juan Santos were demoralizing failures. The last major engagement was in 1752, when rebel forces moved from the jungle into the highlands to capture and occupy the town of Andamarca for three days. This caused widespread panic in Peru, but the rebels proved unable to consolidate their victory. The Spanish settled on a policy of containment rather than reconquest; from the jungle came only silence. By the 1760s the Spanish realized that the new Lord Inca had disappeared as inexplicably as he had arrived.

Predictably, there are contesting versions of the death of Juan Santos Atahualpa. In 1766, a Franciscan heard from some Conibos that Juan Santos died in Metraro, after which his body disappeared in a cloud of smoke (Castro Arenas 1973:148). A late nineteenth-century expedition reported that Juan Santos died during a drunken feast when an Asháninka, doubting the messiah's godlike status, hurled a stone at Juan Santos's head to see if he would feel pain (Izaguirre 1922 (book 3): 182–83).

The very success of the rebellion prevents us from understanding the internal political changes it may have produced within Asháninka society. So far as we know, no Spanish documents exist that would shed light on Asháninka institutions between the early 1740s and the mid-nineteenth century. The most conservative assessment is that the large-scale political links forged in the crucible of revolt did not survive peacetime. The ideological impact of the revolt should not be underestimated, however. Franciscans who cautiously reentered the region in the nineteenth century found the Indians sullen and unwilling to cooperate. More important may have been the spread of a belief in Inkarrí, the Inca king, a myth of native renewal that played a role in later Andean revolts and, in a modified form, captured the imagination of Asháninkas.⁶

Asháninka stories explain that Inca controlled the creation of all important goods: cloth, metal tools, firearms, machinery, and metal cooking pots. Through the sinful behavior of Inca's son, the *viracochas* (Europeans in general, though in this context specifically the Spaniards) emerged from a jungle lake and began a campaign of extermination against the Asháninka people. The Spanish captured Inca and decapitated him. Some variants of the myth conclude by explaining that the *viracochas* now own

Inca's head or entire body, which lives on, providing them with all the valuable goods Asháninkas lack. Asháninkas will be rich once again when Inca returns to them.

Although the myth of Inca has indigenous roots, its spread among Asháninkas was probably aided by the teachings of the Franciscans, many of whom held millenarian views themselves (Phelan 1970). In the words of Félix Alvarez Sáenz (1989: 16), the apocalyptic and millenarian Christianity of the Franciscans furnished the Indians with a "discourse more than a faith"—a discourse that alloyed itself with Andean and Amazonian beliefs in the cauldron of the colonial experience to support faith in an imminent apocalyptic transformation that would result in a reversal of the Asháninkas' fortunes and the end of the oppressive rule of outsiders.

NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY CONTACT

Documentary sources on the Asháninka reappear after the construction of a government garrison at San Ramón in 1847. The American explorers William Herndon and Lardner Gibbon (1854:85), sent by the U.S. Department of the Navy to survey the Amazon, observed that the Indians were "determined to dispute the passage of the rivers and any attempt at further conquest." Nineteenth-century travelers navigating the Río Perené's treacherous currents often found themselves the target of Asháninka arrows en route. Nevertheless, this stalwart resistance failed to stem the large-scale forces undermining the Indians' isolation and autonomy. The formal apparatus of state control was weak in the Amazon, often nonexistent. At the same time, the Peruvian government encouraged entrepreneurial rapine by foreign and domestic economic interests as well as by individual settlers. Even the humblest farmer could afford a repeating rifle that gave him a generous advantage in firepower over Indians still equipped with bows and arrows.

In 1891, the Peruvian government ceded an immense tract of land along the Perené to the Peruvian Corporation, Ltd., an enterprise based in London (Barclay 1989). By 1913, 500 Asháninkas worked the plantation's coffee groves. In 1938 the figure was closer to 2,000, if one counts temporary Indian laborers hired for the harvest season (Bodley 1971: 10; Manrique 1982: 39). Although the Perené Colony, as the British concession came to be known, was the best organized effort to settle the region, piecemeal appropriation of Indian lands quickened elsewhere as well: in the Chanchamayo Valley (where by 1907 there reportedly were 14,000 colonists), along the Apurímac, in the valley of the Pichis, and later near Satipo (Bodley 1971: 10–15; Elick 1969; Shoemaker 1981).

