Government Rationality and Risk Production: Case Study from River Communities in Peru

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Article

Government Rationality and Risk Production: Case Study from River Communities in Peru

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Abstract: Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in marginal, low-income, Belenino river communities located in Iquitos, a fluvial city in the Amazon basin. By using ethnographic methods and semi-structured interviews, this article traces how risk is associated with life in Belenino communities and how the identity of Beleninos and the river at the heart of a resettlement project are politically constructed rather than empirically constructed. In this case study of resettlement, understandings of risk and development by Belenino river communities and the government both conflicted and overlapped, I identified three elements that help to shape the concept of risk in both groups that highlight the disjunctive meanings provided by culture and demonstrate the complexity of the analysis of both populations. Finally, by putting the state's weak presence after a developmental project failure under ethnographic approximation, the article reveals an imbalance in validity and power in terms of the perspectives of the river and Belen.

Keywords: risk; resettlement; governmentality; development; river communities

1. Introduction

Belen has 71 005 inhabitants (INEI 2020) distributed over 56 caseríos [small villages] and 19 neighborhoods in the urban area. The main means of transportation are peque peques [canoes] and motocars [motorcycles with extra seats in the back]. Beleninos live in stilt houses with wood or concrete pillars and stories used depending on the season. The houses have wood and palm frond roofs, which result in a woody, almost moldy smell when mixed with hot air. While rustic, these households usually have electricity and water systems. For many months of the year, the neighborhoods are organized with wood board bridges functioning as aerial sidewalks. Canoes transit under the houses, children play in the polluted water, and turkey buzzards fly in circles overhead. The waste in the water includes syringes from the medical center and fecal matter as a result of the many drains that flow into the Itaya River. Without an epidemiological study, the degree to which this contamination impacts the health of inhabitants is unknown.

The Belenino river communities located in Iquitos are isolated because of the absence of road infrastructure to connect them with the rest of Peru. Bajo Belen (throughout the text, just "Belen") is an exclusively fluvial city in the Amazon basin with fast-flowing rivers and strong negative indicators in terms of health, education, and violence (ENDES 2012). This city, from experts' and the government's perspective, is in a state of emergency because of flooding (INDECI & OCHA 2015). However, Beleninos state that their communities have incorporated flexible, urban architectural systems including residential complexes, commercial areas, and places of leisure to adapt to the variations in the river levels and "flooding." The interaction between the weather and the soil contributes to the movement towards the rivers although the territory appears unstable (Vega-Centeno 2007). Rainfall also shapes the social and urban structure of Belen. For example, during the rainy season, Beleninos add stories to their houses to prevent flooding. While the dry season or bajial between July and August is characterized by less precipitation (200ml/m2), during the tahuampa between January and March, the rainfall can exceed 1000ml/m2, varying the level of the rivers by 25 meters and flooding the riverbanks for hundreds of kilometers (Vega-Centeno 2007). Moreover, the variance in rainfall creates a diversity of geographic spaces and a regenerative cycle for the flora and fauna that, in their perspective, it is not flooding but the natural movement of the river.

In June 2013, the Ministry of Housing, Construction, and Sanitation (MVCS) and the District Municipality of Belen started the project "Belen Sostenible" ["Belen Sustainable"], a government initiative outside national politics. Through the construction of typical wooden houses, pedestrian sidewalks, and aerial routes for motorized vehicles, the project sought to improve the quality of life for Belen's population. The idea was to respect the local cultural practices and maintain an environmental, ecological, and human balance (MVCS 2013). In September 2013, the housing construction began. With the District Municipality of Belen's support, 125 homes were built. However, after the first stage of construction, the MVCS decided to discontinue Belen Sostenible. While the first project considered local know-how as the basis for its design, respecting the natural river fluctuations meant waiting for lower precipitation to start the construction of the houses. This waiting period made it difficult for political agents to calculate the project's progress, thereby making it "inefficient" as well as revealing various technical limitations for future maintenance.

Suddenly, in November 2014, Law 30291 passed declaring the communities of Belen at risk due to constant flooding. The strategy, as a political decision due to an incomplete promise, was to relocate Beleninos to dry land for better and easier monitoring of their "development" and to intensify government efficiency and make it auditable (Dean 1998, O'Malley 1996, Rose 1996).

