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Living dead ancestors: White-lipped peccaries and alternative posthuman Amazonian histories

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ABSTRACT

Ese Eja see white-lipped peccaries (*ño'*), *as* their temporarily transformed *emanokuana,* deceased relatives. Through inter-relationships with the peccaries, we witness how Amazonians hold relational perspectives of the world that resonate with contemporary critical posthumanist philosophy and move away from the social boundaries of androcentrism in the past, present and future.

KEYWORDS

White-lipped peccaries; posthumanism; abundance; scarcity; commensality; conviviality;

Introduction

Alternative histories of social and ecological relationships, relatedness, economics, gender and ultimately personhood can be told by understanding the bonds that Ese Eja sustain between themselves and the white-lipped peccaries[1]. Such connections are experienced as passaging and transcending cross-realities, life and death, while also revealing important ideas of abundance, scarcity, permanence, sustainability, regeneration, multiplicity, permeability and conviviality. Links between different worlds often happen through the personification of *ño'*, the white-lipped peccaries who travel in herds and whom Ese Eja at times, hunt communally. On these occasions, *ño* are believed to be temporarily transformed *emanokuana,* deceased relatives.[2] In examining how Ese Eja experience their multiple relationships to white-lipped peccaries, both as individuals and socially, I engage with how Amazonians talk about, experience and position themselves in their accounts of the past, present and future. Lastly, I argue that through the stories of the peccaries, we can come to understand how Amazonians hold relational perspectives of the world—views that resonate with contemporary critical posthumanist philosophy and move away from the social boundaries of androcentrism.

White-lipped peccaries: past, present, future

> *Four peccaries have been shot […] their bodies cut in half are carried by the men, who place them on the front of their house. There, the four bodies are reassembled awaiting the visit of*

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> *the* eyámikekua *('shaman'). We follow the old and frail* eyámikekua *as he enthusiastically approaches each of the corpses, announcing 'anikua-ani … eya Shaijame … ae'bajani' ('I am visiting* [you]. *I am* Shaijame*, who are you?'). He looks down at the body of the female peccary and her disembodied fetus before him and examines it,' Oh, you are* Ponasisi *from Palma Real … and here is your daughter* Basha!' *He proceeds to visit each of the peccaries and addresses them as known persons, giving them news about how their families and communities are. When he reaches the last peccary he exclaims: 'Now we are going to eat!'* The surrounding children rejoice! Following the eyámikekua's *visit, each hunter goes off with his respective half of the ño'. Ño' are the dead ancestors coming back to earth to visit and nourish the living … .* (Fieldnotes, Peluso, January 1996)

Earlier that day a wave of excitement had rippled across the community when two young Ese Eja *Sonenekuiñaji*[3] men approached the community of Sonene on the border between Peru and Bolivia to announce that ' … the peccaries have arrived [are visiting]!'.[4] They had heard the unmistakable loud sound of peccaries clacking their teeth—an alarm and warning sign—echoing through the forest. Upon hearing this, people sprang into action in a way that we had not previously witnessed – even after a successful hunting trip. Several men gathered their guns and disappeared into the forest while the women began organizing their stocks of rice and plantains as well as other special ingredients—garlic, spices and flour—hidden away for special occasions. We were in full preparation, and one could feel a level of certainty that the men would return with the much-anticipated peccaries. The jovial atmosphere was similar to how it felt when we were preparing for a large celebration party and reminded me of the kind of anticipation and excitement that accompanied certain ritual feasts, such as the e*shashapoi*, when dead and living humans and others were invited to partake in the drinking of raw plantain mush.[5] Old and young bustled around and talked excitedly as they prepared for the return of the peccaries. When, four hours later, the men emerged with several peccary carcasses from the forest, the women were ready.

Before the animals were butchered, and as the opening vignette illustrates, it was necessary for the individual ancestors embodied in the peccary carcasses to be properly identified, a task that can only be performed by the *eyámikekua*, who alone can 'see' beyond the visible exteriority of the animal bodies and recognize the Ese Eja ancestor in question. We followed the *eyámikekua* as he visited the household of each successful hunter, addressing each peccary (ño') and naming the ancestor in a distinct, jovial manner.[6] Relatives, and especially children, asked questions about them, particularly if they had not heard of that particular ancestor before. The joyful and festive atmosphere that preceded the arrival of the peccaries lingered, with people crowding around the body of the peccary, laughing and talking loudly and with much animation. The children then sat around, prodding, examining and playing with the animal corpses until the butchering began, the first of several moments that suggest a transition from visiting ancestors to food. 'The peccaries decided to visit us!'

After the peccary corpses were butchered, everyone retreated to cook and eat in their respective extended households, with the sound of gleeful chatter reverberating throughout the community. I have fond memories of this long and eventful day in which dead ancestors had come to visit in the form of peccaries, leaving the bodies behind as gifts of meat while they returned to resume their ordinary lives as *emanokuana* in *Kueihana* ('the river of the deceased'), the world of the dead.[7] The 'visit' of the peccaries to the

community signalled a brief reunification between Ese Eja ancestors with their mortal human relatives that brought joy for days to come.[8] As was typically exclaimed, 'The ancestors continue to provide for the living! They had not forgotten us!' While peccaries continue to occasionally visit Sonene, the possibility of recognizing its full social significance through the recognition of the ancestors and names involved ended with the death of Shaijame in 2006, and with it an important space for extending relations with the dead and the past into the world of the present and the living. Today, while there is speculation about what particular animal might embody an ancestor (Peluso 2023a), there is a much more ambiguous or vague sense of the past in terms of specifics while the general sense remains. During the rest of this article, however, I will re-examine that event and consider some general questions relating to Ese Eja notions of history, death, animal-human relatedness and interactions and how this resonates with posthumanism more generally.