The advance of the agricultural frontier was overshadowed by the explosive growth of rubber tapping that began in the 1870s. Although the rubber boom of Peru's central jungle was less violent than its counterpart on the Río Putumayo to the northeast (Taussig 1987), it was just as dependent on forms of debt servitude. Coveted trade goods—firearms, ammunition, coarse cotton cloth, metal pots, decorative trifles—were advanced to the Indians against future latex production. Merchants fixed the value of the goods and of the latex, and Indians never produced enough to cancel the debt. Flight was futile: traders watched the rivers for tappers attempting escape. Punishment for attempted desertion was harsh, sometimes unspeakably brutal.

The period also saw the growth of commerce in human beings. On his expedition to the Gran Pajónal in 1896, the Franciscan priest Gabriel Sala found that even whites of modest means commonly bought and sold Asháninka children:

From the highest authority to the lowest farm hand or merchant, all want to have a *chuncho* boy or girl in service; and if they don't have one, they ask somebody to go among the *chunchos* or to stage a raid; and once they've obtained their *chuncho*, they thank [the slaver] very much and then pay him. (Sala 1897:66)

Another traveler in the region reported that “a boy of ten or twelve years is normally worth five hundred *soles*, and if it's a Campa quite a bit more . . . The children come to forget their savage customs, learn Spanish, and prove useful to their patrons—that is, if they live” (quoted in Fernández 1986b:57).

Stefano Varese (1973:246) explains that the rubber barons encouraged the traffic in captives by playing off one native group against another. “The method was simple,” he writes. “Winchesters were delivered to the Conibo, to be paid off with Campa slaves, after which Winchesters were delivered to the Campa to be paid off with Conibo or Amuesha [Yanesha] slaves.” Nevertheless, raids took place within tribes as well as between them, implying a political complexity lost in Varese's formulation.

Asháninka *caciques* or *curacas*, acting as intermediaries between merchants and the general Indian population, often carried out forced “recruitment” of rubber workers and the outright capture of slaves. Padre Sala provides a portrait of a *curaca* named Venancio: “There suddenly appeared four canoes with twenty-five men (*chunchos*) well armed with rifles and led by the *curaca* Venancio. He entered in a routine way, with a black parasol, a hat, and a scarf at his neck.” On two other occasions Sala



Figure 8.2. Portrait of Asháninkas published in F. A. Stahl's 1932 memoir, *In the Amazon Jungles*. Stahl's original caption identifies the subjects as "a band of murderers . . . organized for the purpose of stealing children, after killing the parents." (Reprinted with kind permission of Grace and Orlando Robins)

meets Asháninka parties sent by Venancio to conscript Indians from the Gran Pajonál for rubber tapping on the Río Manú. "The merchant who knows how to play with his *curacas* grows like the foam on a whirlpool of dirty water," the priest observes (Sala 1897:96, 99).

The preeminent rubber baron of the Asháninkas' part of the jungle was Carlos Fermín Fitzcarrald.⁷ The memoirs of Fitzcarrald's associate, Zacarías Valdez Lozano, trace the alliances between Indians and Fitzcarrald's representatives that came to define Asháninka political realities during the height of the rubber frenzy. On the left bank of the Urubamba, for example, Fitzcarrald had in his employ four Piro Indian *curacas*: a supreme chief named Curaca Agustín, and three lesser chiefs named Francisco, Jacinto, and Ronquino, who answered to Agustín. The Asháninkas of the Ucayali and Tambo were balkanized into warring groups under the control of traders of Peruvian, Spanish, and Chinese origin, all of whom eventually came to work for Fitzcarrald (Valdez Lozano 1944: 13–14).

