CHAPTER 3

# A Tale of Three Cities

## *Power Relations amid Ese Eja Urban Imaginaries*

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In a recent work, Miguel Alexiades and I (2015, 7) examined Indigenous urbanization in Amazonia as sets of multidirectional processes that are "often highly contingent and situational not as a simple or permanent migration to a city, but rather as part of an ongoing circulation of people that connects different communities, towns, and multiple-sited dwellings" (see also Alexiades and Peluso 2016; Peluso 2015a; Peluso and Alexiades 2005). Urbanization is often opportunistic and inspired by an ever-increasing range of drivers, the most common being labor opportunities, schooling, political work, and an escape from village conflicts. I have described how urban areas become villages and how villages become urban, but most importantly how these processes ultimately begin in people's minds long before they physically take place, and hence the idea that "urbanization begins at home" (Peluso 2004a, 1). The political stake in such analyses has been to denounce forms of representation, outreach, and development that trap Indigenous lowland South American peoples into strictly rural images that uphold unsustainable stereotypes that are then turned against them. For instance, encroaching extractive economies leverage images of urbanity to legitimize their expansion of activities to Indigenous lands and processes of deterritorialization (McSweeney and Jokisch 2015; Peluso, forthcoming). Here, I expand on this body of work by discussing a nonvisible place as a tacit meeting point between cross realities and different kinds of urbanity—cities of humans, nonhumans, and living and nonliving Others—with the caveat that humanity

is a shared sense of being and that living continues beyond what we might refer to as life.

Amazonian cities are not always visible to the eye of the external observer. Particular types of cities are part of the nonvisible world of human Others; these shape and are shaped by Amazonian rural-urban and creation narrative imagery, as well as the sociospatial knowledge of earthly and cross realities. Numerous scholars document Amazonians' knowledge of villages or cities that exist underwater (Slater 1994), underground (Gow 1994, 2011), or in the overworld (Gow 2001; Kopenawa and Albert 2013; Politis and Saunders 2002). As Peter Gow (2011) has speculated, it is even possible to imagine how Amazonian Piro (Yine) stories about places such as the underworld cities of the white-lipped peccaries might be linked to the former urban centers of the Upper Xingu (see also Heckenberger 2004). Such an analysis potentially identifies the kinds of cities described by Amazonians in their creation stories as residues of a historical but largely forgotten past. These lines of thought build on scholarship that increasingly verifies how several pre-Columbian Amazonian settlements were large scale, urban, centralized, densely populated, and stratified (Denevan 1992; Erickson 2006; Heckenberger et al. 2008), an image that challenges deeply rooted misconceptions of pre-Columbian Amazonia as an area of pristine wilderness with minimal human impact on the environment and settlements that were nondynamic (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007; Alexiades 2009). As Michael J. Heckenberger (2004, 39–41) has argued,

> The great shock comes not so much upon realization of the massive physical scale of earthworks, almost ubiquitous in terminal prehistoric settlements, although that is indeed surprising. The real eye-opener is experienced when the ancient and sophisticated architectural plan is revealed in its entirety. The great fortified towns of the remote past, over ten times the size of contemporary villages, and vast deforested agricultural areas associated with them document an unexpectedly dramatic and intentional transformation of the prehistoric landscape. The distribution of settlements, roads, pathways, ports and other sites, demonstrates that in the past, like today, the built environment was integrated across a much broader area, extending well beyond the village areas themselves. Across the region there were many of these villages, undoubtedly home to a large late prehistoric population, numbering

> in the tens of thousands, densely settled in large, permanent settlements, some likely numbering in the thousands, throughout much of the Upper Xingu basin.

Given such poignant accounts, it is likely that knowledge of great settlements in the past has directly or indirectly played out in Amazonian dwellers' imaginations just as current modern cities likely continue to shape their references to nonvisible cities. Indeed, knowledge and visits to pre-Columbian Andean cities may have also shaped these imaginaries (Santos-Granero, this volume). Amazonian cities or large towns crystallize the social hierarchies in which rural Amazonians are stationed (Peluso 2003). As Rupert Stasch (2017, 449) points out, when people live in multiple places they form part of a larger geographic space where social differences become acute. This means that rural people who live in more than one place "live in hierarchical disparities between those places." Furthermore, locales are not merely produced by groups (Santos-Granero 2005) but accentuated by urbanization, and thus locality is coproduced among collectivities not just in terms of the imagination but through a wide range of ways and forms as people navigate and circulate within such spaces (Peluso 2015b).