In February 2015, the Peruvian Navy presented a technical report on the variation of the Amazon River course in relation to the Itaya River (where Beleninos live), supporting the resettlement project. The findings of this geological and geotechnical study state that in approximately 51 years, the Amazon River will return to its original course, following what used to be its path in the 1700s (the Itaya River), and will take over the current Itaya River, thereby flooding Belen (Navy technical report, 2015). On April 30, 2015, an intergovernmental memo was signed by local and national authorities guaranteeing support of the resettlement project. The MVCS consequently financed the first resettlement project to move people from one of the communities of Belen to dry land. Thenceforth, some public servants, in charge of the project in Belen, started to threat and intimidate Beleninos, based on the Navy´s report, by telling them that "a navy truck is going to come to destroy their houses if they don't want to leave." This discourse was presented as a strategy to save them from the flooding.

When the relocation project started, 197 families signed the "giving-up document," surrendering their houses in Belen to obtain property tittles in the resettlement area, Varillalito. This area is located at kilometer 12.6 of the Iquitos-Nauta Highway, one to two hours by bus from Belen.[1]

In less than six months, the government's ideas about the river had changed as well as their dialogue with Beleninos. Now it was an uninhabitable space that contributed to a bad view of the city of Iquitos because of its dirtiness and public insecurity as well as the way Beleninos behave because "they don't know how to live." This unexpected turn brought the first wave of protest organized by the Beleninos.

This paper traces how risk is imagined to be associated with life in Belenino communities. Government actors tend to see the river's polluted waters and shorelines, and its frequent flooding as sources of great risk to community members. In contrast, community members who have long lived with the river's fluctuations see the river as a source of life, a resource for development, and an integral part of their identity. In this case study, resettlement functions as a political opportunity, a result of government risk assessment as a simplification of nature to suit developers' and public and private institutions' goals. More specifically, my study seeks to answer the following questions: How are state actors' understandings of the river and risk mobilized to undergird resettlement as a technique of government? How is risk entangled with particular interventions and extensions of state power? Why is it important to investigate the government's and Beleninos' notions of development as opposing as well as overlapping and based on diverse origins?

In particular, this article investigates how the overlap of perspectives of the river and Belen are risk perceptions and demonstrates that paying attention to them as such reveals that the risk is

[1] The resettlement project has been at a standstill since the end of 2019.

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politically constructed. In the following sections, I explore how the identities of Beleninos and the river—the objects of intervention—are constructed by creating new subjectivities regarding nature and risk, and how that notion of risk is materialized and legitimized by a group of privileged actors justifying the resettlement project.

2. Materials and Methods

In my efforts, I draw on 54 in-depth interviews of inhabitants of Belen (22), ex-inhabitants of Belen that now live in the resettlement area (13), public servants of institutions related to the resettlement project (16), and scholars from Iquitos that follow the project (3); ethnographic fieldwork over a 10-month period; and archival work, after having the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition, I carried out countless informal conversations and ethnographic fieldwork over a 10-month period distributed over October 2014; February, March, and December 2015; April, June, and December 2016; and May, June, and July 2017. In addition to archival work mostly in Iquitos, I conducted all of the formal interviews in this last period in 2017. Most of the in-depth interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded to analyze their content. The interviews not tape-recorded were codified by using the notes taken during the interview. The experience of "hanging out" in Belen was indispensable to my research. From cleaning clothes to taking baths to washing dishes, I saw diverse variations of the same daily activities that occur in all households. I experienced firsthand how these activities are intrinsically related to rainfall and risk perceptions. My fieldwork was restricted to Belen, the communities next to the port, and the market.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish after explaining to the participants the purpose of the study and a verbal confidentiality agreement, which included not using real names in order to protect their identities. Conducting interviews and informal conversations in Spanish with Iquiteño slang made me question how to translate the true meaning of Iquiteños' testimonies. I started thinking about some differences between English and Spanish and how, as a native Spanish speaker, I was going to convey the emotions and significance behind each conversation. I decided to articulate literal and interpretive translations to preserve the essence of the dialogue while still making it understandable for English readers. In this scenario, verbal consent is more culturally appropriate than written informed consent. Prior research conducted with human subjects in developing countries, including Peru, indicates that research participants are often wary of signing documents such as consent forms, and it is generally more customary to receive verbal consent for research in developing countries.