The full extent of the violence associated with slave raiding was still evident when John H. Bodley conducted his field research in the 1960s. He reports that more than 30 percent of adults interviewed at the Sha-

huaya mission stated that they or one of their parents or grandparents had been captured by raiders (Bodley 1971:106). Since raiders killed adult men whenever possible, taking as captives only women and children, this rate of enslavement is an index of high mortality among male defenders (fig. 8.2).

Even Franciscan priests were drawn into the local traffic in children. Monsignor Irazola, who established the twentieth-century mission in Satipo, “found it prudent,” as he put it, to acquire kidnapped children from Asháninka slave raiders who came to the mission. He saw these children “as a gift of the Providence that perhaps in this way seeks to instill and propagate the faith among these infidels” (quoted in Fernández 1988:32).

Commerce in Asháninka children continued in some areas until the early 1960s. In 1984, a man named Chimanca recalled with chilling clarity the raids organized in the 1940s by Shora, a “chief” appointed by Spanish-speaking authorities of the area:

Shora was made chief by a colonist named Antenor. He was named because he was Antenor’s *compadre*. Just as boys and girls were traded before, this Antenor traded them for cotton cloth. He asked Shora to bring him girls and boys so that he could raise them, so that they would work for him without pay. They were only given food, sometimes clothes—but old clothes, the poor children! He had plenty of them! Antenor also asked for children to be sent to his mother in Lima . . .

You delivered a child and they gave you a piece of cloth. “Bring me a child,” they said to Shora, and they gave him cloth. So Shora, since he was a warrior, was able to take them from over there, from the Río Ene. He killed the parents and took the children. They arrived here and they were given to the one who had paid him with cloth. (Fernández 1986a:139–40).

MILLENARIANISM

Out of this sanguinary period of Asháninka history there emerged stories of a new messiah. The most believable report comes from Gabriel Sala’s diary of his expedition to Gran Pajónal. In the entry dated March 10, 1897, Sala recorded his meeting with an Asháninka man who told him that “in Chanchamayo the Campas and the whites are fighting, and that there has appeared again the *Amachegua*, descended from heaven, to help us in the combat” (Sala 1897:127). The *Amachegua* to which Sala refers—more properly, Amachenga or Amachenka—denotes a class of

mythical saviors (Weiss 1975:258). Sala later states that one such Amachenga was none other than the rubber baron Carlos Fitzcarrald, who Sala believes manipulated Asháninka spiritual beliefs to conscript rubber tappers.

A more firmly documented Asháninka crisis cult arose in the late 1920s, when Fernando A. Stahl, a Seventh-Day Adventist, established a mission on the Río Perené. Stahl's efforts produced little progress at first, but eventually Asháninkas began to show glimmerings of interest. Stahl's visits to communities along the Perené attracted large groups of Indians waiting to be baptized: "Suddenly we came in view of an open valley, and as we entered the valley we were met by hundreds of Campa Indians, who greeted us warmly" (Stahl 1932:86). The photographs that accompany Stahl's memoirs show scores of Asháninkas standing stiffly beside the missionary.

In his research on the impact of Stahl's mission, John Bodley (1972) found that Asháninka enthusiasm for Stahl's message had achieved a life of its own, in many cases even before Stahl had contacted specific communities. Stahl preached of the imminent return of Christ, who would destroy those who failed to respect the Word of God. Asháninkas elaborated their own interpretation of his teachings, including a belief that Christ would appear within a matter of weeks, bringing about a cataclysmic transition to a world without sickness and death.

Hundreds of Asháninkas—perhaps as many as two thousand— assembled spontaneously to await the predicted millennium. In areas where the movement took hold, the sudden disappearance of Asháninka workers enraged white landowners. They organized reprisals against native catechists, including the murder of one on the Río Shahuaya. Most Asháninkas eventually dispersed when Christ failed to appear, but two hundred or more adherents remained in communities organized by native leaders at Las Cascadas and Tambo (Bodley 1972:224–26).