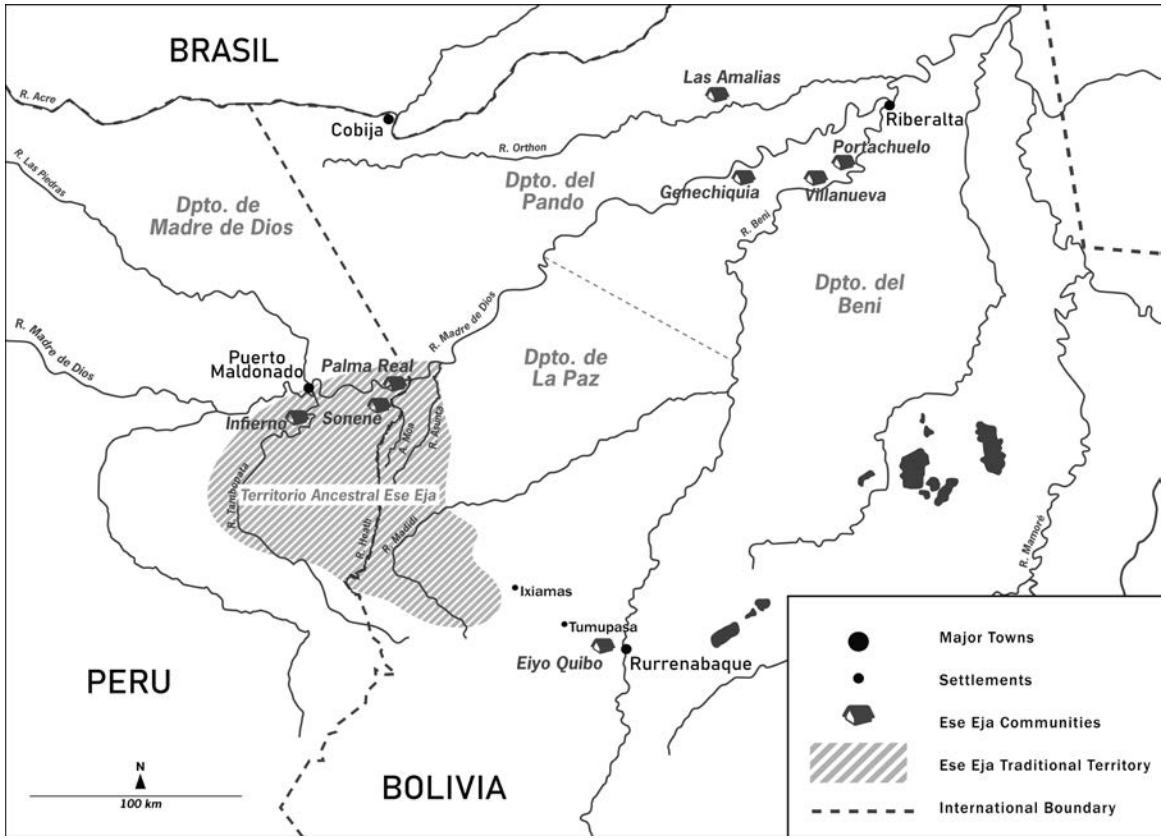
Nonvisible cities have featured in the Western imaginary of Amazonia for centuries, reaching mythic status. Such imaginaries serve as extensions of ongoing settler-colonialist power structures that subjugate Indigenous peoples. The most famous such cities are El Dorado and the Lost City of Z. Although these allegedly spectacular and resource-rich cities have never been located despite numerous expeditions, the desire to know them has historically resulted in the surveying, mapping, and conversion of "terra incognita into bounded colonial territories" (Burnett 2001, xii). Indeed, the pursuit for the "discovery" of such places continues today as evidenced by Jamin Thierry's (2006) ongoing relentless search for Paititi. There are also the nonvisible cities of creation narratives as well as those that exist contemporarily alongside the human world. Some of these cities belong to nonvisible beings. For Runa peoples these can be found within landmarks such as volcanoes (Guzmán-Gallegos 2015). Many such cities are in the underworld or sky and can belong exclusively to particular nonhuman animal groups such as jaguars and peccaries or, as for Ese Eja peoples, the underwater anaconda (Peluso 2004b).

Shamans can access crossroads between humans and nonvisible beings and their villages or cities. Such portals can also be accessed by nonspe-

cialists through the use of psychoactive plants (Prance 1970; Arévalo Varela 1986) and through activities and processes that entail or evoke altered states of consciousness such as dreaming, hunting, being ill, being solitary, and participating in rituals (Peluso 2003, 2004b; Opas 2005; Santos-Granero 2012; Mezzenzana 2018). Indeed, it is in these states of increased vulnerability that cross realities can potentially be bridged. There are numerous accounts of nonhuman Others approaching humans to come and live with them in their village, city, or world, usually through temptation, seduction, or abduction. For instance, for Ese Eja, the anaconda can tempt children and adults toward a new place of habitation with the lures of technology and sex, as well as promises of pleasure and abundance (Peluso 2003, 2004b). Michael A. Uzendoski (2004, 888) has recorded accounts among the Runa where beautiful and exotic spirit women have taken men away "to 'serve' as mayors or other administrators in cities in the underworld," instances that Francesca Mezzenzana (2018) refers to in terms of seduction (see also Larochelle 2012). In many cases such narratives explicitly describe thriving nonvisible cities that are also the sources of technology on which modern cities are founded, a point I will return to later (Civrieux [1970] 1997; Kohn 2009; Guzmán-Gallegos 2015). The knowledge of these metropoles is widespread and for the most part remains in the background of daily life unless for particular reasons it becomes important.

In this chapter, I discuss another kind of nonvisible city, the land of the dead. I suggest that the terra incognita of all invisible cities ontologically encompasses vestiges and reserves for nonvisible beings and living mortals who are still able to understand the world as one that is multiple, regenerative, and potentially transformative. While often interpreted as mythical or imaginary, invisible cities comprise cross realities that not only affect everyday life to varying degrees at particular moments in time, but also are perceived to be awaiting us in the future.

The following story takes place in Puerto Maldonado, the regional capital of Madre de Dios, Peru, in 1995. It is here that the Ese Eja from Sonene encountered a mysterious girl. Ese Eja people are part of a lowland Amazonian ethnic group comprising about 2,500 individuals living in eight communities along the Beni, Madre de Dios, Heath, Orton, and Tambopata Rivers along the border regions of Pando, Bolivia, and Madre de Dios, Peru (map 3.1).[1] Most Ese Eja are swidden horticulturalists who also hunt, fish, and gather, as well as extract and process forest resources for their own consumption and




**MAP 3.1** Map of Ese Eja communities. Crafted by Miguel Alexiades.

for commercial trade; they also periodically and variably engage in forms of labor with townsfolk. Ese Eja, who live in communities spread over a distance of 310 miles (500 kilometers), are situated at varying distances from urban centers spanning Peru and Bolivia; increasingly, they move between these and other urban centers (Peluso 2004a, 2015b). Through the accounts that unfold here, three settings are engaged with: the regional capital, an Ese Eja community, and the land of the dead. My ethnographic focus is the Amazonian community of Sonene on the Heath River, which here forms the boundary between Bolivia and Peru.[2] I specifically refer to Ese Eja individuals and families who live in Sonene as Sonenekwiñaji, a term that is used by people from Sonene to refer to themselves, and that others use to refer to them.[3]