Posthumanism in Amazonia: ancestor-animal-more than human

Posthumanism is a broad philosophical perspective that challenges notions of human exceptionalism and hierarchical thinking that are deeply embedded within Western thought. Following (Haraway 1991, 19, 1997) such a move reflects and responds to a series of 'boundary breakdowns' within the ontological and epistemological edifice of modernity and its constitutive binaries, including human-animal, living-non-living, physical-non-physical, and more generally and fundamentally, nature-culture. Posthumanism offers a relational perspective of the world (see, for instance, Barad 2007, 139, 352), and, indeed, as Ferrando (2019, 148–157) has pointed out, it is in and of itself a form of perspectivism. Posthumanism emphasizes the interconnections between humans, non-humans, and the environment. It recognizes that humans are not sole actors in shaping the world and that other entities or agents, such as animals, plants, technology, and ecosystems, also play significant roles. As Wolfe (2009) has noted, posthumanism recognizes humanity as one of many beings and forms of life and on that basis rejects anthropocentric dominance. When it comes to Amazonia, a region of great ecological variation and cultural significance, relational ontological views that recognize that the existence of autonomous non-human agencies precede and resonate with a posthumanism approach offering many insights into a lived philosophy that is part of a broader consideration of interconnections between humans and others that define reality beyond human-centric narratives and where boundaries between human and non-human are increasingly blurred. In sum, Amazonian relational ontologies and posthumanism critique the limitations of humanist perspectives and advocate for a more inclusive understanding of life and reality.

The ontological viewpoints of many Indigenous and local Amazonians recognize living (as well as some seemingly non-living) beings as having distinct personhood and perspectives (Viveiros de Castro 1998) that form part of a larger 'ecology of selves' (Kohn 2013); a non-anthropocentric reality that places the individual in a continual field of shifting relationships. Understanding the past, present and future cannot be understood without considering non-human agencies. In acknowledging multi-natural relationships as the common playing field for sociality, I recognize socio-historical particularities as key frameworks for shaping their emergence (Peluso 2023b). Such relationships render

behaviours of respect and reverence as well as conviviality and antagonism towards non-humans as warranted by shifting contexts and particularities.

There is an abundance of Lowland South American ethnographic literature that conveys perceptions that resound with a posthumanist past, present and future. This expansive body of literature stretches from Tierra del Fuego (Chapman 1982) to Panama (Fortis 2010), forming part of the ample discussions on non-differentiation of animals and humans, game mastery, ownership and guardians, and occurrences of actual or potential transformation (Århem 1996; Fausto 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Londoño Sulkin 2005, 2017; Rosengren 2015; Santos-Granero 2012; Taylor 1996; Vilaça 2005). While some scholars, such as Ramos (2012, 483), are concerned that perspectival personhood can be utilized as an essentialized generalization that 'flattens down' Indigenous outlooks, what is relevant is that the degree of potency and importance of perspectival agency and intentionality varies tremendously among, within, and in-between individuals and collectives, and also does not always matter or carry weight in one's decision-making, interpretation or actions depending on time, place and context (for Ese Eja see, e.g., Peluso 2003a, 2004a, 2007, 2023a). In other words, a perspectival outlook may be apparent and/or expressed in certain moments, but not in others and in that sense is situated and contingent in its variable states of dormancy, awareness or action. It is as much modern and political as it is a set of philosophies that build upon former states of being and the past. Here, having introduced the complexity of Ese Eja relationships with white-lipped peccaries as ancestors, I hope to expand ideas of more-than-human existence that predates yet forms a posthumanist critique to contemplate various stages of existence – unborn, mortals, dead ancestors and peccaries – that address ideas about the past, present and future.

Personhood, in its various manifestations, underlies all corporal incarnations of *Sonene-kuiñaji* – as mortals, as *eyámikekua* (healer), as *emanokuana* (deceased relatives) and as white-lipped peccaries. Understanding these possibilities entails paying close attention to the Ese Eja concept of *eshawa*, the invisible, intangible and inalienable aspect of all beings (Alexiades 1999; Peluso 2003a, 2004a, 2007, 2021). *Eshawa* as personhood, with its ensuing sociality, is consistent with 'multi-natural perspectivism' (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 1996, 1998), whereby intentionality and consciousness form the multiple subjects of humans, animals and non-visible others, and their ability to see each other differently. Concomitantly, multiplicity – the fluidity of human identity and the permeability between different realities – and transformation – the ability to change between various singular and plural forms – are prominent themes in Ese Eja understandings of reality (Peluso 2003a, 2021). Seeing white-lipped peccaries as people and specifically as *emanokuana* draws upon such internalized and practiced views, and offers a unique opportunity to explore the coexistence, 'contradiction' and possibilities of transformation between cross-realities.