From the 1920s onward, hundreds of Asháninkas chose to escape the threat of slave raids or the burdensome demands of landowners by moving to the mission communities that sprang up across the region. In the 1960s, John Bodley found 38 mission settlements functioning in their territory, mostly under the aegis of Protestant denominations (Bodley 1971:147–48).

Asháninka converts proved as wayward in the twentieth century as their ancestors had in the eighteenth. Commenting on the negligible impact of 20 years of Protestant missionary work at the Cahuapanas mission, John Elick, an anthropologist and missionary who lived with the Asháninka for seven years, notes that many Asháninkas exhibited "a gradual

rejection of what apparently comes to be an unsatisfying way of life and a return to the old Campa ways" (Elick 1969: 16).

However volatile the Asháninka commitment to Christianity, the missions offered undeniable attractions: a degree of protection from outsiders, medical care and education, trade goods, livestock, and the drama of radio communications and airplane landings. The material plenty associated with mission life also gave rise to beliefs reminiscent of the messianism observed by Padre Sala in the nineteenth century. One such case occurred in the late 1950s or early 1960s, when a Protestant missionary attracted a significant Asháninka following at a site called Puerto Rico on the Río Ene. A woman interviewed by Eduardo Fernández recalled that people spoke of this mysterious gringo as a messiah:

At that time we were living there in my village [Mazaronquiari], and I heard people who spoke this way: "Upcountry there is a gringo, a little gringo who is a brother, who is a god. He is white." He was white. The people said: "You ought to believe it! He's the sun, our god!" . . . The people believed that he was Itómi Pavá, Son of the Sun. That's the way it was! He was an evangelical. I don't remember his name, but I got a good look at him. My people believed that he was Itómi Pavá. Yes! They said: "Our god comes from Lima in an airplane." "Let's go to the Río Ene," said the gringo. "Let's go to the Ene," they answered him.

By the 1960s, colonization of Peru's central jungle region by immigrants from the Andes had reduced the Asháninka to a minority population along parts of the Río Perené, the Río Chanchamayo, around the town of Satipo, and in other sections of their traditional territory. In these densely colonized areas, Asháninkas maintained tenuous control of lands that were woefully inadequate for the subsistence needs of their families—as little as 3.4 hectares per family around Satipo (Shoemaker 1981: 168). Although more land was available in refuge areas along the Ene and Tambo rivers and in the Gran Pajónal, Asháninkas living there lacked ready access to the trade goods and medical care that they now considered essential for their survival. Tensions between the Indians and local landowners along the Río Perené grew markedly in the early 1960s.

In 1965, a group of leftist guerrillas belonging to the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), a Castroite party determined to overthrow the Peruvian oligarchy through an act of "revolutionary audacity," made contact with Asháninka settlements around Cubantía in Satipo Province. Some Indians in the contacted villages joined the guerrillas as combatants and guides in the ensuing months, until units of the Peruvian armed

forces had succeeded in liquidating most of the MIR leadership by January 1966.⁸ During the course of the counterinsurgency, Peruvian fighter bombers napalmed and strafed Asháninka villages.

Oral histories reveal that some Indians regarded the local MIR commander, Guillermo Lobatón, as a messiah who would lead them in the destruction of colonist society and a redistribution of land and trade goods. In this sense, Lobatón seems to have walked unawares into a symbolic role occupied formerly by Juan Santos Atahualpa, F. A. Stahl, and possibly Carlos Fitzcarrald, all charismatic outsiders who inspired millennial enthusiasm among Asháninkas. Lobatón was black, which would have made him especially marked as an “other” from the Asháninka point of view. Pedro Kintaro (a pseudonym), who served time in prison for allegedly collaborating with the guerrillas, remembers the debate over Lobatón’s identity as the Son of the Sun:

Ernesto, a shaman, said: “These guerrillas are going to defend us, they are going to help the Indians. We have to believe them.” Some believed that Lobatón was Itómi Pavá, that he was the Son of the Sun. Sure, but there were others who didn’t believe it. “How could the Son of the Sun appear as a human being?” they asked.

