

# PLURIVERSE

A POST-DEVELOPMENT DICTIONARY

Edited by

ASHISH KOTHARI, ARIEL SALLEH, ARTURO ESCOBAR,  
FEDERICO DEMARIA, ALBERTO ACOSTA



authors  
UPFRONT

First published in India in 2019 by  
**Tulika Books**  
44 (first floor), Shahpur Jat, New Delhi 110 049, India  
www.tulikabooks.in  
and  
**Authorsupfront publishing services private limited**  
authorsupfront.com

© This collection: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar,  
Federico Demaria and Alberto Acosta, 2019  
© Individual essays: respective authors

ISBN: 978-81-937329-8-4

eBook available on Amazon Kindle

All rights reserved. For commercial use, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the EDITORS, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographic rights organizations. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the publisher at [info@authorsupfront.com](mailto:info@authorsupfront.com).

This is a Creative Commons publication. Information from the book may be reproduced in print and digital formats for non-commercial use only. Please attribute (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) whenever the information is used.

Cover design: Neena Gupta  
Cover illustration: Ashish Kothari

Printed at Chaman Offset, Delhi 110 002

Rabbi Michael Lerner is California based and edits *Tikkun* magazine. He is chair of the inter-faith Network of Spiritual Progressives; and author of many books including *Jewish Renewal* (1994); *The Politics of Meaning* (1996); *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* (2006); *Spirit Matters* (2000); *Embracing Israel/Palestine* (2012); *Revolutionary Love* (forthcoming); and with Cornell West – *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin* (1995).



## KAMETSA ASAIKE

Emily Caruso and Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti

**Keywords:** conviviality, extractivism, Latin America, relationality, sociality

This entry describes *kametsa asaike* ('living well together in this place'), an indigenous philosophy for well-being pursued by Ashaninka people from the Peruvian Amazon. We argue that understanding personhood – the culturally inflected perception of the constitution of persons – is fertile ground upon which to grow and sustain practicable, radical alternatives to the dominant development paradigm.

*Kametsa asaike* has two main characteristics that challenge mainstream understandings of well-being:

1. subjective well-being is only possible through collective well-being, and the collective includes humans, other-than-human beings and the Earth; and
2. it is a deliberate practice – to live well everyone has to work at it.

*Kametsa asaike* demonstrates how measuring 'subjective wellbeing' in terms of health and/or consumption, all the vogue in conventional development circles, cannot capture the ethics of human sociality and ways of knowing and engaging with the world contained in such a practice. In knowing the world as a network of mutually constituted human and other-than-human actors, *kametsa asaike* implicitly questions the modern notion of the disembedded individual and the nature-culture dualism that underscores the development complex and sanctions large-scale extractivism, regardless of its consequences for life.

Depending on the context, Ashaninka means 'we the kin' or 'we the people'. Most humans, and other-than-human beings such as plants, animals, and spirits, are Ashaninka, that is, social actors. All of these perceive and act in the world in similar ways: they can be kind or mean; they get drunk, make mistakes and need shamans when they are ill; they laugh, cry, love, and fear. This understanding of other-than-humans is common among many indigenous peoples. Yet, this is 'not' an anthropocentric perspective: humans are one of the many different kinds of beings that share personhood.

In these contexts, personhood is not stable or given. From the moment of birth, Ashaninka babies enter into a lifelong process of being continuously 'made' into *ashaninkasanori* ('real Ashaninka people'). The art of making people involves, primarily, sharing substances and close living spaces, eating prescribed foods, and engaging in appropriate behaviour such as working hard, being generous with the product of one's work and sharing in socially constructive emotions. Living as an *ashaninkasanori* also requires following an ethos of conviviality in the relationship with the Earth, including respecting other-than-human beings; caring for the Earth through hard work; abiding by prescriptions regarding where to make gardens, and where, what and when to hunt, fish, and collect plants. In turn, animals, plants, spirits, and the earth provide what people need to live such as *ashaninkasanori*. Thus is established a cycle of interdependency and interconnection that continuously reinforces the 'ashaninkaness' of people and places and allows *kametsa asaïke*.

*Kametsa asaïke* comes into stark contrast with the boom of large-scale extractivist projects throughout Peru, which have become the backbone of reconstruction efforts in the wake of the Peruvian internal war (1980–2000). Large sections of Ashaninka traditional territory, the theatre for a particularly violent and enduring episode of the war, have been granted in concession to multinational companies by the Peruvian state for oil/gas extraction and the construction of hydroelectric dams. The continuum of violence, created by the war and followed immediately by extractivism, is experienced by Ashaninka people as a ripping apart of the fragile balance between people and the earth that allows them to live well. The last thirty years has seen the undoing of *ashaninkasanori*-ness and, our Ashaninka collaborators tell us, the Earth is angry. Having suffered the violence of war and of extractivism, she is turning her back on humans. Crops do not grow, trees do not bear fruit, the rivers no longer fill with fish nor the forests with animals, and the spirits that help shamans heal and protect forest animals are gone.