Ese Eja relationships with animals are materially and semiotically complex, variable and diverse. Like other Lowland South American ethnic groups (Århem 1996; Lima 1999; Londoño Sulkin 2017; Viveiros de Castro 1996) and North American Indigenous peoples (Brightman 1993; Nadasdy 2007), Ese Eja tell of a time when their ancestors were undifferentiated from animals (Alexiades 1999; Burr 1997; Lepri 2003; Peluso 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2007, 2021). Said differently, what humans share with non-human animals is their humanity, not their animality (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 472). Furthermore, this interconnection

between Ese Eja and non-human others exists before one's birth, specifically through the dreams that their parents have about animals and the subsequent names that are bestowed upon them (Peluso and Boster 2002; Peluso 2004a, 2007, 2015, Beckerman et al., 2017) as well as through hunting, solitary activities, prophetic dreams, healing and ingestion of the hallucinogenic ayahuasca brew (Peluso 2004a). Most of the powerful non-visible beings are indeed animals/people, such as *Edósikiana*, an all-powerful and temperamental supreme forest being who embodies a continuous loop of the life/death cycle by bringing illness, but who also serves as the crucial link with healing.[9] It is accurate to say that there are times when an animal can be treated as just an animal and other moments when they are Ese Eja and/or non-human others. It is precisely in these shifting contexts – due to an extensive set of variables – that a person attentively reads such an intricate landscape and responds accordingly (Peluso 2004a, 2023a).

While many, if not most, animals (and indeed some plants) are persons in the sense that they share a common origin and are endowed with human-like interiorities (*eshawa*), white-lipped peccaries are unique in that they are ancestors. That is, the contingency of their exteriority is explicitly related to the desire, wish or need that the deceased have to temporarily return to the living world, ostensibly to eat highly prized forest fruits, and also to visit their relatives. From a perspectival standpoint, therefore, the invisible interiority of the white-lipped peccary is not simply Ese Eja, but kin. The visit of herds of white-lipped peccaries thus reflects a crossroads of Ese Eja states of existence. Indeed, the worlds of the dead and the living are linked by a system of relatedness that overlaps their realities. When Ese Eja die, their *eshawa* (soul, personhood, power) makes its way to *Kueihana*, the world of the dead. After a long, perilous and hardship-ridden journey which can take years, the deceased become *emanokuana* and thereafter continue to live their lives in ways that mostly parallel those of living Ese Eja, hunting, fishing and cultivating their swiddens, except that their *eshawa* have now regained the powers that Ese Eja had in mythic times, *yawaho nei-nei* ('a long-long time ago'), including those of mutability and transformation into different bodily forms.[10]

In *Kueihana,* individuals continue to live, reproduce, and die, but at an accelerated rate in comparison to mortals (*japanakiani*).[11] Throughout these transformations, personhood never ceases as a state of being, although the type of being a person changes as they become an *emanokuana*. Despite potentially having multiple future deaths, *emanokuana* retain the identities they acquired in mortal life, including their biological sex. *Emanokuana* live, thrive and continue to have children, plant swiddens, cultivate plantains, hunt and fish, form new connections, and introduce new characters, heroes, and adversaries in their continued lives.[12] While in some ways *Kueihana* is a place of plenty and abundance, epitomized by the concept of *japanakiani*, in other ways it is impoverished. It lacks, for instance, several plants that inhabit the mortal world including, crucially, some highly sought-after forest fruits, for which the ancestors long and for which they return in the form of white-lipped peccaries. Unlike other indigenous groups such as 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 *emanokuana* mirror those of living Ese Eja to the extent that even the nature of individual and collective relationships while alive are extended into the afterlife and subtend the relations between the living and the dead.

While the emanokuana continue to live and die in Kueihana, certain connections and links are maintained between them and their living relatives and landscapes. Most commonly and directly, emanokuana return to the earth in the form of white-lipped peccaries, ño'. The primary reason and motivation for their return are reportedly to eat several forest fruits that are prized delicacies for the Ese Eja, including noi (Pseudolmedia laevis), and most notably the palm jajasíe (Astrocaryum murumuru), all of which ostensibly do not grow in Kueihana. Their ability to do so, however, is contingent on their being allowed to do so by the Edósikiana.[13] The emanokuana process of transformation into peccaries is extremely painful, as individuals are forced to pass through a narrow opening between the trunks of the palm pachichone[14], which are thoroughly covered with long hard spines. As soon as the trunks open up slightly, allowing the emanokuana to enter, the trunks close upon the hapless ancestor (much to the amusement of the narrator recounting the story and the audience listening to it), driving the spines into the body. This process of acquiring the peccary body resonates with creation narratives that speak of other transformations or acquisitions of animal forms of the past and is explicitly equated to an act of donning oneself with an item of clothing, similar to the traditionally worn cotton or bark cloth tunic (daki). In the event that the peccary is killed by a hunter, the eshawa – invisible to the hunter – returns unharmed to Kueihana, leaving behind the carcass, just as one might leave behind an item of clothing: indeed, such an act in and of itself constitutes a gift from the emanokuana and the Edósikiana to Ese Eja mortals, an act which is predicated upon and necessitates, in turn, proper forms of conduct by the hunter and Ese Eja, as well as reciprocal gifting through the epoi sese and eshashapoi rituals, which I examine in greater detail below.