The MIR’s campaign was of such brief duration, and the government repression so fierce, that we cannot say whether or not the rebellion would have spread to include those skeptical about the arrival of the Son of the Sun. In any event, our research suggests that pro- and antiguerrilla factions among the Asháninka formed along lines of long-standing political rivalries. Coercion by Peruvian soldiers also led some Asháninkas to work as guides for the counterinsurgency forces.

Although the revolutionary struggle of the MIR was a failure and Asháninkas sustained significant casualties, the violence did lead some landowners to moderate their demands on Indian workers and tenants. The exposure of Peruvian army officers to the desperate social conditions in the countryside helped to inspire a leftist military coup in 1968 and the subsequent enactment of a progressive Native Communities Law that promised land titles to Asháninkas and other Amazonian Indians. Here again, the internal contradictions of the Peruvian state asserted themselves. While employees of the government agency dedicated to “social mobilization,” mainly reform-minded young people from Lima, attempted to issue land titles to Indians, local settlers and provincial officials lost no opportunity to oppose the formal titling of native communities.⁹ Land titles were, in any case, of little use to Indians living in areas

of heavy colonization, for there was no unoccupied land left to be claimed.

Since the guerrilla struggle of 1965, Asháninkas have directed their political energy to the creation of intervillage organizations, which are allied to native federations at the national and international level. To a lesser extent, they have also tried to forge links to Peru's political parties by presenting Asháninka candidates for local elective office.

Yet even as Asháninkas formalize their links to the state, the state's power to control events in the central jungle region has ebbed. Asháninka lands are under increasing pressure from colonists eager to cash in on the growing world demand for cocaine by growing coca. Meanwhile, two Marxist guerrilla groups—the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) and the Shining Path—have become major political forces in parts of eastern Peru. Beginning with widely spaced and selective assassinations of Asháninka leaders, the Shining Path has recently launched attacks against entire Asháninka communities that refuse to obey the guerrillas' directives. In April of 1990, as many as 40 people were killed when a Shining Path column assaulted the Asháninka village of Naylamp in Satipo Province.

The Asháninka encounter with the MRTA took a sharp turn late in 1989, when guerrillas executed a prominent Asháninka leader named Alejandro Calderón Espinoza. Asháninka reaction to the killing was explosive: in the words of the popular press, the Indians “declared war on the MRTA.” In late December of 1989, hundreds of Asháninka men stormed the town of Puerto Bermúdez, detained the town officials, and rounded up dozens of MRTA suspects. Press reports from Puerto Bermúdez claimed that the Indians subjected a score of guerrillas to “popular justice,” including execution. The Peruvian government was slow to send army units to restore civil control or to take custody of the alleged MRTA suspects in Asháninka hands, apparently because it was happy to have the burden of the conflict borne by Indians rather than by the army.¹⁰ In sum, state control of some parts of Asháninka territory has declined to levels comparable to the era of the rubber boom, and Asháninkas are once again forced to depend on their own wits to survive in a dangerously unstable social environment.

DISCUSSION

Let us now analyze this complex history in light of the links between state expansion and violence. The central issues can, we believe, be distilled to four distinct but interrelated questions.

Did the expansion of the Spanish, and later, the Peruvian state increase levels of violence within Asháninka society? The answer to this question is an unequivocal “yes,” though the proximal causes and specific shape of violence have changed through time. During the early contact period (1595–1742), Spanish mission stations became a significant political factor in Peru’s central jungle region. Fragmentary evidence from Franciscan missions in Peru, as well as comparative data from other parts of the New World, suggests that headmen increased their power by redistributing valuable trade goods, especially steel tools, provided to them by missionaries in exchange for compliance with the missionaries’ efforts. Competition for access to mission resources promoted intercommunity conflict, both within Asháninka society and between Asháninkas and their neighbors. The Spanish use of native mercenaries (e.g., Conibos) contributed to higher levels of violence between ethnic groups that may formerly have engaged only in sporadic conflict. A dramatic exception to this pattern was the interethnic solidarity inspired in 1742 by the rebel messiah Juan Santos Atahualpa, whose uprising cleared the region of settlers for nearly a century.