3. Results

In this case study of resettlement, understandings of risk and development by Belenino river communities and the government both conflicted and overlapped. I identified three elements that help to shape the concept of risk in both groups : 1. view of the river, 2. notions of development, and 3. the Belenino identity. These elements highlight the disjunctive meanings provided by culture and demonstrate the complexity of the analysis of both populations. The narratives of both groups demonstrate a nuanced viewed of how risk management happens for different social groups and the empirical and theoretical implications of the divergence, thereby challenging existing literature on resettlement and displacement, and risk perceptions.

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	Elements that shape risk perception		
	View of the river	Notions of development	Belenino identity
Beleninos	• Resource • Sustainability • Rain • Natural river fluctuations	• Fishing • Market • Chacra [farm] • Social network • Rainfall	• Traditions • Identity • Organization with nature • Solidarity • Local know-how
Government	• Flooding • Risk management need • Obstacle for development	• Less pollution • Usable water • Less interpersonal violence • Less urban violence	• Immoral • Dirty • Deviant • Ignorant • Undisciplined

1. View of the river

The first element explains why living on the water is risky for one group and not for another. According to the government, public servants, and development experts, the flooding hazard constitutes the main problem, which presents the need for a risk assessment policy. This group aligns their understanding of risk according to the principles of developmental programs (Defert 1991) to effectively control environments, natural resources, and populations (Goldman 2001). According to these principles, the natural fluctuations of the river and the rain are variables that present an obstacle to the government's ability to give Beleninos development and the "greater good." For instance, public servants say that Belen is uninhabitable because the flooding prevents building concrete structures and installing drains and lighting. In their view, resettlement is easier as a risk reduction strategy.

Additionally, the government cites a study conducted by the Navy explaining that the Amazon River will inevitably flood Belen and destroy its communities. The following two interview excerpts summarize public servant discourse on how living on the river is unsafe for populations. Roberto and Margot work for different institutions related to the project. Both of them represent one of the main arguments supporting the resettlement project:

Roberto: "You cannot live there [Belen], modifying the house every time it is flooded. You cannot live like that. It is inhumane. You cannot improve your house there because you cannot build concrete structures, because of the water. Structures cannot resist [the water]. Some people have electricity there, but then there are fires; nothing can be built there."

Margot: "The law has technical support, a report from the Ministry of War [Navy], which indicates that the Amazon River will recover its previous course. That means that the entire lowland area of Belen is not only going to flood, but that it will be covered by the waters of the Amazon River, and it will no longer be just a flood; it would be something permanent."

These testimonies are compelling because they are from the same public servants that previously supported the Belen Sostenible project, which was based on the construction of typical wooden houses on the river and appreciated the Belenino cultural and economic perspective. Roberto and Margot use their approximations of development to reject the possibility of living on the river and to turn the idea of the river fluctuations as a resource into a risk that needs to be managed.

On the other hand, for Beleninos, the river constitutes a resource for their survival. For them, the river has a different meaning. The changes in the river level are part of their everyday reality, their community and family habits, their shared knowledge of living with and on the river, and their history from the beginning of the development of Belen. For them, the government's concept of flooding misinterprets the natural river fluctuations. The government's approach to the river, and water in general, it is not just a different understanding of risk and economic means; to Beleninos, not having the resources of Belen available threatens their survival as well as their culture and social

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and economic development. Marta and Eduardo have lived in Belen their whole lives and have learned to live with river fluctuations. To them, living on the river does not constitute a risk:

Marta: "They enacted a law based on a study conducted by the Navy of Peru that says that this area will disappear; we have another report that says the contrary. Every year, there is flooding, but that is natural; that does not mean that we are in danger or at risk. The government should improve the life quality of the population here, instead of wanting to get us out."

Eduardo: "Because of the huaycos [mudslides/landslides], that's why they have started talking about flooding. Here we have the creciente and vaciante. Here there is no risk; the only thing we have to do is be careful."

Marta and Eduardo do not trust the Navy's technical report. They know that river fluctuations are difficult to predict and are not flooding. They think that the government's ideas of the river and their thoughts on the river's behavior are those of westerners, which explains why they see risk and nature differently than they do as locals. However, both views are not exclusive but overlapping, making this conflict more nuanced as can be seen in the testimonies of Pablo:

Pablo: "I get it, Belen Sostenible was not sustainable, but it doesn't mean that it is not possible. It was a political opportunity to think about "new cities." The technical part of the project was very idealistic because the maintenance is too expensive. It is similar to the Varillalito project, it is not ok; it is not even finished… Ollanta [Peru's past president] promised something to the Beleninos that he couldn't accomplish. But again, it is not true that you can't build houses on the water. There are many cities—look at Venice—that is why people call Belen 'the Peruvian Venice.'"