Aside from their visible appearance as white-lipped peccaries, the dead ancestors can also, much more rarely, appear in other animals, or even human, forms.[15] *This does not mean, however, that the dead ancestors do not continuously act upon and affect worldly events, indeed, they often intercede and act on behalf of, in support of or against individual living Ese Eja, but always in ways that are, other than to the eyámikekua, invisible and unapparent to the living Ese Eja. Emanokuana can, for instance, either protect their kin and affines by killing kiyo (fever) with kuehi (thunder) or, conversely, they can send diseases like measles (wo'o) or colds (wishi) as punishment or revenge*. There are certain instances where *emanokuana* can show themselves as themselves, in human form, to ordinary Ese Eja, though always in the dark and necessarily through the mediation of the eyámikekua, namely during the *epowi sese* and *eshashapoi* ceremonies.[16] Such ceremonies are predominantly healing rituals*, as emanokuana have the ability to heal others,* but they are also important social occasions in which Ese Eja offer the *emanokuana* two different kinds of plantain beverage, from which the name of the ceremony is derived.[17] *Epowi sese* refers to plantain beer made with the boiled ripe fruits that are left to ferment while *eshashapoi* is made with the mashed, very ripe but uncooked fruits of a single variety (topa'ai), served in the flowering spathe of a palm tree (*Socratea exorrhiza*). *Epowi* sese ceremonies are much simpler rituals and occasions and can be organized at short notice, as long as fermented plantain beer and an *eyámikekua* are available. *Eshashapoi* ceremonies are much more elaborate, formal, important, and also rare events, which require much more planning and preparation and involve a larger, more active participation. Only in *epowi sese* ceremonies does the Edósikiana make an appearance; indeed, the *raison d'etre* of the ritual is ultimately to invite him to drink the beverage, appease him and encourage his

reciprocity by facilitating access to game and, importantly, future visits by ancestors as peccaries. During both rituals, visiting ancestors heal, flirt, joke, gossip, offer advice, and inform or warn of events in mortal and immortal worlds. It is also in these ceremonies that Ese Eja learn about events unfolding in *Kueihana*, and more importantly, it is how they maintain their relationship with kin who are *emanokuana* and foster new relationships with *emanokuana* kin, those born in *Kueihana*.

It is, however, in the form of white-lipped peccaries that *emanokuana* most often appear and visit. Such instances, when a large herd passes close to a community, are the ones which resonate with villagers the most, as it is then that large numbers can be hunted through what is in effect a communal hunt, yielding large amounts of meat that can be consumed by all. Ese Eja eat dead relatives, personified by *ño*, with gratitude, an act that symbolizes reciprocity, interdependency and exchange.[18]

All along, at their core, *ño* as *emanokuana* are the same people that they were when they had been mortals, although, like all people, they are also potentially impacted by new experiences in their accelerated *emanokuana* lives. In addition, *Sonenekuiñaji* see white-lipped peccaries as being similar to themselves – they are social and omnivorous and also live in kin-based communities (see Calavia Sáez 2026).[19] Like them, peccaries socially and ecologically adapt to most environments or circumstances and communicate and care for each other.[20] Like people, injured peccaries are said to be taken care of and their wounds treated with plants by their kin.

Eating more-than-human – commensality with ancestors

White-lipped peccaries are one of the most esteemed sources of game for Ese Eja, not only because the taste of the meat is highly valued (*kiahoa*, 'delicious') but also because of the unique affordances it provides. Travelling in large herds, often including dozens, if not hundreds of individuals, means that large numbers of them can be killed at once. While there are other social game species, such as monkeys, for instance, it is hard for hunters to kill more than one individual or two at once. While peccaries can and are frequently hunted opportunistically by solitary hunters, there are also instances – as our opening vignette illustrates – when they can be hunted communally, notably when a herd happens to pass close to a community or camp and is detected by someone coming across their tracks, hearing their calls or even smelling them – their strong, characteristic musky smell carries for some distance across the forest and lingers for some time. In these cases, peccaries offer that most valued, and rare, opportunity for everyone, or at least many, to gorge on meat at the same time.

From a posthumanist perspective, 'eating is a process through which subject and object are configured and reconfigured, for example as a multispecies self-incorporating multiple Other' (Heitger, Biedermann, and Niewöhner 2021, 38). The recognition of animals as potential persons validates a past of human-prolific animal non-differentiation. Such an ontological position might require that before individuals and communities can consume animals as meat, they must necessarily remove the possibility of its personhood at the time of consumption. As Fausto (2007a, 497) so candidly puts it '*If animals are people, how can one distinguish between everyday eating and cannibalism?*'. Fausto suggests that Amazonians void personhood by transforming game into proper food so that it lacks agency and intentionality, ultimately by cooking the meat and (ibid.) To a

certain extent, however, such a dilemma among the Ese Eja is obviated to the extent that the person as animal refers to a condition of interiority that is, certainly in the case of white-lipped peccaries, entirely alienable. Ese Eja remark that the carcass that remains after the pig is shot and killed and after the *emanokuana* leaves the body and returns to his or her home is a shell, a cover, a ruse and a gift.[21] This of course does not mean that the meat is alienable; it is still endowed with elements of the person and in many ways remains connected to the person, hence the ability of the *eyámikekua* to 'speak' with it, and hence the need to treat it with proper care and respect.

In this sense, preparing peccaries as food is a multistep process that transforms the peccary/ancestor's' temporary body into proper meat for consumption. Indeed, several Ese Eja foods require preemptive actions prior to cooking that serve to remove personhood and agency. For example, plantains must be harvested by sexually inactive individuals such as children and the very elderly; otherwise, if improperly procured, consumption will bring illness (Alexiades 1999; Peluso 2003a). In the case of properly consuming peccaries, such a process also begins prior to cooking and occurs alongside the commensality between Ese Eja and their dead ancestors, which makes eating peccaries so special. Commensality embraces the transformation from peccary/ancestor to peccary/meat and a re-transformation from peccary/ancestors to *emanokuana* status.