When interest in colonizing the jungle revived in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, landowners and rubber barons learned to manipulate traditional raiding and trading patterns to their own advantage (Chevalier 1982:204). There is overwhelming evidence that this strategy increased local violence to unprecedented levels, especially when it included the distribution of repeating rifles to Asháninka slave raiders, making combat much more lethal than in the precontact era. White merchants destroyed traditional Indian trading networks to foster Asháninka dependency, a tactic that incited Indians desperately in need of basic goods (salt, for instance) to raid their more prosperous neighbors.

The violence engendered by colonization of the jungle was not always in the immediate interests of the state that fostered it. As the world market for rubber collapsed, for example, rubber merchants in the Pichis Valley attempted to squeeze every last *centavo* from their Asháninka workers. The situation eventually exploded: beginning in December of 1913, Asháninka warriors raided white settlements, cut telegraph wires, killed 150 settlers, and closed the Pichis Trail linking the region to the Perené Valley and the Peruvian coast (Bodley 1971:109–10; Elick 1969:14–15).

What strategies did the Asháninka devise to adapt to higher levels of violence? Obviously, some Asháninkas were willing to modify precontact feuding and raiding patterns to take advantage of the new circumstances in which they found themselves. Ambitious headmen, such as Carlos Fitzcarrald’s henchman Venancio, used predatory violence to increase their

personal power and the size of their retinues. In 1900, Colonel Pedro Portillo visited Venancio's village on the Río Tambo, a place called Washington. "Washington is like a military plaza or an impregnable fortress . . . of five hundred inhabitants, subject to Venancio," Portillo reported. "From the months of June to November they are in continuous journeys to extract *caucho* and *sheringa* [types of latex] from the region of Sepahua, Cuja, and Purús" (Portillo 1901:40).

Indians who wished to avoid forced labor recruitment by *caciques* such as Venancio either fled to remote corners of the jungle or joined together in large communities (often at missions or plantations) that afforded some protection from attack. The cruel irony is that Asháninkas had to turn to Western institutions to find a safe harbor from the violence spawned by the widening influence of the Western extractive economy. Worse still, high levels of indigenous violence were fixed upon by Peruvian nationals as justification for the forced acculturation of Indians. "Satipo's old-timers often told me that they literally stepped between groups of warring Campas and forced them to disband," writes Robin Shoemaker (1981:165). The national society had become a source of peace in a violent world largely of its own making.

Anthropologists tend to view missions and plantations as places where indigenous people can be brought under control and their culture systematically extinguished. In eastern Peru, however, the competing interests of missionaries, traders, and plantation owners created a complex socio-political mosaic that in some respects may actually have impeded control over the native population. Consider the case of missions. Although it is true that missionaries sometimes worked hand-in-hand with colonists (Ortiz 1961:255), on other occasions their aims were in direct conflict. Fernández (1986b:56) observes that some Asháninkas have been attracted to the missions of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (an American organization dedicated to the translation of the Bible into native languages) because the American evangelicals are visibly "other" vis-à-vis Peruvian nationals; in a sense, the Indians see the religion of the Americans as an alternative to the dominant religion of Peruvian national society, Roman Catholicism. More recently, events suggest that at least a few Asháninkas have used the chaos unleashed by guerrilla war to settle personal scores with their enemies—in effect advancing their own agendas by taking advantage of cracks in the edifice of state control.¹¹

