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# PHOTOGRAPHY IN LATIN AMERICA

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Images and Identities Across Time  
and Space

**[transcript]** Postcolonial Studies

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# Unexpected Memories

## Returning Photographs and Films from the 1980s to an Asháninka Nomatsiguenga Community of the Peruvian Selva Central

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With the advent of cell phone photography and the practice of sending pictures across great distances to different viewing communities, photographs now are taken for granted in almost every part of the world. When Manfred Schäfer and I studied *Völkerkunde* (a discipline nowadays called cultural and social anthropology) at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich in the 1970s and 1980s, this was not yet the case. Instead there was a profound disparity between (analog) photography as a common practice in our own society and the limited access that people had to the medium at our research sites in marginalized regions of Latin America such as the Peruvian Selva Central. The fact that high-quality photo technology was much more expensive, its handling was less user-friendly than it is today and, furthermore, that hegemonic cultural values discriminating “others” such as indigenous peoples’ affinity to it were inscribed in photography’s social practices contributed to what I term a “visual divide.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 I use the term “visual divide” in line with the more familiar term “digital divide” in order to capture in a similar manner, the uneven access to audiovisual media technology as a result of educational disparities, geography, social class, ethnicity, cultural factors, and gender. In addition, “visual divide” refers to the comprehensive structures of inequality that people who are categorized as indigenous face in this field: inequality is not merely inscribed in representations, but

**1 Selection of photos taken by Manfred Schäfer between 1978 and 1989.**

**Photographer: Manfred Schäfer.**

This particular chasm was also true of Matereni, a village inhabited by Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga on a tributary of the Río Ene in the Peruvian Selva Central. In the following, I will recount the history of the approximately 2000 photos (mostly color slides) that Manfred Schäfer took as the only photographer in this community in the years between 1978 and 1989, and of their various attributed meanings and uses made of them over the course of time and in different locations. Manfred Schäfer (b. 1949) was a professional photographer and filmmaker who graduated with an engineering degree in photography and cinematography. He subsequently studied anthropology from 1976, obtaining his doctorate in 1987 (Schäfer 1988). From the late 1970s, he was intensely involved as a political activist in the struggle against the Ene 40 dam project of the Peruvian government, which threatened to flood the land of many Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga communities, including Matereni, and thus destroy their habitat. He also joined in the resistance of the Awajún (Aguaruna) against Werner Herzog's shooting of the movie *Fitzcarraldo*, which many of Peru's Amazonian indigenous people opposed, forming a broad coalition. They rejected the film company's encroaching procedure of incorporating Awajún and Asháninka people as extras in this film that celebrates a rubber baron of the 19th century (Greene 2009: 183-189; Schäfer 1982b). Manfred and I had worked closely together ever since we became a couple in 1982.<sup>2</sup> At the end of 1989 we spent two months in Matereni to shoot our first joint project for the German TV station Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), *Im grünen Himmel* (*In Green Heaven*), a portrait of their sustainable economic activities such as agriculture and hunting and gathering in the rainforest. Shortly afterwards, this area was invaded by the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla. The people living in the Selva Central were severely affected by the ensuing

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also in the materiality and the social practices of audiovisual media such as in media training and the organization of work. The actors bridge this divide through their own creativity and by combining photography with local traditions of media use (see Kummels 2015; Kummels n.d.).

- 2 Manfred Schäfer and I collaborated on the book, which contains interviews with Asháninka film extras who had been recruited by the Herzog film company through methods comparable to those of the rubber boom era such as debt peonage (Schäfer 1982b). We co-produced two photographic exhibitions, one super 8 film between 1982 and 1983, and ten 16 mm films for German television in the years between 1981 and 2003.

civil war until 1997, but even in the years that followed they were victims of recurrent episodes of violence, expulsions, deportations, and the disappearance and killing of residents. Today this region is probably the last remaining pocket in the country where remaining partisans of Sendero Luminoso still engage in drug trafficking.<sup>3</sup> In Peru, the severe conflicts and ravages of that period are associated to this day more with the highlands region of Ayacucho than with the lowland area of the Selva Central, which was in fact no less affected.

Manfred Schäfer died in 2003. It was not until 2014 – 25 years after our last visit and on the occasion of an invitation to Lima’s Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) – that I decided to return to Matereni.<sup>4</sup> In preparation for the trip, I digitized 600 color slides and two movies that we had filmed there to be able to hand them over to the community.<sup>5</sup> Since 1989, I had lost direct contact with the people from the village and had been able to obtain very little information about this part of the country, which had been overwhelmed by the civil war. Due to the lack of communication, I decided on my own initiative to return the photos and the films that Manfred Schäfer and I had recorded there.

I was not only inspired by my own private motives and the belief that the photos – which had been largely forgotten in my own personal archive over the years – primarily belonged to the subjects represented in the images. As a media anthropologist I also sought to answer several questions that are central to my work. For decades, photo and film documentation has been an important part of the methodological toolbox of anthropological re-

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3 It was not until 2015 that Asháninka men, women, and children enslaved by Sendero Luminoso in the border area between the departments of Ayacucho, Junín, and Huancavelica were liberated by the Peruvian military forces after being detained for 25 to 30 years. There are no exact figures for the total of Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga victims during the civil war. Between 10.000 and 15.000 probably suffered displacement and up to 6.000 were killed during armed battles.

4 In view of their teaching and research focus on the Amazon region, representatives of the university expressed an interest in these anthropological photos and films as part of my invitation to the PUCP. This also motivated me to first contact the subjects of the images.