Ese Eja recognize peccaries as other Ese Eja. Commensality between Ese Eja and their ancestors is a process that begins before, during and after eating takes place in an array of different forms. It is the manifestation of all kinds of respectful interactions and exchanges that prioritize the autonomy, sociality and conviviality that people mostly strive towards. It is as much a process and an act as it is an outcome of Ese Eja beliefs about life, death and regeneration that take place preceding and following the sharing of food. When they butcher the animals, hunters must be careful to dispose of the innards carefully and respectfully. Doing otherwise, or indeed wasting any of the meat, will incur the wrath of the ancestors, notably *Edósikiana*, who will punish the Ese Eja either by making them sick or by withholding peccaries from visiting again. Commensality is not only about making kin with the living by sharing peccary meat (Gow 2001; Mentore 2007) and food (Costa 2016; Fausto 2007a; Fausto and Costa 2013; Vilaça 2002), but for Ese Eja, it is also about maintaining kinship with the *emanokuana,* the dead and, especially, the Edósikiana. In its broadest terms and in alignment with posthumanist thought, commensality is also a way to make relations with one's environment (Heitger, Biedermann, and Niewöhner 2021), the living, the dead and all life forms.

The process of de-subjectification for food to be made proper is part of commensality through the dutiful exchanges that transpire. It starts, as evidenced earlier, with the shaman identifying each peccary corpse as an *emanokuana*, speaking to them, addressing their personhood and gender, and thanking them for coming to visit them as all villagers attentively gather around. Directly afterwards, people talk about the person as a human and not as a peccary body, mostly reminding each other about them and explaining to youth and children who might not remember them or might not have heard of them, who they are in terms of close or broader relatedness. Soon after, such discussion ceases. While identification as part of the process of the dismissal of agency may appear contradictory, it is not the case if one considers that acknowledging a peccary's humanity must happen before its personhood can be properly released and dismissed. The recognition of the *emanokuana* gift and their sacrifice to return as peccaries is vital

for also ensuring that the peccaries will return – such a cycle informs Ese Eja eco-cosmology.[22] Peccaries are vital for the regeneration of life, death past and future (see also Pollack 2026).

I had mentioned how the children played with the peccary corpses, particularly the male peccaries, left outside of the hearth until they were ready to be butchered. Their play went unreprimanded and seemed to contradict the proper handling of these carcasses, which entailed leaving them undisturbed until butchering began. Such playing certainly dehumanizes the body – subjecting it to actions that would not be appropriate for a person; probably the most outlandish of these play practices is the way that children repeatedly take turns pulling on the fibroelastic interior of the penis, extending it as far as it can go and then letting it go so that they can laugh as it springs backwards like a slinky (see Figure 1). Yet, nonetheless, it cannot be ignored as part of a process of de-subjectification.

As the peccaries are being dismembered, they gradually move towards their intended animal state, satisfying the goal for which they came. Cooking culminates the transformation, and the meat is indeed well-cooked. People treasure peccary meat, and they consider it to be a favourite (see Costa 2026).[23] For Ese Eja it is clear that the ancestors came to provide them with food. While the disassociation of the animal as a person happens physically so that the meat is void of personhood, the metaphorical association with the peccary meat continues. It does this in conversations that follow the meal for time to come as people remember when so-and-so 'came to visit and we ate well'. From a

Figure 1. Children play with peccary carcass. Photo credit: Daniela Peluso.

posthumanist perspective, animal-human-environment boundaries break down in multispecies relationships and eating (Heitger, Biedermann, and Niewöhner 2021). The commensal sharing of food is remembered and eagerly desired for the future. Peccary meat is more than just tasty and nutritional, through commensality it nourishes and maintains relatedness with the living and the dead and through the collective hunt and distribution of the meat, it also maintains community. Insofar as all game meat is shared, it also enables commensality; at the same time, however, the sharing and distribution of game is frequently also a source of conflict, as some relatives may feel that they have either been left out or given less than their due by the hunter who has a limited amount of meat to share with a large network of kin. Communal peccary hunts, on the other hand, often yield enough meat to go around for everyone to be satisfied, and in that sense too generates an exceptional degree of commensality and solidarity.

Food, particularly an abundance of it, as is quintessentially exemplified by the peccary herd, creates a significant occasion and basis for sociality and conviviality through the process and acts of commensality and it is thus an important means for Amazonians to connect with each other as families and as communities. In this way, commensality is always about more than just food – it is about health and well-being through nourishment and positive social relations. With this in mind, for Ese Eja eating more-than-humans provides a way for living mortals to maintain their connection to living ancestors through such life-giving social opportunities. Furthermore, it contributes towards and reflects a broader interrelationship with one's environment whereby the human is just one of many subjects.

Peccaries over time – scarcity and abundance

The impromptu arrival of a large peccary herd and the consequent feasting of meat and merriment brought about by a successful hunt signals not only a moment of abundance, but an abundance that is distinctly social and hence, inevitably, precarious and contingent. The sociality and social connotations surrounding the hunt of the white-lipped peccary are all-encompassing and include the visit (large numbers of Ese Eja ancestors clothed as peccaries), the hunt (large numbers of living Ese Eja) and the consumption (the feast). As with all other instances of sociality and commensality, all the stages associated with the hunting and feasting of white-lipped peccaries are premised on an ethos of sharing, commensality and generosity which must be reciprocated in order to perdure and which is thus, inevitably, fraught and contingent. Whilst the peccaries are visiting ancestors, such visits are ultimately only possible through the actions of the *Edósikiana*, who not only control, but to some extent embody the productive and destructive forces of the world; be these game, thunder and lightning, floods, diseases or certain kinds of illnesses. Just as the ancestors gift living Ese Eja with the meat and the *edósikiana* allows them to visit, the Ese Eja have to reciprocate, first and foremost, by showing gratitude and not disrespecting the animals, and by offering plantain beer and mush to the *edósikiana* and the ancestors. Failure to properly acknowledge or reciprocate the *Edósikiana* leads, first and foremost, to scarcity. One Ese Eja creation narrative tells of a time when white-lipped peccaries ceased to visit, provoking an existential crisis of sorts which was only resolved when a group of eyám*i*kekua travelled to *Kueihana* carrying bundles of *yoe* (Amazonian cinnamon) bark on their backs and leaving them there as a gift (Alexiades fieldnotes, January 1996).