Pablo is an example of an actor with different understandings of risk that help legitimize the resettlement (Apter, 1997). Their testimonies are evidence of the complexity of the discourses around the justifications of the resettlement project. However, they still justify the government's ignorance of the essential features of the local culture's social order (Pierce 2006: 897). This view is in line with a way of thinking about development and governmental intervention (Li 1999, 2014) as further presented in the following dimension.

2. Notions of development

The government and Beleninos also have different notions of development. On the one hand, the government sees Belen as an undeveloped, polluted, and dangerous place without access to potable water and drains. The waste in the water includes garbage from households, fecal matter, and syringes from the medical center. The government is also concerned about the domestic violence, robberies, and drug selling that occurs within the neighborhoods. All Beleninos agree with this element of the government's perspective; however, they argue that the government should be responsible for what they call "undeveloped." From their perspective, some of the features of their surroundings are indeed risky, such as the ones related to quality of life in regard to public health. However, the focus of the government's justification for the resettlement project is the Beleninos' inability to live on the river. The government approaches nature and the river with governmental rationality, as an effort to secure "the right manner of disposing things to optimize the health and wealth of populations at large (Foucault 1991a, 95). This manner is based on an idea of development that does not include fishing, the market, farming, social networks, and rainfall as resources (Li 2014, Hacking 1986). On the contrary, Beleninos have a different perspective of nature, the river, and how they interact with them (Li 2014); for them, nature can be appropriated for human use as "natural resources" (Scott 1998). Beleninos have a different historical perception and evaluation, and consider living in Belen a resource for their development (Hacking 1986).

The following testimonies of Ricardo and Gilda, public servants that support the resettlement project, summarize institutionalized ideas about the dirtiness of Belen and how they perceive Beleninos' lives:

Ricardo: "When the river is higher, you see one child washing his teeth in the morning while another one is going to the bathroom, everything with the same water...It is a different mentality from what we live here [in the city of Iquitos]. They see it as normal...To improve the quality of life, we have to boost values."

Gilda: "Belen is like a giant market; you can find everything. They sell you everything: drugs, sex, children…there [in Belen], people think that hitting women is normal, that stealing is normal, children tell you that their father is a thief, as if it was normal, or that their mother is a prostitute...acting in that way, they will not better themselves."

These testimonies expose important social problems that need to be fixed by the government. However, they are not directly related to the resettlement project or the space, but to the efficiency. The Beleninos recognize and share the government's view of Belen as dirty to some degree while at the same time blaming them for putting the drains in their space. They claim that the state should have more involvement regarding garbage collection and provide more police officers. From their perspective, there is a lack of municipality participation in the district, a place that has many resources for social and economic development. In their minds, Belen is a place in which nobody starves. There are always resources to survive: the river, the chacra [farm], the market, and social networks. Belen's inhabitants form strong bonds.

Mirla came to Belen from the chacra when she was a teenager. While she recognizes some of the government's perspectives about the river and Belen, living in Belen helped her to cope with the dangers and uncertainties of life. Her daily routine of selling coal and sugar cane liquor allowed her to raise her three daughters and two sons. Her observation comes from a comparison between her life before and after living in the river community. Living in Belen brought her more security. Indeed, from her perspective, it enhanced her economic and social development, as explained in the following quote.

Mirla: "The people of Belen buy and sell in the market and from their homes, it's their way of living. You go fishing early, and you're going to the market to sell, and with that, you have money to eat and help your family. For example, I have my sugar cane, with that, I prepare liquor and sell it from my home and sometimes in the market. To me, Belen gave me opportunities that I did not have when I was little…Here, my family and I think that all those who have come here have been able to improve. Here, you can ask anyone! Here, we will not live in wealth, but we continue to survive and even improve."

As in the first element, the government's and Beleninos' notions of development are mostly based on disparate cultural origins, although there are some intermediate points of view. Essential features of Belenino river communities are incomprehensible to some because they have different systems of meaning provided by their respective cultures (Mitchell 2009; Babb 2001; Ferguson 1994). While Beleninos recognize that Belen has several problems that need improvement, the government's institutionalized perspective of development has allowed it to determine standards of normality that question the traditional life context described in Mirla's testimony.