5 I handed over digitized photos, movies, and a video projector to the village’s *presidente*. Due to time constraints, I selected 600 photographs before my trip, primarily portraits, so that they could be digitized on time.

search. Today, the visual documents once amassed by these scholars for research purposes are often the only source or one of the rare sources of this kind, which depict the subjects and their everyday life over the long periods of time before photography and film achieved the more generalized access it enjoys today. In the course of my field research on local media history and media uses in an Ayuujk village in Oaxaca, Mexico, which I initiated in 2012, I discovered that the inhabitants currently appropriate and adapt these kinds of historical visual documents created by external photographers to suit their own needs.<sup>6</sup> They actively look for historical images and reinterpret them by integrating them into their own private photo albums and Facebook pages or even organize local photo exhibitions. Among other things, they reinterpret photographs once taken by anthropologists during the first half of the 20th century who were keen on portraying Ayuujk persons as “representatives of the ethnic group” for their family albums. The persons portrayed are now reinterpreted as deceased relatives, friends, and village members from the perspective of the community’s own history. I conceptualize this creative capacity of actors from the margins to appropriate new means of communication on the basis of their cultural and social needs in terms of them opening new “media spaces” (Kummels 2012).

In recent years, a number of studies have examined similar cases of pictures that anthropologists once took within the context of their field research and similar reclamations and reinterpretations on behalf of the source communities under the term of “visual repatriation.” Such projects, which concern “a realigning of relationships between museums and the communities drawing on their collections” (Brown/Peers 2006: 101), focus on photos that have been archived in anthropological museums since the second half of the 19th century.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that these photos were not exclusively taken in the framework of a pseudo-scientific and neo-colonizing anthropological perspective, as in the case of anthropometric

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6 My research sought to retrieve the diversity, intensity, and historical depth displayed in the culturally specific uses of photography, radio, video, and television in an Ayuujk community in Oaxaca, Mexico, and one of its satellite communities in Los Angeles, USA. Inhabitants of the Mexican village began to appropriate photography as early as in the 1960s despite their limited access to audiovisual technology. Parts of this research have been published in Kummels (2015) and Kummels n.d.

7 The expression visual repatriation was coined by Ann Fienup-Riordan (1998).

photography. Still, in the course of cataloging and archiving at the museum the photos' subject matter was often classified according to a formula of clear-cut categories of cultural regions and ethnic groups (Kraus, this volume). This classification scheme negated the actual varied circumstances in which photographs' representations were negotiated and imbued with a transcultural quality. Today, above all museums and museum anthropologists engage in returning photos to the source communities, as a rule handing them over in digitized versions rather than in the original. The studies on visual repatriation stress both the range of former researchers' approaches toward photography and the impressive work that the descendants of the photographed subjects invest in redefining and translating the images to integrate them into their own version of history.

Manfred Schäfer's photos exemplify the broad scope of visual methods that were actually applied in the context of ethnographic research. In the case of each anthropologist, there were different motivations to take pictures, and the relationships of trust, the interactions with the research subjects, as well as the further objectives pursued when publishing the photographs, varied. From the time Manfred started to work as a professional photographer (his work was published in professional journals such as *Photo Revue*), he developed his own aesthetic style. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was a popular strategy of modern photography to convey dynamism and modernity by visualizing movement in a scene. The expression of motion blur was often implemented by panning the camera when pursuing a particular subject. Serial images of people in motion were taken using a motorized trigger. Manfred applied such stylistic devices too, though what was novel was his use of them to convey the dynamism and modernity of his indigenous subjects.<sup>8</sup> What is more, he portrayed people in their everyday clothes, and did not suppress "traces of civilization" like T-shirts with a Lucky Strike logo nor index Western garments' adoption as a "loss of culture."<sup>9</sup> In this manner, he counteracted cliché images of "the Indians"

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8 Manfred Schäfer combined ethnographic research and photography in several contexts from 1976 onward and conducted research among the Rarámuri and Lacandón in Mexico, as well as the Awajún, Shipibo, Asháninka, Ashéninka, and Nomatsiguenga in the Peruvian Amazon region (with regard to the Ashéninka see Schäfer 1988, 1991).

9 Manfred's portrait of an Awajún activist in such a T-shirt was widely diffused in connection with the Amazonian peoples' opposition to Werner Herzog's film



(prevalent, for example, in the promotion of tourism in Germany and in U.S. magazines such as *National Geographic*), which in many cases portrayed indigenous people as exotic and averse to change. Manfred's visual approach contributed to setting a new trend that meant a decisive departure from photography's primary use since the 19th century as a medium for producing and spreading the notion of race as a visual discourse of rigid, hierarchical categories to be distinguished by physical appearance, culture, and stage of development (Poole 1997: 22-23). Manfred, by contrast, fundamentally understood photography as a tool for a collaborative or action anthropology approach.<sup>10</sup> The process of taking pictures and constructing their messages were part of anthropology's political activism and pursued with the intention of effectively conveying the cultural strengths and the concerns of Peru's Amazonian indigenous people. The process of photography was conceived as ideally requiring a continuous dialogue between researchers and research subjects on the same level. As a researcher and professional photographer, Manfred engaged in conversations with Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga to define desired messages and motifs suitable for giving their political statements visual expression.<sup>11</sup>

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project *Fitzcarraldo*. Interestingly, Herzog himself indirectly comments on these photographs, see *Stern* 51/1979, Herzog's letter to the editor.

- 10 The Munich *Trickster* magazine dedicated its January issue in 1980 to the approach of action anthropology. Historically, its origins have been attributed to U.S. cultural anthropologist Sol Tax, but the *Trickster* authors helped reconceptualize this approach in view of contemporary ideas like those presented by Karl H. Schlesier during his guest professorship at the University of Munster. Action anthropology critically reflected on the colonial and neo-colonial entanglements of anthropology (especially anthropologists' involvement in the U.S. government's Project Camelot). Its practitioners instead advocated collaborating with and committing oneself as a scientist to supporting the former "research objects" and "natives."
- 11 A collaborative approach toward photography in indigenous communities is described in Schäfer/Kummels (1988), the catalog of the exhibition *Somos Rarámuri*. The latter was based on the exhibition *Somos Asháninka* from 1982. Both exhibitions were part of an effort to introduce photographic technology and knowledge to the research subjects and to convey messages vital to their interests.