## An Encounter with a Mysterious Girl in the Capital City

My field notes from November 15, 1995, record the excitement that followed the regional elections in Puerto Maldonado, as Sonenekwiñaji returned home:

> Nearly the entire community has been gone for several days. It has been extremely quiet and with time we have come to feel sad and lonely. It is quite unusual to have so many people gone at once. . . . Offers of free meals, cash and transportation in exchange to vote for a new regional candidate for regional mayor lured the community to town. Only we, our elderly friends and some of the toddlers have remained home . . . waiting. . . . We are missing everyone despite our prior longing for privacy. . . . Finally, I could hear the distant sounds of the community's 20HP outboard engine echoing against the cliffs alongside the river. It felt as though life was being restored to Sonene. How wonderful it was to see our neighbors climbing up the riverbank looking so excited and satisfied. Santos Kaway, their choice for mayor, had won the election and they enjoyed all of the festivities in town surrounding his victory. However, there was an additional sense of excitement that went beyond a group visit. It rang of the familiar combination of enthusiasm and agitation that is so common after a big fight or a fresh scandal.

For days after their return from the regional elections, Sonenekwiñaji excitedly spoke about their encounter in Puerto Maldonado with an unusual

*deja* (outsider) girl.[4] Individuals—no matter what age—seemed distressed to have met her. Over and over again they recalled their experiences surrounding meeting her and the details that followed as if each time they repeated the story there lay a new possibility that could lead them to uncover a forgotten detail or clue that would eventually unravel the mystery of this encounter. It is from conversations in front of Shasha's house that I thread together snippets of one of these numerous conversations.

The account unfolds as follows: The morning after everyone arrived in town, Shasha's husband, Iba', encountered a young girl of approximately eight years of age begging for bread in the town market (figure 3.1). Shasha explained: "Iba' was watching this girl pleading with people to buy her bread—and he couldn't believe that she was a *deja*! Iba' kept looking to see if someone was with her but she was alone. She was very thin!" Someone else added, "He gave her some bread and she stuffed it in her mouth with both hands as though she hadn't eaten in days! We felt so sorry for her—that is why we fed her. We pitied her!" During the three days that Sonenekwiñaji stayed in

**FIGURE 3.1** Ese Eja notice the *deja* girl in the marketplace. Drawn by Sydney Acosta Solizonquehua.

town they continuously shared food with this girl and let her stay with them. Shasha enthusiastically continued, "From that moment on she tagged behind Iba' and the children and followed them all back to the communal house [the shabby empty rooms on top of the native federation's communal house, where, in the early 1990s, Ese Eja usually slept when in Puerto Maldonado, when they were not sleeping in their canoes]. We fed her again. She kept asking us for food." My neighbor added, "We felt very, very sorry for her." Shasha's daughter added, "When we brought her food and drink she would grab it from us." More neighbors explained: "She followed us everywhere we went," "She wanted to be with us adults," "She wasn't interested in playing with the children." And a young girl added, "I was afraid of her!"

What seemed especially eerie and intriguing to them was that this girl insisted that she did not have parents and did not have a name. Shasha explained: "Everyone has a name, a mother and father. Yet, when we asked her for her name she said, 'I have no name.' When we asked her who her parents are she told us, 'I do not have a mother or father!' But someone must be watching over her!" An elderly woman who had not gone to Puerto Maldonado added, "It cannot be that someone does not have a name. Maybe she just doesn't know her name. And even if she was thrown away, someone must have raised her!" Cobishawa agreed: "Even savages like the Iñapaere don't leave their children to die!"[5]

Overall, there was a general feeling that the girl had something inexplicable and strange about her. As Ese Eja navigated the town along the routes that they tend to take, they questioned and requestioned her and looked for signs to see whether she was familiar with the town, but they could not find any.[6] Also worrisome were incidents when she seemed to understand the Ese Eja language. Ese Eja are not accustomed to *deja* understanding their language. This unfamiliarity allows them to talk about things that they might not want *deja* to understand while in their presence. Sixteen-year-old Hiasa explained, "When I told Shasha that I thought the girl was *niñé* [crazy], the girl looked at me and laughed as though she understood. This girl knew how to listen to 'the words we speak.' How can this be?"[7]

Toward the end of the Sonenekwiñaji's stay in Puerto Maldonado, the girl announced that she wanted to return and live with them in Sonene. Ese Eja discussed it and decided against it. There were too many things about her that deeply disturbed them. As Shasha put it, "When she told us that she was coming to live with us here in Sonene, we didn't want that. Some were afraid

of the *guardia* [police] because this girl is *deja*. They might say to us, 'What are you doing with a *deja* girl? Where are you taking her?'" Just as the Ese Eja were about to leave Puerto Maldonado, Pasoso and Tewi took the girl to the *guardia* and left her with them. Once the girl was under police care, Sonenekwiñaji immediately embarked on the daylong trip back to their community.

## The Community Ponders the Mystery

Sonenekwiñaji were especially disturbed by the girl's familiarity with and contradiction of Ese Eja and *deja* worlds. In overtly hybrid cities such as Puerto Maldonado there are constant engagements with both the familiar and the unfamiliar, meaning that people often encounter things that they do not consider ordinary. For Ese Eja, these encounters are generally quite casually accepted within their open worldviews. But in the case of this *deja* girl, Sonenekwiñaji were troubled by their encounter, which inverted their expectations of what reality normally looks like, particularly in an urban setting where notions of cosmopolitanism and Indigenous cosmopolitanism take hold.[8] The details of their encounter firmly reversed Ese Eja perceptions of power relations between Ese Eja and *deja*, most clearly represented by the girl's desire to return with them to Sonene and live with them—in effect choosing Ese Eja lifestyles over *deja* ones.