The sociality underpinning the system of exchanges and reciprocity between the dead and the living, between *edósikiana* and the *eyámikekua* and between Ese Eja, and game animals, and most especially white-lipped peccaries, has distinct historical and spatial dimensions and, ultimately, in today's context, contradictions, which are worth examining briefly. The past is always part of the present and future-making. Past relationships, affinities and kinship can be maintained, re-established or broken in ways that reflect present actions that secure current and ongoing wellbeing. Ese Eja often state that if they forget the past, particularly the ancestors, the future will be unrecognizable to them. Ese Eja narrative accounts of the past are important precisely because they do not posit ideas of history as unidirectional or unfolding continuums of progress (Peluso 2013). Through Ese Eja white-lipped peccary interactions, the past is not forgotten. The trepidation and the connectedness across margins of the living and the dead, animals and humans, and visibility and invisibility, the visitations of white-lipped peccaries are closely linked to Ese Eja ideas about abundance and the regeneration of personhood/forces of being ('*eshawa*') and the resources that such states of being entail. To understand how and why Ese Eja stories of white-lipped peccaries sometimes appear as ambiguous (peccaries are human, they are animal, they are Ese Eja), it is critical to understand their ideas about their past and current states of personhood and humanity.

The ongoing flexibility and multiplicity of relatedness that continues and transforms beyond mortal lives as demonstrated by *ño* reflects ideas about the permeability and multiplicity of persons, animals, and non-visible beings with whom Ese Eja share personhood and sociality. These perspectives, as rooted in spaces of cross-realities, are also tied to notions of power, which, in turn, are rooted in relationships with each other and their environment. Formations of social closeness or social distance are part of an individual's personal network that provides him or her with access to power in social and political contexts. *Ño* clearly represent people from the past who ceased being mortal and have returned as peccaries. Yet, to understand what this means one must return first to the beginning, to the remote past for which, not coincidentally, the Ese Eja language does not hold a special verb tense. In the beginning, when Ese Eja descended from the sky rope, they were undifferentiated from animals since animals were undifferentiated from Ese Eja – this is because they were all people. Through a long series of mishaps and conflicts over time, people were categorically separated into persons and animals while always retaining their humanity and personhood. Importantly, these states are states that need to be maintained or else slippage can result in transformation to a new state of being (Alexiades 1999; Burr 1997; Peluso 2003a, 2003b, 2004a).

To further expand these ideas, mortality in the 'here and now' is finite; however, one's 'eshawa' (personhood and associated sex and gender) will continue as an *emanokuana* who can will themselves to become peccaries from time to time. This possibility of providing food as *emanokuana*, as immortal humans, informs and underpins Ese Eja ideas about abundance and scarcity, ideas which revolve around proper relations with others. Elsewhere in Amazonia, hunting peccaries has been associated with enemies and warfare (Fausto 2007a; Lima 1999; Murphy and Murphy 1974; Rival 1996; Seeger 1981), but in the Ese Eja case, peccaries are not foes; instead, they are more akin to familiar competitors who can challenge one's hunting skills, resembling a game of hide-and-seek.

I suggest that the *emanokuana*, through their will to provide food and their continual ability to manifest as peccaries, simultaneously serve as game masters or gamekeepers,

similar to several other non-visible custodial beings such as *Edóskiana* and Enashawa.[24] Game mastery, envisaged as custodial spirits and/or as a large predator animal species, is amply evidenced in the Amazonian literature (Fausto 2007b, 2008; Seeger 1981; Zerries 1963; as cited in Morton 1984), some of which are peccary custodians (Fausto 2007a, 2008; Flowers 1983; Gow 2001; Lima 1999; Murphy and Murphy 1974; Viratanen 2017). What is unique about *emanokuana* is that they are a direct lineage to Ese Eja individuals and communities. The ancestor–descendent connection is more immediate, and therefore communication is more frequent and familiar than with other custodial beings or large animal predators, even though they too derive from a human-animal undifferentiated past.[25]

The idea that people are made by others through a variety of acts is well-established within the Amazonian literature, Melanesia and elsewhere. Multiple works have theorizing this idea for several decades, and it is consistent with some of the oldest Amazonian ethnographic accounts, even though such theories may not have been spelled out as specifically as they are now through more specific discussions of animism and perspectivism. What this means is that individuals are not just born as people, they are instead 'made' to be people. Underlying this belief is that individuals can be shaped to be particular types of people. For Ese Eja, the making of a person predates conception, includes pregnancy and continues from birth onward (Peluso and Boster 2002). What is key to note here is that this notion that individuals and groups are acknowledged as being responsible for crafting other individuals rests upon a conglomerate of several other pan-Amazonian ideas: that bodies are socially fabricated,[26] the consubstantiality of bodies, ideals of conviviality, an acceptance that humans have evolved from an originary state of human/non-human differentiation, an understanding of reality as being part of a set of cross-realities with perspectival and animist attributes, and the interactions with 'others' as a process of relatedness. Simultaneous and key to all of these social, ontological and metaphysical notions are those of multiplicity and transformation. Lastly, all of these ideas come together under a set of practices that require ongoing repetition and reiteration for people to be fashioned and for their outcome as certain types of people. The coming and going of the peccaries and the transformation and retransformation of *emanokuana* to and from peccary bodies is an example of how repletion and reiteration not only craft people but also sustain a fluid multi-species cross-reality of beings that further informs ecological relationships of human-animal interactions, hunting, sustainability, commensality, relatedness and conviviality. In turn, these ideas underlie and shape Amazonian ideas about the past, present and future, as well as the role of multi-species relationships and interdependency in the overall well-being.