## The Background Stories of the Photographic Collection

In the course of participating in the photographic process, both the photographer and his photo subjects inscribe their own perspectives into the resulting picture. As a consequence, such images basically allow for many different kinds of readings. What is more, further meanings can be ascribed to photos over time depending on who looks at them and through which means of publication they are disseminated or stored. The photos of the collection discussed here range from those of a private nature – taken during fieldwork that lasted over one and a half years, they were tokens of friendship recorded for the “personal photo album” – to those that served as a means of visual politics in the context of action anthropology. Some of the photos were displayed in an exhibition in Lima with a broad impact (*Somos Asháninka*; see below) and others published in German magazines such as *Stern*, *Spiegel*, and *Natur*, where they were viewed by a wide audience. The circumstances of the production, diffusion, and consumption of the items of this one collection are already quite varied. In my opinion, photos can be productively analyzed as sites or “busy intersections” where a number of distinct cultural and social processes intersect. As interconnected attributions of meaning to societal phenomena, they give rise to new meanings (Rosaldo 1993). At the site of the photos examined here, social relations, the image’s message, and common interests were negotiated against the backdrop of anthropologists and their research subjects’ transnational entanglements in the 1980s. For this reason, it is necessary to first take a brief look at the history of the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga, especially with regard to the village of Matereni, as well as the history of German and Peruvian anthropology three decades ago.

I will begin with the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga whose history of the settlement in the rainforest areas of the Selva Central extends back to the pre-colonial period. From the early 17th century, they fought against the colonization of the Spaniards and resisted the proselytizing efforts of the Franciscans (Brown/Fernández 1993). Many of their communities reorganized in social composition and size in a flexible way to meet such challenges. The combination of agriculture and hunting and gathering in remote areas further enabled them to preserve their autonomous way of life. In the 1990s, however, they increasingly began to grant concessions to large private companies for the exploitation of natural resources such as

timber and petroleum (Krämer de Huerta 2015). In the 1980s, their traditional economy of subsistence, which was well adapted to the rainforest ecosystem, was under threat during the presidency of Fernando Belaúnde Terry (1980-1985). Alleging that the country's rainforest areas were still largely untapped (Richard Chase Smith accurately characterized this claim as the "myth of Amazonia as an empty space"), the government enforced their settlement and the exploitation of their resources such as hydropower as a way of solving the nation's economic problems. The affected communities resisted through local organizations, first forming a national indigenous movement of the rainforest in 1980 under the umbrella of the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDSEP) (Greene 2009: 174). Despite some lingering disagreements about the appropriate course of action, the communities were also supported by the Peruvian anthropologists organized in the Centro de Antropología y Aplicación Amazónica Práctica (CAAAP) and the Centro de Investigación y Promoción Amazónica (CIPA). The rainforest indigenous communities mainly pursued the goal of securing their communal land rights as *comunidades nativas*. They called on the land reform that had been instituted during the period of leftist military rule of Peruvian president Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975). In the course of their struggle to have their sustainable use of the rainforest recognized and their opposition to the national policy of Amazonia's colonization, the communities built alliances and broadened their network.

Matereni's unique history played an important role in the development of this movement. The Asháninka, who immigrated to this area, founded the village in 1964 together with the original inhabitants, the Nomatsiguenga. The Asháninka previously had worked in the coffee plantations of settlers (*colonos*) from the Andean highlands under the terms of the prevailing debt peonage system. Cesario Chiricente, an Asháninka, effectively turned the tables in his quest to become independent, introducing coffee growing to the area with the support of like-minded individuals. Cesario's strategy of withdrawing to a region that is still unaffected by colonization and is removed from state power and the main traffic routes has been repeatedly used by Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga throughout their history for either preserving or regaining their independence.

Manfred Schäfer visited Matereni for the first time in 1978 while working as a professional photographer<sup>12</sup> and became increasingly politically active on behalf of Peru's ethnic minorities. The Peruvian government viewed them as an obstacle to national unity and the country's development and strove to "integrate" them. "Reform projects" aimed at these ethnic minorities in the areas of education, colonization, agriculture, and hydroelectricity effectively constituted a hidden policy of ethnocide. Recognizing that there were similar oppressive situations throughout the world, students in Germany, including those of the Munich Institut für Völkerkunde, expressed their solidarity with the "tribal societies" ("*Stammesgesellschaften*" was the usual designation of indigenous peoples at that time).<sup>13</sup> Few state governments had committed themselves to national models of multiculturalism. Manfred collaborated with a group of anthropology students who had founded *Trickster* magazine in 1978 and supported the resistance against the systematic marginalization and expulsion of ethnic minorities from their habitats as a result of major dam projects.<sup>14</sup> The German government was also involved in the plans to construct the Ene 40 dam; the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) had surveyed possible sites for hydro-power plants with the help of the German consulting company Lahmeyer International (Schäfer 1983).

In this context, Manfred looked for a community that was located within the 100.000 km<sup>2</sup> of the potential flood zone for the purpose of document-

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12 As a professional photographer he worked on commissions, inter alia, from the German state Agency for Technical Cooperation (in German GTZ) as well as private firms.

13 See interview with Werner Petermann, a founding member of the *Trickster* magazine, in Haller (2009). He describes how students' initiatives were a major moving force complementing and counteracting the teaching of conservative anthropological schools of thought (such as diffusionism) imparted at the Munich Institut für Völkerkunde.