3. Belenino identity

From the government's perspective, Belen is not just a dirty place, but a space with filthy practices and deviant culture which makes it undeveloped. These opinions have built meanings surrounding the identity of Beleninos that support the government risk construction arguments justifying the resettlement project. Public servants see Beleninos aiming to preserve and benefit from immoral practices such as robbery, drug dealing, alcohol sales, human trafficking, and informal businesses (Li 1999). In addition, these employees question the Beleninos' worldview because by living around and with the river, they willingly accept the risk of diseases from water pollution and subpar standards of living. In their words, Beleninos live a "vicious lifecycle" that needs to be regulated (Li 1999) for the sake of development (Defert 1991). In some public servants' words, refusing the resettlement project and voluntarily putting themselves at risk reflects Beleninos' ignorance of how a person should live and their failure to recognize how their lives would be improved by living on solid ground and letting the government transform populations (Ferguson 1994, Li 1999) for the 'greater good' (Cernea 2000). These perceptions are captured in a conversation with a public servant from Iquitos directly related to the project. The following conversation with Clara illustrates some of the arguments used by many public servants to support the resettlement project and to delegitimize the Beleninos' local culture.

Interviewer: Tell me about your job, what do you do for the project? Can you walk me through it?

Clara: Well I do home visits to see if the people of Belen want to sign up to go to Varillalito. Then there are also informative workshops on the project, such as on the proper use of water; they do not know how to use water...Belen, from my perspective, has sectors that are a bit bleak. It scares me because people are drinking; there are also drugs. I have the sense that people in Belen live in their world, in their comfort zone. For a person who has never been in Belen, it would be shocking. You see the children, while one is brushing his teeth, the other is doing his business [in the same water], and for the mother, this is normal, or you see children not going to school. It's a mentality and a world different from what we see, but for them, it is normal. We seek to improve the quality of life in general. You have to give them values, security, respect for themselves, love, solidarity, the need to study...People of Belen are a bit conformist; they do not see beyond.

Clara is a psychologist that organizes the workshops. In these workshops, she talks about the benefits of living in Varillalito as well as the 'vicious lifecycle' of Beleninos that live on the river. She creates an atmosphere that separates the qualified Beleninos from the unqualified ones, and promises to teach Beleninos that decide to resettle how to properly behave, general grooming practices, and healthy social and personal relationships, as a way to re-school them (Collins & Mayer 2010) and create new subjectivities (Li 1999). By marking the undeveloped and risky identities, she uses the workshops to 'deposit' mental and physical schemes of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2005, Bourdieu, 2000), thereby breaking down old forms of living and enabling new ones to come into being (Scott 1995, 193).

On the one hand, Beleninos acknowledge cases of urban and interpersonal violence as well as sexual abuse. No interviewee justifies these problems. They, indeed, suggest that they require government attention. For instance, they call for greater police presence, garbage collection, and the restriction of medical waste disposal. On the other hand, they do justify practices reflecting their relationship with nature, their identity, and their traditions. For them, as in their notions of development, many of the problems in Belen need to be solved through collective efforts. However, the existence of problems does not invalidate their local know-how, traditions, and how they live with nature that, in Varillalito, are canceled in the absence of the river, farm, and market. The following testimonies of Magda and José summarize the Belenino perspective about their way of life in Belen. Both were born in Belen and identify themselves as Beleninos:

Magda: "I know that there are robbers here, bars, bad things, but as in every place. At least we don´t die here out of poverty. The government wants to relocate us where there is no development, nothing to survive. Here are our customs, our culture, our work. The majority of people work in markets, ports, rivers, and others work in farms in nearby areas."

José: "We know how we live; we know how to live...Enacting a law against a population in a habitable place?…how is Belen uninhabitable? So I'm an animal? I am a Belenino. I was born here; my father and my mother raised me here."

While Beleninos relate their socialization to their history and identity without justifying their social problems, public servants utilize negative descriptions of Beleninos to reinforce the aims of their resettlement project. The government does not consider the Belenino identity as an actual identity but as a way to demonstrate the risk of their way of life (O'Malley 1996). Therefore, their 'spoiled' identity supports the legitimization of the resettlement project. Some public servants have decided to ignore the essential features of the local culture's social orders and to undermine the ability of the Beleninos and others (Mathews 2008) to envision the state as an entity with legitimate actors (Pierce 2006: 897) that 'knows better' with regard to development and risk. Under this rationale, the resettlement project operates as an effective risk reduction strategy.