Asháninkas have used these fields of political and ideological difference as resources to be investigated and exploited. One can see this in the turnover of Asháninka population in the Franciscan missions of the eighteenth century and similar short-term residence at Protestant missions in

the twentieth. Asháninka biographies collected by John H. Bodley (1971) in the 1960s reveal how this movement within the frontier mosaic has played itself out in individual lives. A man named Juan Antonio Sharihua, for example, has spent parts of his life as an agricultural peon, as a rubber tapper and gold miner for white patrons, as a cash-crop farmer living next to a Protestant mission, and as a “traditional” householder in independent Asháninka settlements (Bodley 1971: 128–29). Bodley’s study documents in Asháninka life histories and population movements a slow course from subsistence production to market involvement, but the heterogeneity of the frontier world has allowed Asháninkas to move on that path with a stuttering zigzag rather than in a swift, straight dash.

We are *not* arguing that missions, plantation communities, multinational corporations, or Marxist guerrilla groups have promoted the preservation of traditional Asháninka culture in any direct way; indeed, all of them assert control over Asháninka labor, settlement patterns, or beliefs. Our point is that the internal contradictions of the Peruvian state have given rise to different institutions in the Amazonian frontier and that competition among these institutions provides opportunities for Asháninkas to pursue varying strategies for cultural survival.

What ideological responses have Asháninkas formulated in the face of such dramatic changes? One of the most persistent responses has been the belief that the world in which Indians are subservient to outsiders will be destroyed, to be replaced by one of utopian abundance. Asháninkas, writes Gerald Weiss (1975: 407), “anticipate a time when Tasórentsi [God] will destroy the world or, rather, transform it into a new world.” “When that occurs,” he adds, “sky and earth will again be close together, the earth will speak once again, and its inhabitants will be a new race of humanity knowing nothing of sickness, death, or toil.” John Elick found a similar belief among the Asháninkas he studied. “This world, tainted and contaminated by the intrusion of evil forces and beings,” they told him, “will also pass away” (Elick 1969: 236).

We have no way of knowing whether this apocalyptic vision predates contact with Europeans or evolved in reaction to it. What we can say, however, is that it has helped to propel Asháninka millenarian enthusiasm since the rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in 1742, including the 1965 alliance with the guerrilla fighters of the MIR. Other instances of millenarianism among the Asháninka—for example, the movement inspired by the American missionary F. A. Stahl in the 1920s—have not evoked armed resistance. Yet in each case Asháninkas expressed their unwillingness to endure the status quo. We would not go so far as to suggest that Asháninkas have formulated a true “culture of resistance” of the sort documented among the Saramaka of Surinam (Price 1983), but their

willingness to put a millenarian dream into action represents a durable critique of their situation and an ideological resource that Asháninka leaders have drawn on to galvanize a violent response to oppression.

To what extent has contact promoted "tribalism" among Asháninkas? Here the historical record remains equivocal. The increased power of Asháninka headmen in the face of early European contact seems to have produced larger social units in Asháninka society, as did the unifying but short-lived influence of messianic figures. This tendency toward social consolidation was countered by intercommunity conflicts fostered by slave raids, fear of the epidemics associated with large settlements, and competition for access to scarce trade goods. By the late nineteenth century, Europeans came to realize that Asháninka populations represented a single (if in some respects heterogeneous) linguistic group labeled "Campas," but we find little evidence that the Indians conceived of themselves as a cohesive "tribe" with shared interests until recently. By the 1980s, Asháninka leaders had assimilated the rhetoric of ethnic assertion common to native groups elsewhere in Amazonian Peru and had begun to formulate their demands to the government in terms of the needs of "the Asháninka people." Yet even as we write, Asháninkas are divided into eight federations, each representing communities from a single valley or region. Thus far no organization has succeeded in creating stable links to all Asháninka communities.