14 Manfred criticized the misrepresentation of Asháninka as "Campa Indians" in an exhibition at the Munich Museum für Völkerkunde (Schäfer/Bauer 1979). He also designed the first book of the *Trickster* publishing house (Schäfer 1982). This book deals with the inhumane treatment that several hundred Asháninka extras experienced during the filming of Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*. The film company in charge was headed by Walter Saxer. The book collects the testimonies of the Asháninka who were affected by being recruited through debt peonage. For more on action anthropology, see footnote 10.

ing their traditional subsistence strategies and quality of life, which the state's policy threatened with extinction. This was how he discovered the village on a tributary of the Río Ene, which had 120 inhabitants and could only be reached either using the small Cessna aircraft that transported the coffee out of the village to the regional markets or via an arduous journey of more than two days on foot. Thanks to a letter of recommendation from Alberto Quinchoker, the influential *teniente gobernador* of the Asháninka of the department Junín, he was accepted into the community, an unusual gesture toward a “gringo” in those days. Manfred subsequently worked hard to develop a strong relationship with the community. For instance, he took part for more than a year in all of the men's daily work, which earned him the respectful nickname “Saviri” (machete). His participation further served as a way to document the economic activities of the Asháninka and the Nomatsiguenga and their alimentary produce. They asserted “we're doing well,” while Peruvian law, in contrast, alleged that the *comunidades nativas* still needed to be introduced to a “dignified life”; it used this argument to justify the promotion of agriculture in the rainforest region.<sup>15</sup> Manfred noted that although verifying that Matereni led a “good life” according to the “criteria of ‘Western’ science” was a problematic approach, he made use of it nonetheless as a way to initiate “a debate in our culture,” which was yet not willing to respect the criteria of indigenous cultures. In this regard, he also criticized “the arrogance and ignorance of the Peruvian legislator” (Schäfer 1982a: II-III). In his master's thesis, he measured and recorded in minute detail the nutritional value of the products that Matereni's inhabitants obtained from their fields (*chacras*) and the intact rainforest.<sup>16</sup> He also published photos of a “good life”<sup>17</sup> and explained:

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15 See the “Ley de Comunidades Nativas y de Desarrollo Agrario de la Selva y de Ceja de Selva” from 1978, article 1.

16 To this end, he remarked in his master's thesis (1982a: IV): “I will therefore describe the land area on which the people of Matereni live, what technique they use to produce which product, in what quantity, and inquire to what degree they are able to sustain themselves sufficiently with nourishment. With these findings, I intend to ground scientifically the community's assessment ‘we're doing well’ and compare their subsistence strategies with the national economy.”

17 Many of his photos depicting Asháninka's and Nomatsiguenga's economic activities were published in the Peruvian journals mentioned below. The term “good life” was not used in a political sense in the 1980s, even though concepts concerning a desirable lifestyle had already been expressed. Ideas concerning

“Though the subject matter does not require it, I’ve incorporated narratives and photos into the depiction so that the reader will not lose sight of the people, the people of Matereni, between the tables and statistics.” (Schäfer 1982: VI)

Manfred freely shared photos like these with Peruvian organizations that supported the native rainforest communities, in particular with *Voz Indígena*, the newsletter of the Asociación de Desarrollo de la Selva Interétnica Peruana (AIDSESP) founded in 1980; *Amazonía Peruana*, the magazine of the Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica (CAAAP); and *Tarea. Revista de Educación Cultural*. He also used the photos for his own work such as the 1982 article “Yo no soy Campa. ¡Soy Asháninka!” (“I’m not Campa. I’m Asháninka!”), which advocated using the Amazonian peoples’ autodenominations, since they were an expression of self-determined political stances. “Campa” was the common name used at that time by non-Asháninka Spanish speakers, for whom it was a derogatory word meaning “wild,” “primitive,” and “uncivilized.” Despite the term’s problematic usage, anthropologists at the time – in compliance with the discipline’s convention of adopting exonyms carelessly – integrated and perpetuated the exonym “Campa” without giving it further thought in their writings. Yet, “Schäfer’s (1982c) article [...] had such an impact that it stopped the academic and official use of the term in favor of Asháninka” (Sarmiento Barletti 2011: 4).<sup>18</sup>

An example of the impact of Manfred’s photos and their context is found in the cover image of the 1980 *Lima Kurier* and his article “Asháninka: Imagen y realidad.” A man from Matereni, at the peak of his concentra-

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the “good life” and the self-determined development of the Asháninka (*kametsa asaike*) were formulated in the 21st century by the organization Central Asháninka del Río Ene (CARE). See CARE (2011).

18 See also Santos/Barclay (2005: XX) and Gow (2013: 54). In Stefano Varese’s (1973) classic monograph *La sal de los cerros*, it was still common to use the term “Campas” instead of Asháninka (the self-designation of the inhabitants of the Gran Pajonal region). Scholars currently argue in favor of retaining “Campa” as an umbrella term for the Arawak-speaking Amazonian lowland groups since, on the one hand, they share many cultural and linguistic features and, on the other hand, they have repeatedly changed in their social composition and political alliances. Relying exclusively on their self-designations is considered problematic for anthropological research. See Santos/Barclay (2005).

Hasta el 25 de este mes de setiembre continuará en la Biblioteca Nacional (Avenida Abancay) la exposición que sobre el pueblo Asháninka de la Selva Peruana ha montado Manfred Schäfer (1949, Amorbach, Baja Franconia, República Federal de Alemania). Schäfer ha estudiado fotografía, ingeniería fotográfica, antropología, sociología y también ha ejercido el periodismo (al séptimo día decaes). Ha viajado por la URSS, Marruecos, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, México y Bolivia. Desde 1976 ha estado viajando a la selva peruana, residiendo por varios meses con diversos pueblos nativos; en 1980/81 vivió un año en la Comunidad Nativa Asháninka, de la cual procede la exhibición de fotos e implementos que comentamos.