Conclusions: reciprocity, interdependency and renewal

Ese Eja ontological know-how is contingent upon whether one is dealing with a specific or a general subject or context. This is the case across many types of human and more-than-human relationships, such as in dreams, shamanism, ceremonies and hunting (Peluso 2004a). In speaking of animal ancestors, it is understood that most animals were and therefore are Ese Eja. Yet some animals, from time to time, are specifically knowable dead relatives, as happens with the peccary hunts when individual peccaries are identified by the shaman. In villages where there are not any shamans, people will speculate about

who the animal visitors might be and look for clues with the hope of identifying them (Peluso 2023a). Reciprocity and interdependency also have similar variances. For example, with certain acts such as hunting for food, while clearly supplying nourishment at the level of the individual and community through an act of mastery and predation, they also contribute towards a greater exchange with the broader species whereby one more-than-human other is seen to be sacrificed as part of the renewal and continuity of the species (Århem 1996; Brightman 1993; Descola 1996). Furthermore, locally, a successful hunt presents an occasion for the sharing of meat and renewed contexts for creating and maintaining relatedness (Fausto 2007a; Mentore 2007, Vilaça 2002). In addition, for Ese Eja, hunting their peccary ancestors is also a way of solidifying and amplifying relatedness into *Kueijana*, the world of the dead. Such beliefs about the sustainability of the individual, the community, and the species create an understanding whereby Ese Eja can meet their own needs and those of future generations. In this sense, death and killing replenish the world as it is providing social, natural and economic resources.

Relationships between humans and more-than-humans are certainly sophisticated. Interactions and negotiations with gamekeepers such as the *Edósikiana (singular)* reflect a life-death loop perpetuated by aggressions and alliances between *edósikiana* (multiple) and other allies, animals, plants, *emanokuana* (ancestors) and humans (now mortal). Here I have suggested that in addition, *emanokuana* are also viewed as gamekeepers whose allegiance to Ese Eja means that they will continue to provide nourishment and occasions for commensality and conviviality through the continual visitation of the peccaries which, in turn, contribute towards the renewal of individual and community vitality. Despite Ese Eja's capacity for transcendence in dreams and rituals, human *eshawa* (personhood) does not typically transcend being temporarily mortal.[27] As discussed, when people die, their *eshawa* makes their way to *Kueihana*, ('river of the dead') overcoming many obstacles on their way to this parallel plane of existence. During *emanokuana* ceremonies, it is revealed that once the *eshawa* makes a safe crossing, *he* or *she* maintains a life similar to the living, except that *he* or *she* has regained *his* or *her* powers of transformation. In *Kueihana, eshawa* is referred to by Ese Eja as *emanokuana*. They continue to live and die, but at an accelerated rate, *japanakiani*. Personhood does not cease. Despite their multiple deaths, they retain the identities they acquired in mortal life. Part of this identity is their maleness or femaleness. This also means that relatedness continues and that the *emanokuana's* wilful return as peccaries ensures that commensality between the living and the dead persists as part of the past, present and future.

The potential for transformation, particularly towards future animality is at the heart of Ese Eja beliefs (Peluso 2004a) and other lowland South Americanist ontologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998). In reflecting on Heidegger's ideas on being and becoming, Boulter (2015, 27) notes that 'the posthuman is this boundary or limit figure that emerges as it looks back on what was (temporally and ontologically) and towards what may be possible, futurally'. Given that Amazonian ontologies widely ascribe to ideas of a past shared 'humanity' with animals and nonvisible beings as more-than-human others, Ese Eja subjects continue to share an intangible component – *eshawa* – that withstands all corporeal transformations. Peccaries as ancestors are a reflection of how humanity is at the core of personhood through the food-giving gifts of their temporary peccary bodies, while also reminding their mortal kin that animality is a future possibility for different states of one's personhood, *eshawa*. This resonates with the futural focus of

posthumanist thought in which 'deep time is no longer confined to the past' but towards a 'posthuman future' (Herbrechter 2022, 47).

The ontological beliefs that underpin Ese Eja understandings of peccary visitations, like posthumanism, challenge the distinctiveness of commonplace perceived borders between life and death. Their views maintain coherency and move away from the social boundaries and the assumptions of androcentrism in relationship to animals and non-visible beings. I am not suggesting that Ese Eja are posthumanists; indeed, I would venture to say that they are pre-humanists in that they view humanity as emerging from a more arbitrary past of non-differentiation and crossover. What we can say about peccary ancestors is that their personhood carries forward as *eshawa* and *emanokawana,* rendering mortal humans as just one part of a complex ecosystem where interactions between species, animals and plants, and the environment shape the intricate web of ecological interdependence in Amazonia between people and peccaries. Ese Eja ontologies and posthumanism both stress the importance of recognizing and respecting the agency of non-human entities and their crucial roles in the sustainability of the environment in the past, present and future. The social and physical reproduction of the peccary herds is based on similar social dynamics that keep communities together. It is the recognition of personhood, communication, cooperation, and working alongside each other that allow people and peccaries to thrive. Remembering one's ancestors and taking care of them through recognition is focused on believing in a productive past and building a better future.