This *deja* girl was at once both like and unlike other *deja*, as well as Ese Eja children. As a *deja* child, "white child," and fluent Spanish speaker who desired their presence, she presented a disquieting enigma, an anomaly without parallel.[9] In addition, the sight of a "starving" *deja* girl in a *deja* marketplace full of food was also unthinkable—not only her lack of access to food but also the absence of the commensality so fundamentally associated with being a proper human. Indeed, in the absence of the food sharing that constitutes the social person (Fausto 2007), Ese Eja were feeding the girl, and through happenstance they were making her family. Although Sonenekwiñaji can sometimes have the upper hand in social and economic relations, they are accustomed to being the food seekers in an urban marketplace and have sometimes played on people's pity in this regard. Yet they, rather than *deja* people, were the ones who supplied the girl with food and shelter. So although they could relate to the girl's marginality, its context was troubling. The distorted social and economic patterns of urban power relations that she mirrored heightened feelings of suspicion and even fear toward her. Some

felt that she had a hidden agenda, although it remained unclear what this might be. Shasha stated, "she wanted to fool us and trick us by getting us to bring her to Sonene." And when thirteen-year-old Estela had asked the girl a question, the child had allegedly grabbed Estela's neck and in a terrifyingly high pitch screeched out, "I am telling you yeeeeeesssss!" Although this can be acceptable behavior for a child, the girl lacked the necessary familiarity to act so unusually, and so her gesture left Estela and others with an eerie feeling.

While the girl herself made Sonenekwiñaji feel anxious, the fact that they had delivered her to the local police struck me as especially unusual. This act further inscribed the reversal of social expectations since generally Ese Eja fear the police, skillfully staying far from their gaze. Yet in this case, an Ese Eja couple approached a policeman and told him that this girl was actively trying to follow them to their community and that she was incessantly clinging to them. Ese Eja turned this *deja* over to the police just as they have been turned in by *deja* themselves on many occasions. This unusual act also left them feeling unsettled, wondering whether they had made a wise choice between leaving her there, reporting her unusual behavior, or bringing her home with them. Sonenekwiñaji were careful about which aspects of and degrees of urbanity they fostered or resisted in their village (see also Buitron, this volume); certainly the raising of a *deja* child and the complications of unknown links to the city threatened the balance of their pick-and-choose approach to urbanity.

## Kweijana: The Land of the Dead

Eventually, knowledge about the *deja* girl's identity and the reasons underlying her most enigmatic characteristics—her strange behavior, the absence of family, and her lack of name—emerged in an impromptu *emanokwana* session. In these sessions, Sonenekwiñaji interact with the *emanokwana*, the spirits of the dead who visit (*anikwa'ani*) from Kweijana, the "river" and land of the dead, through the medium of the *eyamikekwa* (shaman). *Emanokwana*, like *deja*, represent a type of otherness that is spatially and temporally distant: whereas *deja* live in the capital city, *emanokwana* live in Kweijana, the place where most dead relatives live and thrive in a variety of increasingly large towns and villages. Sonenekwiñaji view Kweijana as similar to a neighboring community except that this city and its peoples are

located and dwell within a cross reality. Like Sonenekwiñaji, *emanokwana* also craft their urbanity as desired. While in theory they can choose to wield extensive control over all forms of technology, their true mastery is over all social and environmental relationships between humans and nonhumans across land, sky, and water. Kweijana is a city because of its population density and Indigenous infrastructure, and while it has the power to incorporate Western goods, *emanokwana* choose to keep their city *Ese Eja nee nee* (truly Ese Eja). Unlike Achuar (Taylor 1993), Piaroa (Overing 1993), and Araweté (Viveiros de Castro 1992), whose "dead" have patterns of social organization that differ from those of the living, the social organization and lives of Ese Eja *emanokwana* mirror those of living Ese Eja. *Emanokwana* continue to have children, plant swiddens, cultivate plantains, hunt and fish, form new connections, and introduce new characters, heroes, and adversaries into their afterlives.[10] They mirror Ese Eja even in their antagonistic relationships toward neighboring and distant communities of *deja emanokwana*. These *deja*, referred to with Ese Eja nicknames, are said to pose a risk at *emanokwana* ceremonies, where they sometimes try to trap the *eyamikekwa* inside the portal between the living and the dead. Similarly, *deja* who are visiting the community can make *emanokwana* ceremonies unviable through their use of light and the excessive noise that they make, which frighten off *emanokwana* (Peluso 2003, 2021).

*Emanokwana* continually and indirectly affect everyday life through their nonvisible actions. When individuals die, their *eshawa* (personhood, power) makes its way to Kweijana via a road laden with many obstacles.[11] Through *emanokwana* ceremonies, it has been revealed that once the *eshawa* makes a safe crossing it maintains a life similar to that of the living except that it has regained its capacities for transformation, unlike Ese Eja mortals, who can mostly only reside in one place at one time. In Kweijana, one's *eshawa* is now an *emanokwana*, and as *emanokwana*, individuals continue to live, reproduce, and die, but at an accelerated rate (*japanakiani*).[12] Throughout these transformations, personhood never ceases as a state of being, although the type of being a person is does change as they become an *emanokwana*. Despite potentially having multiple future deaths, *emanokwana* retain the identities they acquired in mortal life, including their maleness or femaleness.

The evening that we gathered to inquire about the *deja* girl, the *eyamikekwa* Shaijaimé arrived for this impromptu *emanokwana* ceremony. The ceremony was also being held to cure several small children who had become

ill with diarrhea and fever during their trip to the city. We sat on the ground by Shaijaimé's house waiting as the old and frail shaman put on his worn-out bark cloth dress (*daki'nei*) and his battered feather headband/crown (*bopa*) and walked down the embankment toward the forested floodplain amid the moonless night. There, we were told, he enters a hole in the ground, a portal to both the underworld and the overworld, where the *emanokwana* are waiting to visit the community. Shaijaimé's wife, Hewa, had prepared a pot of fermented sour-plantain beer (*epoi'sese*) to offer to the *emanokwana* when they arrived.[13] We waited for the emergence of the first *emanokwana* into our world. Shaijaimé had been gone for about fifteen minutes, and the children were restless. Finally, the first *emanokwana* approached, having emerged from the portal in the ground using the *eyamikekwa*'s body as his avatar.[14] We could hear him as he rustled through the surrounding forest making his presence known. Tewi, Shaijaimé's son, signaled to the *emanokwana* where we were sitting so that he could come toward us. Tewi asked the *emanokwana* to reveal his identity. However, *emanokwana* do not say their names up front. After a series of clues, someone guessed who it was.