Now, Ashaninka people work tirelessly to expunge the memory of the war and halt the rise in extractive activity on their lands. They seek to rebuild their relationships of solidarity and interconnectedness with the Earth, other-than-humans, and each other, and thus re-establish the conditions for the practice of *kametsa asaike*. With the support of the Central Ashaninka de Rio Ene (CARE), an indigenous organization led by Ruth Buendía,<sup>1</sup> Ashaninka communities in the Ene Valley published a set of principles, based on everyday *kametsa asaike* practices, which they have called their Political Agenda (Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene 2011). The people represented by CARE expect that any individual or institution wishing to engage with them or their territories will abide by these principles. This manifesto had immediate application as CARE launched a series of projects in 2011, with support from international NGOs such as Rainforest Foundation UK. These projects were built upon the requirements for *kametsa asaike* expressed in the agenda. They have also used the agenda as an advocacy tool in their struggles against extractive projects.

While *kametsa asaike* may not be directly applicable in other social contexts, it presents radical solutions for the rebuilding of humanity, our relationship with the Earth, and an approach for transcending the excesses of the Anthropocene. First, it encourages us to examine what it is that makes us people – in relation to other humans and beings – in order to understand what will allow us to live well. Connectedly, it proposes that the pursuit of well-being is necessarily collective: we must recognize our interdependence and relationships with other beings and the earth in order to live well. It also suggests that achieving well-being might only be possible if people are given the tools to be truly human. For those lost in the false solutions of the development complex, in which human differences are obscured by discourses of ‘improvement’ and ‘rationality’, discovering what makes us human – and how it roots our constructions of well-being – is likely to be a complex task. However, it may be the only way we can build a more meaningful, respectful, and beautiful world. Finally, it shows us that the only way to sustain well-being, especially when it is under aggression, is to continue to practise it every day, in every big and small way.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/ruth-buendia/>.

#### Further Resources

Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene (2011), *Kametsa Asaike: El vivir bien de los Asháninka del Rio Ene. Agenda Política de la CARE*, <http://careashaninka.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/AgendaKametsaAsaike.pdf>.

Central Ashaninka del Rio Ene, <http://careashaninka.org/>.

Global Environments Network, [www.globalenvironments.org](http://www.globalenvironments.org),

Kametsa Asaïke, el buen vivir de la Amazonía peruana, <https://vimeo.com/88115558>.

Sarmiento Barletti, Juan Pablo (2016), 'The Angry Earth: Wellbeing, Place, and

Extractive Development in the Amazon', *Anthropology in Action*. 23 (3): 43–53.

When Two Worlds Collide, [www.whentwoworldscollidemovie.com/](http://www.whentwoworldscollidemovie.com/).

**Emily Caruso** is the Director of Global Diversity Foundation, [www.global-diversity.org](http://www.global-diversity.org). A biologist and anthropologist by training, she carried out her doctoral fieldwork among Ene Ashaninka communities. She is passionate about healing and sustaining the relationships between humans, other-than-humans, and places, considering this to be the starting point for individual and collective well-being.

**Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti** is a social anthropologist at the Center for International Forestry Research in Lima Peru. He has carried out extensive ethnographic research with Ashaninka people on how they experience and know extractivism, the obvious impact it has on their everyday lives, and the less obvious impact it has on their relations with their other-than-human neighbours.



## KAWSAK SACHA

Patricia Gualinga

**Keywords:** rainforest, Yachags, Pachamama, Llakta, Allpamama, Yakumama, Kawsak Yaku, native people

The living rainforest, *Kawsak Sacha*, is a space where the life of a large number of diverse beings flows, from the smallest to the largest. They come from the animal, plant, mineral, and cosmic worlds; their function is to balance and renovate the emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual energy which is a fundamental part of all living beings. It is a sacred domain that exists in primary forests, in whose waterfalls, lagoons, swamps, mountains, rivers, and millenary trees, supreme beings of nature reside and regenerate ecosystems vital to all humans. *Kawsak Sacha* is also a space where *yachags* (shamans) receive knowledge, where they connect with the being and knowledge of their ancestors and living places, maintaining the natural balance of the universe, cultural perpetuity, harmony, and the