Schäfer nos pide solicitar a los lectores del LIMA KURIER informes sobre empuñadas domésticas procedentes de Seilpe y otros lugares de la Selva - para entrevistarlas - y sobre fotos históricas de la selva para ser reproducidas. Dirigirse a la redacción del LK (Telf. 278244). A continuación, un texto que nos ha entregado el propio expositor.



## asháninka : imagen y realidad



2 The cover photo of the *Lima Kurier* in September 1980 and the village chief (teniente gobernador) Cesario Chiricente practicing archery. Photographer: Manfred Schäfer.

tion, shoots an arrow, while his companion cheerfully and confidently looks in direction of its target (Figure 2). The picture conveys strength, forward motion, and a fighting spirit. At the same time, it both plays on the romantic image of the Indian of German society, while subtly contradicting it. Manfred took the photo in May 1980. He liked to comment on the fact that the archery practice had actually been organized as part of the improvised celebration of Mother's Day, that is, a public holiday the villagers chose to adopt. The picture is part of a series showing all the men of the community practicing archery with a bull's-eye target, including Manfred himself. He told me how surprised he was at first when he learned that national holidays were celebrated in Matereni "without [...] the original occasion being of importance" (Schäfer 1982a: 23-24). This photo series, to which Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga men also contributed as occasional photographers, conveys the pleasure in this Mother's Day celebration. At the same time, Manfred took advantage of the event to make perfectly timed close-ups of numerous archers. Many of his photo series reveal a similar situational approach: On the one hand, they document processes in detail, for example, the construction of a house from the natural resources of the rainforest; on the other hand, close-ups and portraits emphasize motifs like concentration, accuracy, cooperation, a bountiful hunt, catch, or harvest, the good life and similar values of a satisfying self-determined life.<sup>19</sup>

Manfred used black-and-white photography as an aesthetic device when recording events which he considered particularly momentous. This includes a journey that he undertook in October 1980 together with the two village authorities, Cesario Chiricente and Pablo Mahuanca, to Lima. There, the community and the neighboring villages of Chichireni and Anapati claimed a joint land title as *comunidad nativa* "Tres Unidos de Matereni" at the Ministry of Agriculture. Similar to all the native inhabitants of the Selva Central, Matereni's quest for the land title was critical for securing natural resources on their territory, particularly precious woods such as mahogany. Since the three villages initiated the process of obtaining a land title in September 1979, according to the standard schedule it should have been awarded in early 1980. Instead this process was systematically obstructed by private logging companies interested in exploiting the area for

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19 See his photos, for example, in *Trickster* magazine no. 8, pp. 45-55, December 1981.





**3 Cesario delivers a speech at the Ministry of Agriculture in Lima. Photographer: Manfred Schäfer.**

their own profit.<sup>20</sup> As a result, Manfred became involved as an advocate of the community and initiated a trip to Lima with a group of men from Matereni in October 1980. They were received by the Minister for Agriculture, who was in charge of the awarding of titles (Figure 3). Their demands were supported by leftist politician Hugo Blanco Galdos who had been a presidential candidate in 1980 and was present at this reunion. In connection with these endeavors, Manfred designed a photo exhibition in collaboration with the villagers entitled *Somos Asháninka (We are Asháninka)* that was shown from August 27 to September 30, 1981, in Lima's Biblioteca Nacional. For this occasion, the same group of men returned to Lima. The exhibition was intended to convince the public there of the Asháninka's and

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20 "The company FASA (Forestal Apurimac SA), in which a former Minister of Economy and Finance and a senior official of the Forest Department of the Agriculture Ministry participate, seeks to obtain permission to deforest an area where Matereni is also located. It was FASA's intervention which prevented the land title from being awarded to the inhabitants of Matereni" (Schäfer 1982a: 33).

Nomatsiguenga's quality of life and the sustainability of their subsistence strategies, which were well adapted to the tropical rainforest.<sup>21</sup>

### **Unexpected Memories: The First Day of My Visit**

In August 2014, I traveled to Matereni with 600 pictures in my luggage like those described above. For the first time, I did not go by Cessna, but rather uncomfortably on the back of a pickup and over a bumpy dirt road that is primarily used to exploit the area's timber. Instead of the less than 30 houses I witnessed during my last visit, picturesquely covered with *capashi* palm leaves, I now looked upon a veritable sea of 150 newly constructed square houses made of sawn planks and shiny, corrugated roofing. My attention was drawn in particular to the impressive *agencia*, a large one-story building that was worthy of a provincial capital's government seat. In the conversations that followed, I learned about how the people of Matereni had accomplished this rapid development largely on their own and by investing their own money. After years of conflict and with the help of the Peruvian military, they had managed to expel the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla from their territory. Since 1998, they have exploited and marketed the wood of their *comunidad nativa*, which was finally officially recognized in the 1990s. They have repeatedly extended contracts with a logging company from Oxapampa, which guarantees them a regular income. Since then, the road was built, drinking water was routed to the village and – above all – education was expanded locally. The town now boasts schooling opportunities that range from the primary school to a technical college. Eight settlements (*anexos*) from the surrounding area have since joined the community. In the process, it has transformed into a regional center, which in the core settlement alone accommodates five times as many inhabitants as it did 25 years ago. The population is predominantly young. Life expectancy is not very high, while at the same time throngs of children and youth from around the area gather here to attend one of the schools.

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21 The photography exhibition received broad coverage in the capital press, including *El Comercio*. It was interpreted in different ways with regard to President Belaúnde's politics of colonizing and economically developing the rainforest region. *El Comercio*, for example, contradicted the exhibition's message by writing a headline that claimed that the Amazonian natives welcomed the colonization of their region.