After several different *emanokwana* had visited and finished curing the children, one of our neighbors, Bewa, directly addressed the matter of the mysterious girl with Kwashi, an *emanokwana* and the spirit sibling (*ekwe'doe*) of her husband (also named Kwashi).[15] Waiting until after the *emanokwana* Kwashi had finished telling us the good places to go hunting and cured two of Kwashi and Bewa's sick grandchildren, Bewa began to question him:

**BEWA**: Who was this girl that we met in Maldonado?
**KWASHI**: This girl was the daughter of Dabicho.
**BEWA**: So then, the girl was the daughter of *deja* people?
**KWASHI**: No, she was not the *deja*'s. Instead, she was of theirs! [meaning the *emanokwana*]. This girl's name is Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee.
**BEWA**: Oh! For this reason, then, when they asked her if she had or didn't have a mother, this is why she answered that she had neither a mother nor a father!
**KWASHI**: She was Dabicho's *ebacuase* [adopted daughter].
**SHASHA**: This girl was very charismatic!
**TOBOCO**: This girl had [skin] fungus. She was uncared for!
**KWASHI**: So that Dabicho could become good with you, you had to raise this girl. And because you did not raise/adopt her, he is going

to continue to mess with your lives! (*With these last words the* emanokwana *began to leave.*)

**BEWA** (*calling out after him*): Take good care of yourself, and if you care to, do kill some illnesses for our children!

What the *emanokwana* Kwashi revealed was surprising to everyone. This mysterious girl from the regional capital turned out to be an *emanokwana* herself—a daughter of the dead! She was also related to Sonenekwiñaji, being the daughter of their deceased relative Dabicho. And like all Ese Eja, of course, she had a name: Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee (Black-Eyed River Turtle). Yet despite her request to return with them to Sonene, Sonenekwiñaji had failed to take her home to live among kin.

## A Bridge Between Cities

Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee was a living portal between the visible and invisible cities of cross realities, an ultimate hybrid of beings, bodies, and places. She was Ese Eja, *deja*, mortal, and *emanokwana*. She had claims to all three settlements—Puerto Maldonado, Sonene, and Kweijana—and as an *emanokwana* she was "other" to Ese Eja and to *deja*. Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee embodies several reversals that characterize Ese Eja social alterity, as well as the power relations characteristic of particular places, and yet as an *emanokwana* she was simultaneously detached from *deja* and Ese Eja worlds. The inconsistencies of her position crowned her with a magical aura while simultaneously signaling that something was not quite right. Sapahewa, in retrospect, knowingly told me, "I took a very good look at her—her eyes were red!!!"

Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee was the daughter of the infamous Dabicho, a legendary troublemaker in both the mortal and the nonvisible worlds. Kwashi explained that if Sonenekwiñaji had agreed to "adopt and raise" Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee by respecting her desire to return to the community to live with them, then Dabicho would have shown his appreciation toward his mortal relatives by quelling all the misery and suffering that he consistently inflicts on them. Sonenekwiñaji were quite excited that Dabicho, the "modern" *emanokwana*, was discovered to be behind this puzzling encounter. Their relationships with Dabicho have long been ambiguous and complex. Dabicho is the deceased son of Kwashi and Bewa. Although he appeared normal at birth, his head allegedly became enlarged soon after, and he died of "a swollen head"

as a newborn. Bewa once mentioned that she thought Dabicho might have suffered a head injury when her daughter Shaka accidentally stepped on him.[16] Upon his death, Dabicho grew rapidly in Kweijana, and, as is known through contact with the *emanokwana*, he now has a large family with several children, and they have formed a powerful group in the densely populated Kweijana.

Dabicho is considered to be particularly bad (Sp. *malo*) and mischievous, yet he is also seen as heroic as his deeds are far reaching, and he impressively wreaks havoc in non–Ese Eja worlds. *Emanokwana* also complain about their ongoing struggles with Dabicho as they strive to protect their living relatives. Indeed, individuals often ask *emanokwana* about Dabicho's whereabouts as a way of gauging or anticipating difficulties. Being that Dabicho is Ese Eja and *emanokwana*, his desires expand beyond his home, town, and region, and indeed into more distant urban parts of the world, to which some Ese Eja may sporadically escape for safety from the sometimes overwhelming intimacy and lack of anonymity that is a phenomenon of life within villages (Peluso 2015b). Allegedly, no city is off limits for Dabicho. For instance, he is blamed for many illnesses and misfortunes that occur not just in Sonene but in the rest of the country, affecting Ese Eja and *deja* all over Peru. Yet like other powerful characters, Dabicho is also heroic. He is blamed, for instance, for natural and unnatural disasters, including crimes, airplane crashes, and fires as far away as Lima, the national capital.

Similar to Watunna creation narratives, Ese Eja stories about how nonvisible Ese Eja affect modern and urban landscapes reveal an ambivalent control over the surrounding world. The wielding of Western technology forms part of a widely spread practice whereby Indigenous origin stories and creation narratives (Civrieux [1970] 1997), discussions of heroic exemplars (Peluso 2014), hallucinatory visions (Arévalo Varela 1986), and nonhallucinogenic visions of healing or diagnosis and dreams (Peluso 2003, 2004b, 2021) meaningfully incorporate and reinterpret technology into local geographies (Guss 1989). Indigenous recastings of technology speak to power through Indigenous agency, whereby they narrate their own histories and realities toward their own self-determination. I will return to this point when I discuss the manner in which power relations are also removed from their expected zones in the story about Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee.