Notes

1. This article focuses on Ese Eja peoples, a lowland Amazonian ethnic group of about 2000 individuals living in eight communities spread over 500 kilometres along the Beni, Madre de Dios, Heath and Tambopata rivers in the border regions of Pando, Bolivia, and Madre de Dios, Peru. The Ese Eja language belongs to the Tacana language family, itself part of the Macro-Panoan group of languages of western Amazonia. Most Ese Eja plant swidden horticultural fields, hunt, fish, gather and extract and process forest resources for their own consumption and for commercial trade; they also periodically, increasingly yet variably engage in forms of labour with townsfolk and move or reside between rural and urban environments (Alexiades and Peluso 2003, 2009, 2015, 2016; Peluso 2004b, 2015).
2. *Emano*: 'dead'; *kuana* 'people': plural means 'people'; *emano* also means 'sick'. Being sick entails dying, notably, a space of death (Alexiades 1999).
3. An ethnonym denoting Ese Eja from the Sonene river, the natural border between Peru and Bolivia.
4. Lima (1999) and Mentore (2007) alongside other lowland South Americanist scholars remark on how much exhilaration and excitement the sighting and hunting of peccaries bring.
5. For first hand descriptions of the *eshashapoi* feast see Alexiades (1999) and Peluso (2003a, 2021).
6. The Wari (Conklin 1993, 1995, 2001a), Kulina (Pollock 1992, 1993, 2026) and Yine (Gow and Sarmiento Barletti 2026) also regard the large peccary herds to be returning dead ancestors. Conklin (1993) describes how, similar to Ese Eja, the shaman identifies each individual peccary corpse as a Wari ancestor.
7. The reference to the world of the deceased as a river (*kuei*) seems to refer more to the path and the journey to get there, which is sometimes also described as a 'wide road' (*carretera ancha*), and which can take years and involves all sorts of hardships. The passage connecting the lived world to the world of the deceased is always described as a hole in the ground, while *Kueihana* itself is variously described as located both 'above' or 'upriver' (*arriba*), or as a large cave, but always very far away, in another (unknown, unreachable) side or part of the world (*al otro lado del mundo, otro lado más, muy lejos*), according to some in the direction of the setting sun.

8. According to Yost and Kelley (1983), following a successful peccary herd hunt, the Waraoni maintain a jovial and joking atmosphere that last for several days. Their joking refers to the abundance of meat and peoples overeating.
9. Edósikiana is also a gamemaster – he takes the form of different animals, notably deer (*dokuei*) and black cara-cara (*shia'*) and is seen as both an ally and a predator because of his ability to provide animals for food as well as to kill by brining sudden illnesses upon people.
10. Those who do not safely cross can become *ekuikia,* beings who retain not fully actualized status between the living and the dead. They can also be referred to as a type of 'soul' distinct from eshawa, see Burr (1997). Alexiades (personal correspondence) has testimonies that describe how when the person dies, different parts of the soul separate. In fact, collared peccaries, *yohi*, are associated with *ekuikia*.
11. The Ese Eja notion of *japanakiani* refers to 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.'
12. Not all individuals go to *Kueihana* upon death, a topic beyond the scope of this article (see Peluso 2003a). Also, see Peluso (2023b) for a description of *Kueihana* as a village or city of the dead.
13. The action of the edósikiana in this regard is often represented more forcefully, as in him 'sending' or 'ordering' (*los manda*) the ancestors to go.
14. This species of palm (unidentified) also grows in the headwater regions and, of course, in *kueihana*. Also, see Lepri (2003) for an Ese Eja account of how painful the ancestor peccary transformation can be.
15. See Peluso (2023b) for a story about a girl they came to refer to as *Kui'ao kojata'ee* whose appearance in Puerto Maldonado, the regional capital, was an unprecedented way for an *emanokuana* to appear to its kinsfolk. See also the story of an *emanokuana* woman who returned as a jaguar (Peluso 2023a).
16. *Epoi'sese* is a casual form of a much more elaborate ceremony (*shashapoi*) designed to engage more fully with *emanokuana* and Nonhuman Others.
17. See Alexiades (1999), Lepri (2003) and Peluso (2003a) for further details on *emanokwana* healing abilities.
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.
19. See Lima (1999) for a description of Juruna thoughts on peccary family and community sociopolitical organization.
20. See Alencar, Nogueira-Filho, and Nogueir (2023) for a discussion on multi-modal communication signals among white-lipped peccaries.
21. Chyc (2020, 118) offers an excellent analysis of the peccary's visibility of the otherwise 'opaque inside', someone 'hidden behind the surface' of their animal body.
22. It is our understanding that the term ecocosmology was first used in the Amazonian context by Kaj Århem (1996).
23. Peccary is similarly a preferred meat for Wari peoples who also view peccaries as their dead ancestors returning to provide food (Conklin 1993).
24. *Enashawa* is a powerful river custodial *eshawa* (Alexiades 1999, Peluso 2003a, 2004a).
25. The most frequent forms of communication with *emanokuana* are through dreams and *emanokuana* ceremonies.
26. This formulation builds on the work of many, including McCallum (1996), Conklin (2001a, 2001b), Overing and Passes (2002) and Vilaça (2002, 2005). Londoño Sulkin (2017, 477) has referred to some of these features as composing the 'Amazonian package'.
27. In the e*shashapoi* ceremonies the *eyámikekwa* and many of the older people, *etikiana*, may temporarily become e*dósikiana.*

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