After the driver assured me that this was actually Matereni and I got out, I fortunately discovered something that was familiar to me about the unfamiliar surroundings: a group of women in an informal get-together drinking *masato* (manioc beer). Sitting among them was the wife of the former village chief Cesario, María, who recognized me. On this Sunday, I soon went from house to house to meet old friends and acquaintances, but also got to know a large number of young adults, adolescents, and children. During each encounter, I had to deliver the sad news that Manfred had died. Since they had not received an official notice, they continued to believe that he was alive despite his long absence. On this first day of my visit, our conversations revolved around Manfred. Even young people who had never met him personally had formed a vivid impression of him. Elvis, a man in his late twenties, had been the former *presidente* of the community, despite his youth. He represents one of two village factions, a dual organization I had already witnessed 25 years ago. Representatives of these two factions have always shared the highest political offices or regularly alternated in their responsibilities. Elvis asserted that the community owed Manfred its land title and therefore its current prosperity, for the land title enabled them to sell timber as one of its natural resources. Numerous people offered a similar assessment. As the young *ex-presidente* explained to me, Manfred's role as one of the founding figures of the village was regularly commemorated at public speeches at village festivals and national holidays. He had obviously been adopted as part of the community because of his good deeds and despite being a foreigner he was not actually regarded as an outsider.

On this first day of my visit, memories were therefore evoked in conversations and by drinking *masato* at informal get-togethers. Orality is still by far the predominant means of communication in Matereni; thus, memories are shared by way of conversation. Orality is especially powerful not only because it communicates information, but because it can also act as a rhetorical means, a catalyst for action, and a call of warning. In their narrations the residents always incorporate gestures, performances, and singing. For instance, even though she had not seen him for 25 years, to my surprise Julia, a close friend of mine, would spontaneously imitate Manfred's dance style when telling a story about him. I experienced her enactment as an impressive way of making him most vividly present, one much superior to a photo in my view.

Much of what people told me on that first day aimed to summarize the community's development over the past 25 years. The villagers expressed their pride to me at what had been achieved and they repeatedly stressed how they had built up everything through their own efforts. During the civil war, even people living far away had sought refuge in Matereni, considering it a relatively safe haven. Nevertheless, the community had suffered great setbacks. In the course of several assaults (including one in which Augusto, the former pastor and *secretario* had been killed), the entire village had been looted. At the time of the fighting, Víctor, the son of the old village chief Cesario (and the protagonist of our films) and Pablo, who was Cesario's rival, gradually assumed leadership roles. In 1988, Víctor initiated the process of timber exploitation as the new village authority. The revenues made it possible to finance the schools, potable water, and especially the houses (including the *agencia* building) for Matereni and its *anexas*. For the village's residents this success story was tinged with a sense of bitterness about how little support they had received from the Peruvian government. They now complained that the politicians were alleging that the community's hard-won achievements were supposedly due to the state's own investment. Despite having embraced this change, the people would also comment on their former diet in a highly nostalgic mood: "We hardly are able to catch any game anymore," many of my interlocutors remarked regretfully. Women recalled the abundant yields of the hunting and gathering parties that I had accompanied. Hunting and relishing the meat of tapirs, deer, wild boar, *samani* (*coelogenus paca*), monkey, and pheasant had become a thing of the past.

I was overwhelmed with unexpected memories on the first day of my ten-day visit. Through the many encounters and stories, I was able to experience the community's enduring friendship with Manfred, and with me as well. The deep sorrow over Manfred's death showed me how close many had felt to him. I was also surprised by the stories that attributed to him a central role in the village's founding, for Manfred had never claimed such a weighty role for himself. While the oral sources converge into a convincing, straightforward narrative, his written and visual sources in contrast appear to be much more fragmented. When trying to assess his actions with regard to advocacy for communal land ownership on the basis of a *comuni-*

*dad nativa* the written and visual sources require more extensive interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

### Reconciling Memories: The Following Days of My Visit

It was not until the second day of my visit that I actually unpacked my visual material. The medium of photography still does not have an institutionalized place in Matereni and until now (in August 2014) has not been appropriated as a recording technology or as a medium of remembrance. I realized this over the next few days when asking friends and acquaintances if they kept photos. Some of them proudly showed me their recently issued ID and voter cards as their only pictures. Similar ID photos are used for graduation certificates. Manfred had donated photo prints to many villagers in the 1980s – also as a basis for discussing their use – but as I was not able to find any of them, I assume they were not deemed worthy of preservation. This may hold true since objects instead of two-dimensional images remain at the center of the inhabitants' visual culture, which includes men's and women's traditional garment, *kithaarentze* (*cushma*); adorned baby slings, *tsompirontsi*; shoulder bags, *tsarato*; and bows with a variety of arrows, depending on the game to be hunted. Although these traditional objects are being supplemented or replaced by imported goods, the latter nonetheless are often fashioned in a way that preserves the old forms and functions. Two-dimensional images are rare, but some anthropomorphic and zoomorphic drawings or paintings are displayed in institutions that encourage the production of pictures, like the schools and the (Adventist) church. In contrast, modern audio-visual mass media are still scarce. Electricity is supplied by a generator requiring fuel and is limited to two to three hours in the evening. In 2009, the current village chief, Simón, acquired a solar-powered television, which, in a populist touch, he installed in front of his house along with long benches for all the villagers to enjoy at their leisure. It is the only device of its kind, yet this, too, will soon change. During my

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22 Despite the land titling of many communities, the menace of land expropriation has not been banned. Regional politicians and private companies in the Junín department continue to undermine the communal property form of the *comunidades nativas*. They try to convince the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga of the alleged advantages of a *centro poblado*, i.e., the individual parceling of land, which facilitates its commercialization.

stay, the first lines of the public electricity network had been laid, and the connection to the cellular network was also imminent. The first young adults had obtained mobile phones, although they were still used exclusively for listening to music.