Tales of Dabicho also allude to Ese Eja ancestral "wildness," a time in which people were more fluidly interchangeable between animals and spir-

its than they are today, and social conduct was unruly. Yet these tales also intimate present ongoing village and rural-urban struggles. It does not slip my notice that Dabicho is the child gone wrong of an extremely conflictual household. Dabicho is from a family that represents a history of conflict but also one of resistance. As an *emanokwana*, he is part of the extended Washapa family, one of the largest households in Sonene, headed by Kwashi and Bewa. The Washapas moved to Sonene from a rival Ese Eja community, and they are often blamed for much of the discord in Sonene. They are Na'tewekwiñaje (people from Na'tewe), an Ese Eja group from the Madidi River and one of the last in Peru to have been drawn into a sedentary lifestyle. Even though the *emanokwana* Kwashi reveals that Dabicho is the manipulator behind the strange encounter in Puerto Maldonado, ultimately it is the *eyamikekwa* (who is not a Washapa) as the medium for Kwashi (who is a Washapa) that places Dabicho at center stage of this drama. The *eyamikekwa* consistently reinforces the idea that Dabicho reflects not only what is wrong with the world at large but also what is wrong in the community. Everyone, including the Washapa family, seems to embrace this representation of Dabicho. Interestingly, as strict attendants and participants of all *emanokwana* ceremonies, the Washapas are the first to claim how "bad" Dabicho is; they often ponder over why he is so awful, his accidental premature death being cited as the only possible cause. Yet according to many elders, Kwashi and Bewa cannot control their own children. Dabicho personifies their own domestic anarchy. So, then, why do the Washapas accept the *eyamikekwa*'s claim that a Washapa is the source of much adversity?

On the one hand, images of insubordination and hostility attributed to the Washapas are highly valued, especially when they can be claimed and reframed in the guise of an Ese Eja cultural hero such as Dabicho, thus ensuring that he belongs to all Ese Eja. Indeed, there are moments when Dabicho is metaphorically at the forefront of struggles between Ese Eja and *deja*, and he represents a source of pride for many individuals, such as when he released the fastened boats of encroaching *deja* when the river rose. On the other hand, Washapas feel a strong sense of pride in the idea that Dabicho is one of "theirs," not just an Ese Eja but a Washapa. Just as one may speculate that part of the shaman's message is, "You Washapas are at the root of so many problems!" one can also speculate that their response might be, "That's right. That's what happens when you mess with us!" As awful a reputation as Dabicho has, in the end, he is an Ese Eja creation. Yes, he can create problems at

home, but ultimately he is an Ese Eja person with a powerful ability to reach out into the larger world.

Dabicho may also in some ways express the family's feelings of guilt toward the death of their child through negligence. Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee's appearance represented the opportunity to do it right, to raise a child properly, unlike what happened with Dabicho. It did not go unnoticed, retrospectively, that in the regional capital, Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee first approached her own family. Iba', the man who first spotted Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee in the marketplace, is Dabicho's *ewape* (brother-in-law, his sister's husband). Following the ceremony, Bewa noticed in hindsight that Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee clung to Kwashi (Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee's father's father), and she remarked: "This girl only liked Kwashi, she liked only him! She wanted to stay with him all the time because she is his granddaughter! And afterward in the night she would go crawling to Shaka's mosquito net!" Shaka is the girl's aunt (her father's sister), the sister who allegedly squashed her father's, Dabicho's, head.

In sum, the *emanokwana* had elucidated that when Dabicho, neglected as a newborn and now troublesome as an *emanokwana*, sent Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee, he was sending his most precious gift, his child. There is nothing more important to Ese Eja than their children (Peluso 2015a). Some say that an adopted child is even more loved than a birth child because it was sought after. When Ese Eja individuals give their child to their parents to raise, it is, in part, a reciprocal gesture of recognition and appreciation for their own upbringing (Peluso 2003). The generosity inherent in such an offer is highly praised, and its rejection is socially frowned on. The girl uniting the three cities—the urban, the rural, the dead—was denounced for her uncanny desire to connect these spaces, showing reality for what it actually is and solidifying relatedness through the sharing of spaces. Somehow Ese Eja ignored the possibility of challenging the familiar spatialization of social relationships and hierarchies while still upholding their unique claims to be able to do so.

## Unified Cityscapes

The choice of Sonenekwiñaji to ignore the mysterious girl's wishes is a powerful metaphor for the dangers of transgression that life across multiple kinds of dwelling spaces entails; even the *emanokwana* avoid such trespasses, since in Kweijana they keep their cities separate from those of *deja*.[17] Although taking the child to the *guardia* may have played out an inversion of their social

position within the locale of the regional city, this action did not correspond to Sonenekwiñaji's overarching awareness that something was exceptionally strange and peculiar about the *deja* girl. Ese Eja actions made sense according to the details, but the larger framework remained problematic for them. These unsettling feelings ultimately led them to consult the *emanokwana* as they are seen as knowledgeable about, and sometimes responsible for, any unusual events. By consulting the *emanokwana*, Sonenekwiñaji probed their own hasty decision to turn the child over to the police. They understood that local police, like their uninformed selves, were not in a position to see the situation for what it really was. This is not to say that the state system is inefficient, just that it is not *sufficient*. Had delivering this girl to the police adequately addressed the odd urban social reversals that made Sonenekwiñaji so apprehensive, then the *emanokwana* might not have been consulted.

Yet the decision to take the girl to the police affirmed the *guardia*'s position as local state authorities and agents of power and surveillance. It is the state's obscure presence that brings Ese Eja to Puerto Maldonado for the municipal elections in the first place, outfitting them with cash and the incentives of festivities. It is precisely during this anomalous period of grace—in which their presence in the regional capital was sanctioned by the invitation they received from the victorious mayor of the city—that the girl was handed over to state representatives. In retrospect, this resonates with Michel Foucault's (1977) observation that the gatekeeper of the panopticon does not actually have to be *present* in the tower for the prisoners to remain inside. The *guardia* did not actually have to regulate Ese Eja behavior and free will across geographic spaces. Their choice unknowingly favored the state's visible control over that of the *emanokwana*.