In conclusion, we trust it is clear that the tidal frontier of the post-Conquest state has had a marked impact on the level of violence experienced by Asháninkas in their daily lives. In our assessment of the effects of frontier expansion, however, we have tried to avoid utopian assumptions about what the Asháninka world might have been like had the Indians not fallen prey to states. An analysis that blames every act of brutality on the pernicious effects of colonialism, as does the glib "post-imperial" anthropology espoused by Edward Said (1989), would reduce the Asháninka to the status of passive victims rather than recognize them as active shapers of their history. There is little question that Asháninkas have been capable of great violence, both within and outside of their own society, and that they have not hesitated to use force in pursuit of ends important to them: self-defense, control of resources, personal ambition, revenge. By aggressively exploiting the discontinuities and contradictions in the state's hold on their territory, Asháninkas have fashioned a culture of survival.

————— Notes —————

1. The research on which this chapter is based was made possible by the financial support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the School of American Research, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research,

Williams College, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. The authors wish to express their gratitude to these organizations, to the other participants in the School of American Research advanced seminar, and to John H. Bodley, who was kind enough to comment on an earlier draft of our essay.

2. The work of Eric Wolf (1982) is exceptional in showing how European colonial states were rife with contradictory tendencies, largely related to the transition from a “tributary mode of production” to a capitalist one. Wolf observes that this transition took place at different times, and in distinct economic sectors, in each country; the shifting fortunes of competing modes of production had a profound influence on colonial policy in different places.

3. In this essay we do not analyze regional differences within the Asháninka population as a whole. Weiss (1975), for instance, makes a distinction between the River Campa—the population along the Apurímac, Ene, Perené, and Tambo rivers—and the Pajonál Campa, who live in the area known as Gran Pajonál. He and other authorities believe the Nomatsiguenga, who live surrounded by Asháninka communities, to be a Machiguenga population, though they are culturally almost indistinguishable from their Asháninka neighbors.

4. Zarzar (1989:26) provides much higher totals for Franciscan mission populations in the central jungle region, but we judge Lehnertz’s detailed analysis of census data to be more reliable.

5. Principal sources for the following discussion of the rebellion of 1742 are Castro Arenas (1973), Lehnertz (1972), Loayza (1942), Stern (1987), and Varese (1973). Two recent publications that include information about Juan Santos, by Flores Galindo (1988) and Zarzar (1989), came into our hands too late to be fully integrated into the analysis. In any event, they assess the rebellion from an Andeanist perspective and shed little light on its possible meaning to tropical forest peoples such as the Asháninka.

6. For details of the Inkarrí theme, see Bierhorst (1988), Fernández (1987), Flores Galindo (1988), Ossio (1973), Stern (1987), and Weiss (1986). Weiss argues persuasively that some aspects of the Inkarrí myth may have an Amazonian rather than an Andean origin.

7. The life of Fitzcarrald was the inspiration for Werner Herzog’s film *Fitzcarrald*. Allegations that Fitzcarrald’s activities among the Indians had a messianic dimension are made by Reyna (1942) but strongly denied by Valdez Lozano (1944:5–6), Fitzcarrald’s former associate.

8. For background on the MIR guerrilla campaign, see Ministerio de Guerra (1966) and Gott (1973). Brown and Fernández (1991) provide the most detailed analysis of the Asháninka-MIR alliance and its significance.

9. As recently as the 1980s, the Peruvian government found itself under pressure from the World Bank to issue titles to Asháninka communities, but foot-dragging at the local level and in some of the national ministries prevented the issuance of significant numbers of titles.

10. The struggle between Asháninkas and the MRTA was front-page news in Peru during the first weeks of 1990, and the sources we have used to prepare

this brief summary are too numerous to mention here. Benavides (1990) presents a review and analysis of the struggle through July 1990.

11. See, for example, a communiqué by the Central de Comunidades de la Selva Central (CECONSEC), an Asháninka intercommunity federation, published in the Lima newspaper *La República* on July 22, 1990. The statement alleges that the president of a rival Asháninka organization killed several CECONSEC members using arms provided by local military authorities. It also denounces a group of "Asháninkas and colonists" who it contends were demanding protection money from travelers in exchange for safe-conduct passes (*cupos*), a tactic commonly used by both the MRTA and the Shining Path in zones where the guerrillas operate.