Given that Matereni has no tradition of using photography as a medium of leisure or memory, my effort toward restitution confronted the residents with new issues, such as the question of how to interpret the images of the historical photographs and what uses to give them. I had brought along 10 x 15 cm prints of the 600 photos, mainly portraits of the former village inhabitants. Working together with Santiago, an old friend and the village pastor, I spread them out on two large tables in the assembly building.<sup>23</sup> People immediately started to flock to the location and over the next hours there was an excited coming and going of about sixty people (Figures 4 and 5). When viewing the photos, people wanted foremost to identify Cesario, the village chief who died in 2003, Mahuanca, the Nomatsiguenga village founder, Shenkari, the legendary shaman (*sheripari*), who had lived to be over 100 years old, and Manfred. Many of the boys commented to me: "I want to see my grandfather's face," and remarked with satisfaction that they could now see, for instance, what their grandfather Cesario had looked like. Their foremost interest was therefore directed towards deceased persons considered to have been important. I had not anticipated this and was not able to satisfy the demand for photos of these particular persons.

The people present at the photo viewing that day had only a secondary interest in recognizing and seeing themselves in the images, a possibility which I had mainly suggested to them. Personal images from childhood are still not part of constructing subjectivity in Matereni.<sup>24</sup> The task of recognizing oneself in a 25-year-old photo is a challenge in general, but even more so if the medium is still relatively new to the region. Rarely have I

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23 Originally, I intended to project the digitized photographs with the laptop and projector that I had brought along with me. However, the tactile quality of the photographs I had hastily printed out while in Satipo, proved to be much better adapted to the visual and material culture of Matereni. The prints made it possible for the residents to freely select, view, and comment on the photos at their own pace.

24 Mirrors were already widely used in the village in the late 1970s for the purpose of applying face paint. Mirrors primarily fulfilled these utilitarian purposes rather than being used for visualizing oneself as in drawing self-portraits.



**4 Víctor and Julia viewing pictures from the 1980s for the first time. Photographer: Ingrid Kummels.**

seen more stunned expressions than those of the adults whom Santiago and I tried to convince were the children in the photos. Accepting photos as part of one's own family history and deliberately using them in its construction requires socialization with photographs as a particular "way of seeing" (Berger 1990) and familiarity with forms of genealogical interpretation like family photo albums. For me and members of the urban societies I grew up in (Brazil, USA, France, and Germany), photographs have long been a fundamental dimension of subjectivity. In everyday life I seldom question their capacity of reproducing reality and their information value. People in societies like these have been socialized with photography, which means that they have been intensively instructed in the art of reading pictures. My parents first taught me to read photographs of myself (or my previous self) by narrating their anecdotes and versions of history as allegedly inscribed in such photos. Otherwise, I would not be able to identify with and make sense of "my" photos as a baby.

In the course of a similar learning process on the second day, participants began to recognize others and themselves in the photos. Moreover, they took pleasure in looking at the large stack of photos and passing them



**5 Santiago and his photograph from 1982-1983. Photographer: Ingrid Kum-mels.**

on, one by one, as part of the game of discovering others and themselves. At the same time, despite eliciting joy, pleasure, and astonishment, the photos were generally not treated as objects to be cherished and kept. I gave them away to the persons portrayed in them, but only few individuals developed a special relationship to “their” photo. For some who had known Manfred during their childhood, “their” photo reflected their relationship with the photographer. Isabel spontaneously pasted a picture of herself with a group of children on the front wall of her house, alongside the drawings of biblical motifs depicting the past that already adorned it (Figure 6). These examples show how photos are read from different points of view in day-to-day social life. The messages associated with the pictures are not restricted in a unidirectional fashion to the persons and objects represented in them. Others were recalled the humble origins and the adverse circumstances under which their village had first developed, especially when inspecting the clothing once worn by the people in the photos: hand-woven cotton *cushmas* dyed with plants and barks in a reddish-brownish color, which the youth, in particular, consider to have gone out of style. Women now have a general preference for *cushmas* of light industrial cloth of dif-





**6 Isabel pasting her childhood photo on the front wall of her house. Photographer and collage: Ingrid Kummels.**

ferent bright colors, the globally popular pink being a favorite. But the “poverty” of former garments was also interpreted as conveying their determination and mobility back then and regarded a benchmark against which today’s modernization appears as even more laudable. Still other images were commented on because of the message they conveyed through certain aesthetic choices. Even contemporary observers who are too young to have had a personal recollection, would make remarks such as: “That was a good idea of the teacher.” The reference here was to a photo of a game initiated by the teacher in which school children built and played with miniature airplanes.