While the actions of Sonenekwiñaji reflected city methods, when they sought an explanation for the appearance of the girl, they approached the *emanokwana*. This is because in the larger picture *emanokwana* must always be reckoned with, as it is the cross reality of the nonvisible world that animates what is visible in daily life. In other words, these spaces of varying urbanity are part of a larger whole, a fact that, as far as Ese Eja are concerned, *deja* simply do not understand. The *emanokwana* Kwashi confirmed the women's suspicion that there was more to the *deja* child than met the eye. The *emanokwana* did not judge people's decision not to raise Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee; they simply added a new dimension to the dynamics of Ese Eja social relations, which inevitably include these connected cross realities. It was

Sonenekwiñaji themselves who interpreted the *emanokwana*'s words and critiqued their own choices and behavior. After the identity of Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee became known to them, their conversations and curiosity continued for weeks. Yet while there was still excitement in their exchanges, they now also expressed sadness about their lost opportunity.

Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee's appearance in Puerto Maldonado was an unprecedented way of linking the cities of Ese Eja, *deja*, and *emanokwana*, as well as of the living and the dead. Although the worlds of the dead and the living are also linked by a system of relatedness that extends into both realities, it is rare—apart from the appearance of *emanokwana* via the medium of the *eyamikekwa* during *epoi'sese* and *shashapoi'* ceremonies—for *emanokwana* to appear in visible human form. An exception is through the personification of certain animals, particularly large packs of *ño* (white-lipped peccaries), which are hunted communally by Ese Eja. On these occasions, *ño* are believed to be transformed *emanokwana* who will once again return to their *emanokwana* state. Ese Eja eat their dead relatives, personified by *ño*, with gratitude, an act that symbolizes reciprocity and exchange.[18] The intimate acts of conversing, sleeping, and eating with Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee provided social and spiritual nourishment—and began a process of kin-making (Vilaça 2002) that only in retrospect can be seen as a remaking of kin. Undoubtedly, the possibility of raising an *emanokwana* in the world of the living rather than the more typical scenario—of an Ese Eja going to live in an animal underworld or eventually reaching the destined land of Kweijana—certainly signifies a novel and intimate exchange between the living and the dead across a larger landscape of connected spaces. Just as the coming of *ño* is a voluntary gift on behalf of the *emanokwana* benefactor from Kweijana to the community, so was the appearance of Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee in the capital city a voluntary precious gift from Dabicho.

## Conclusion

Indigenous Amazonian spaces span a rich geographic landscape, with varying degrees of urbanity that connect cross realities: from urban imaginaries that begin in the mind to those that constitute the core canon of creation stories and others that transform villages and cityscapes through exchanges. These deep histories reflect times of undifferentiation between humans and nonhuman Others, as well as their potential for multiplicity and transforma-

tion alongside possible imaginaries of pre-Columbian societies (Gow 1994), centuries of Indigenous mobility and migration (Alexiades 2009), and more recent dislocation through colonization, missionization, dispossession, and marginalization. Embedded in these cities are social hierarchies vis-à-vis the larger world that privilege particular people, such as Ese Eja in Sonene, *deja* in Puerto Maldonado, and *emanokwana* in Kweijana. Together, these cities are part of more global geographic spaces to which Ese Eja see themselves as belonging, in particular those of Peru, Bolivia, and Amazonia. Within these broader landscapes social differences become more pronounced, even when *emanokwana* such as Dabicho prove themselves to be powerful forces.

The unusual emergence of Dabicho and Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee from the invisible city of Kweijana can be seen as a form of ethnogenesis, as Ese Eja mark territories that form part of their histories while creating a more unified ethnic consciousness across such spaces. This suggestion builds on studies of how personhood and the making of the self and the body are forms of ethnogenesis (Santos-Granero 2009), alongside the idea that the refashioning of Amazonian oral narratives is also an ethnogenetic process (Hill 2009). With cities representing spaces in which people can navigate new ways of being—for example, new lifestyles, dressing and eating choices, and kinds of space (Santos-Granero 2009; Peluso 2015b)—then it should follow that moving between cities allows new possibilities for transformation. We are already aware of how lowland South American beings and bodies are processualy made, as well as how proximity and residence create people and their potential for unity. As with sociality, commensality, and consubstantiality, sharing cities is a way of becoming, maintaining, or transforming people and kin. Yet the way that Ese Eja recount stories about encounters with Dabicho and Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee goes further than rehistoricizing or remaking Ese Eja identity (Hill 2009, 25–26). The ongoing privileging of meeting kin through portals between cross realities is a cumulative and ardent force of ethnogenesis that links urban imaginaries by traversing local and broad ontological and geographic Amazonian spaces.

Here, I have recounted a particular and unusual meeting point between three metropoles with three distinct urban imaginaries: the Indigenous community where urbanity begins and is imagined, the regional capital as the popular urban setting, and the land of the dead where urbanity has long been actualized in Ese Eja fashion. Such meeting points and their potential for conflict and rapprochement between simultaneous Amazonian cross re-

alities can be glimpsed or accessed in many states of being, as mentioned previously, such as through dreams, hunts, illness, solitariness, and rituals. What these states have in common is a sense of vulnerability and the ability to expose people and beings for who they really are. Meeting places between different worlds reflect the collapse of binaries. The encounter with the *deja* girl brought into focus the destabilizing of Ese Eja, *deja*, and *emanokwana* identities and their locales. Questions of self and other, the dead and the living, as embodied in this strange *deja* child challenged Sonenekwiñaji's essentialist assumptions about identities and their roles in the social and economic aspects of everyday life, particularly as played out in Puerto Maldonado, which is quintessentially *deja* territory. The shifting and reversing of conceptual political spaces such as police/victim, abundance/starvation, and margin/center as highlighted by the emergence of the daughter of the dead gives emphasis to transforming vertical and horizontal power relations between Ese Eja, *deja*, and *emanokwana* across different types of spaces. Just as processes and conditions of hybridity can be a threat to colonial and cultural authority (Bhabha 1985), Ese Eja found this hodgepodge of twisted oblique referents to both subvert and uphold their own typical understandings of power relations and identity as they relate to place. My analysis of why they found this encounter so unsettling concerns histories and issues of political economy, postcolonialism, and the view of Amazonia as a site for perennial frontiers between the state and the capital in its various guises.

The appearance of Kwi'ao'coja'ta'ee marked a unique chance for rapprochement between the worlds of the dead and the living and the worlds of *deja* and Ese Eja, but Sonenekwiñaji missed it. Kwapiso, a nonrelative, regretfully remarked, "I was going to raise this girl—but since Tewi took her to the *guardia* then I couldn't. It was too late." Yes, Sonenekwiñaji might have finally resolved their long-standing antagonism with Dabicho and maybe with the cosmos at large, and perhaps they have not submitted to or enacted state power in the capital. But on the other hand, who wants to live with an *emanokwana*, the daughter of the dead, even if she does have a name after all? As I write these last words and wonder how I can convey these experiences while respecting the idea that this girl may have indeed come from the land of the dead as my Ese Eja companions claimed, a large bird suddenly crashes against the window behind the computer screen that I am facing. Yes, every now and then these passages open up between realities, and for better or for worse one is at a loss of what to make of them.

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## Notes

1. The Ese Eja language belongs to the Tacana language family, part of the Macro-Panoan group of languages of western Amazonia.
2. My doctoral fieldwork (1993–96) was supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright Institute of International Education, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Association for Women in Science. The research for this article builds on over sixty months of multisited fieldwork among Ese Eja communities, which began before and has continued since my doctoral research.
3. While this account takes place in 1995, its relevance holds as of 2022 as these worlds continue to overlap. Sonene, Puerto Maldonado, and Kweijana have all undergone transformations in the intervening years. The population of Sonene is lower due to deaths among the older population and a move by two large families to another community, but it is currently on the rise. Puerto Maldonado's population has more than doubled, but its territory has also greatly expanded. The transoceanic highway has been completed. The capital's informal economy has grown (Peluso 2018), alongside prostitution and sex trafficking (Goldstein 2014), drug trafficking, gold mining (Wagner 2021), and associated mercury poisoning (Ashe 2012). While these changes have shaped current discussions of Indigenous experiences of urbanization in Puerto Maldonado, Sonene Ese Eja urban residences continue to be temporary (Peluso 2015a). According to Ese Eja, Kweijana has grown exponentially from what was already a densely populated state. This is because the dead regenerate rapidly and continue to have children.
4. *Deja* is an Ese Eja label of social alterity, referring to individuals and groups who are perceived by Ese Eja to have greater contact with, dependence on, and affiliation with markets and external agents. When using Spanish they say *mestizo*, which reflects the general usage of the term *deja*, although *deja* can also imply any type of outsider (Alexiades 1999; Peluso 2003).
5. Iñapaere people live in voluntary isolation; Ese Eja claim to have had some interactions with them. They are also referred to as *los calatos* (the naked ones).

6. When in Puerto Maldonado, if I want to find an Ese Eja person or group of people, I have learned precisely where to look, in terms of both actual locations and routes.
7. *Niñé* is a culture-bound illness that causes madness or insanity. Sometimes it can be brought on by drunkenness. It is often used as a diagnosis for odd behavior.
8. *Indigenous cosmopolitanism* is a term coined by Thomas Biolsi (2005, 249), which he uses to imply "that [American] Indians are at least as at home in cities, universities, the mass media, and so on, as they are on reservations." I discuss Ese Eja Indigenous cosmopolitanism elsewhere (Peluso 2015a).
9. Ese Eja, like other Indigenous populations in the region, refer to *deja*, non-Indigenous people, as *gente blanca* or mestizos. This reference has nothing to do with skin color, as "white people" can be darker than Ese Eja.
10. Anne Christine Taylor (1993) says that the Achuar do not make heroes of the dead. I think it is remarkable that Ese Eja have not only produced heroes (such as Shajaó) in their histories but also continue to create new ones (such as Dabicho) in the world of the dead (Peluso 2014). Ese Eja also controvert Taylor's (1993) claim that lowland Amerindians work diligently to forget the dead. This may be true upon the immediate death of an individual, but ties are soon re-established through *emanokwana* ceremonies. Indeed, Beth Conklin (2001) argues that the dead and living can only approach each other once they have become reconciled to their new worlds.
11. Not all individuals go to Kweijana upon death, a topic beyond the scope of this chapter (see Peluso 2003).
12. *Japanakiani* is a state of rapid growth, birth, and regeneration. For instance, an Ese Eja friend in Portachuelo, Bolivia, described how her recently deceased infant sister was now at least my age only months after her death. On another occasion a woman spoke to me about her husband, who had died thirty years earlier: "Oh, he has remarried and died again so many times. He has so many children now and he has had so many other wives. He doesn't think of me anymore."
13. *Epoi'sese* is a casual form of a much more elaborate ceremony (*shashapoi'*) designed to engage more fully with *emanokwana* and nonhuman Others.
14. Bernd Brabec de Mori (2012, 86) refers to acts where the spirits speak through a shaman's body and his voice becomes altered in communicating their voices as "voice masking."
15. An *ekwe'doe* or *ekwedoyase* is one's own mirror-image soul brother or sister in Kweijana. The prefix *ekwe-* is the possessive personal pronoun "my." As one friend clarified, "My *ekwedoyase* is really me, she is like me, it is the same as me, but it is also different."
16. Similar accidents have occurred among siblings and are usually not judged or reprimanded, despite the sadness felt by the family.

17. Unlike Marshall Berman's (1982, 24) proposition that "modernity is either embraced with a blind and uncritical enthusiasm or else condemned with a neo-Olympian remoteness and contempt," Ese Eja are quite ambivalent about it.
18. See Robert A. Brightman (1993) for an excellent discussion on how Cree prefer to—morally, aesthetically, and strategically—view animals as benefactors rather than as opponents.

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