Once displayed, the photos and the films I had brought figured prominently in the conversations I had with the villagers. This was particularly true, for instance, with Simón, the village’s current *presidente*, whom I met two days later, after he had returned from a regional meeting of the Asháninka and Nomatsiguenga in Pucallpa. Much like Elvis, Simón represents at 33 years of age a new generation, which now wields political power and decides on the new benchmarks for a good (and modern) life in Matereni. I had known Simón well as an eight-year-old in the late 1980s and personally witnessed how his father Cesario had raised and trained him to become his successor as the head of the village.<sup>25</sup> Yet due to the civil war, he and Elvis

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25 This is especially apparent in the final scene of our documentary *In Green Heaven*. Cesario delivers a speech in front of the camera in which he warns that



**7 Simón as a child accompanying Manfred during the shooting of *In Green Heaven* in 1989 and today. Photographer: Ingrid Kummels.**

belong to the generation of children who were forced to grow up outside of the community: For their protection, their parents sent them to secondary schools in the larger towns of Mazamari and Satipo during the second half of the 1990s. There they lived with and worked for non-Asháninka, in exchange for room and board. As representatives of Matereni's two main factions, Simón and Elvis are political rivals. When I met Simón for the first time there was a bit of tension in the air, because I had made the acquaintance of his rival first and we were essentially strangers to each other. The photos, however, helped me to substantiate my memories of him as a child. Just as my parents had done earlier, I caught myself convincing Simón of the anecdotes that I recollected with regard to "his" childhood photos (Figure 7). I told him about how he used to follow the two of us everywhere, and the images, which showed him enjoying himself in our company during our film work, seemed to support this. I also specifically gave to Simón the pictures of his father on the journey to the Ministry of Agriculture in Lima. He was especially intrigued by these black-and-white photos, an aesthetic that was deliberately chosen at that time to convey historical proof of the village's quest for official recognition. Simón immediately commented on how this photo and others of the former village could be enlarged and used for political purposes, such as one of a Cessna airplane at the local airstrip.

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their land could become scarce again one day because of population growth. In this scene, he specifically placed beside him his eight-year-old son Simón, wearing a shoulder bag (*tsarato*) as a sign of his Asháninka identity.

He wanted to frame these photos, along with one of longtime *teniente gobernador* Cesario, to adorn the *agencia*. When I interviewed Simón a few days later with the camcorder, he immediately corroborated his oral history version of Matereni's foundation by interpreting the photos and the film *In the Green Heaven* as substantiating this version:

“First, all of the *comunidades nativas* were formed and my father convened the people of Matereni. According to the story he told me, he himself came from Mazamari. That's where he lived the previous years and he later came here to be able to found a small village. It first only had ten community members. Some would live there, others [lived] farther away. When he arrived, they started to come together and organize as a small village. In the film, one notices that this is actually what happened, right?”

Simón devised another political use for the photos when he invited me on a trip the next day that turned out to be a kind of election campaign to the neighboring villages of Alto Chichireni and Tinkabeni. As *presidente*, part of his responsibilities consists in visiting the *anexas* on regular basis, which he does by driving his own Toyota Jeep on what might be one of the world's toughest dirt roads. Simón asked me to bring along pictures of the neighboring villages that were left over from the selection process, as well as my camcorder. He wanted me to film the trip over the dirt road. It was filled with deep muddy furrows, and we had to cross several rivers without bridges. Simón specifically made stops for recording purposes. He identified positively with the scenes he wanted me to capture, attributing to them an authenticity with regard to the current lifestyle of this rainforest region. He related these scenes both to a realistic documentary style of filming and to the genre of the action film. Simón would playfully refer to our super 8 films as action films, as “Acción Matereni.” The action film coincides thematically with the militarization of the area: In Chichireni, 40 military personnel monitor the area, which is now called VRAEM (Valle del Río Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro). During the presidency of Ollanta Humala, this vast region was identified as the country's last stronghold of terrorism and drug trafficking (*narcoterrorismo*).

I had anticipated from the outset that the photos I had brought with me would be used in relation to this difficult situation. When we briefly stopped at this first of VRAEM's many military bases, Simón, who of course knew all the soldiers well, referred to some of them jokingly as “my

cousin” and “my brother-in-law.” This was an effective way of relieving pressure in such situations. He had told me earlier that I should pretend to be a teacher working in Matereni. Continuing on our way, we made a stop in the village of Alto Chichireni, where, as a conventional greeting, we were served large gourds with manioc beer to share with others in conversation. Simón immediately signaled to me to show my photos. When Eugenio, a teacher, looked through them, he discovered two group portraits of Alto Somabeni. After scrutinizing these pictures for a long time, Eugenio said: “You might think that they were still alive.” It was a touching moment. He told me that two of the three men in the picture were his uncles. They had followed the Sendero terrorists to the villages, which they had occupied with great enthusiasm because they were promised the moon, that is, “that they would get a lot of things, that they would be millionaires.” That was the last time he saw his uncles, for they never turned up again, and it is assumed that they are no longer alive. “I have identified my family,” Eugenio finally told me with a voice and a smile that conveyed a certain satisfaction. Simón further remarked that he would now be able to use the photo to claim compensation. In this case, the slides that Manfred once arranged and classified under the heading of “people” had transformed into evidence for entering into negotiations with the state and for demanding reparations.

## Outlook

What is the future of these historic photos? I realized from the beginning of my brief journey that the hard disk with the digital copies that I would leave behind with Simón in his capacity as *presidente* of the community could be little more than an initial intervention with regard to their “visual repatriation.” By the time I departed ten days later, clearer – but also conflicting – ideas had emerged. Various groups in the community had formulated their own claims in accordance with the tensions of the local political structure. Simón asked me if, for my next visit, I could enlarge certain photos and frame them so that they might be hung at the *agencia*. Even the teachers of the various schools, who are key political actors, had their own requests. The teacher of the primary school, a son of Carlos and a good friend of Manfred, told me to bring a laptop and a projector as a donation for the school during my next visit. I promised that I would return with these ob-

jects in exactly two years. Hence, I began my journey home with the feeling that my obligation to the community had been extended by these new demands. After a long period of neglect and forgetting, the historical photographs from the 1980s have assumed a new potency at the nexus Peru and Germany – or, even more specifically, in relation to the Asháninka, Nomatsiguenga, and “their” anthropologists and new friends. When Matereni was finally connected to the cellular network in November 2015, the first message I received in Berlin from the village was: “Hi Ingrid, this is a greeting from your friend Simón Chiricente [...] I want you to send me last year’s photographs and videos.”

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