4. Discussion

Natural disasters are inherently political events because they pose questions about environmental management and who should be allowed to assess damage and how (Tironi 2018, 2014; Rodríguez-Giralt, Tirado & Tironi 2014; Tironi & Farías 2015; Auyero & Switstun 2009). One

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way to respond to disaster is to relocate the affected population as part of a risk reduction strategy (Iuchi & Mutter 2020; Najarian, Majeed & Gasparyan 2017). However, relocating communities is usually the last development policy considered due to the major changes it produces (Jha 2009). Resettlement disrupts local culture (Rohe & Mouw 1991), economics (Cernea 2003), and social networks (Viratkapan & Perera 2006; Erikson 1976). Socially responsible relocation guided by government rationality and an 'equity compass' can counteract lasting impoverishment and even generate benefits for both the national and local economies (Cernea 2000). Conversely, planning aimed at bringing order in the context of disaster, where much is uncertain, reactive, and dependent on emerging relations between people, things, and spaces, can produce disaster (Easthope & Mort 2014; Kendra and Wachtendorf 2007; Harrison & Mort 1998; Erikson 1976). In other words, risk can be politically constructed to effectively control environments, natural resources, and populations (Goldman 2001), but also as a justification for forced displacement (Cernea 2000) as in this study case.

The rationale for government approximation of development draws on the more general logic of governmentality as a form of power that aims to regulate how people live their lives (Li 1999), breaking down old conditions and constructing new ones to enable new forms of life to come into being (Scott 1995, 193). This approximation of development and its features helps explain why the resettlement project was justified as the best response to flooding. Optimizing development meant not only leaving the river, but also customs and problems such as lacking public safety and sanitation. Thus, "development," as a politically charged arena (Ferguson 1994) brought about by the government, supplies definitions of deficiency, techniques for bringing change and judging success (Li 1999), as well as a notion of what constitutes a resource (Hacking 1989).

In the law that supports the resettlement project, the Peruvian government proposes ideas about risk that delegitimize the Beleninos view of their home. According to Beleninos, the government not only failed to inform them about the real purposes of the resettlement project, but also used intimidation strategies to influence their decision-making surrounding ressettlement. For instance, telling them that the government will force them to leave to save them from the flooding. By applying the government's own definition of risk, as a reduction strategy, which in this case, came in the form of power aimed at regulating beleninos's lives, the government designed a relocation project as a risk assessment policy that aims to gain and maintain legitimacy and power in the eyes of the public (Marlor 2010), because "they don't know how to live." Instead of leveraging the local know-how as the basis for public policies, the government delegitimized the Beleninos worldview of the river fluctuations as a resource rather than a risk.

This resettlement project occurred for development reasons. However, it embodied a perverse and intrinsic contradiction in the context of development, aligning understandings of risk according to the principles of developmental programs (Defert 1991) that bear little relation to local culture. By using the logic of the "greater good," it rationalized and justified a force resettlement (Cernea 2000). Unlike other cases of forced displacement literature (Behura & Nayak 2019; Pandey 1996; Gutman 1994), the idea of a forced action was not entirely clear; the manipulation was more fundamental. Some months after the project began, some Beleninos began accepting the justifications of public policymakers and the government. The workshops and talks conducted by the government provided a theatrical stage on which "official knowledge" silenced all of the previous arguments provided by the same government about living on the river. This knowledge production was employed to build political support (Mathews 2008) and to espouse new perspectives on nature and therefore risk. Consequently, some Beleninos began to accept the development schemes and related forms of political power (Li 1999) as well as the reformatting of social relations with which the idea of living outside the river were entangled (Li 2014).

Accordingly, living on solid ground was promoted as a resource and form of development (Hacking 1989) with less risk as determined collectively by experts, public servants, and citizens (Li 2014). This definition of a resource and its intimate relation with development is one of the more significant "everyday forms of state formation" (Joseph and Nugent 1994). Development as a concept authorizes the government to engage directly in projects that aim to transform and "improve" populations (Ferguson 1994, Li 1999). Consequently, leaving Belen constitutes improvement.

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Initially, the argument that supported the resettlement project revolved around flooding as the main risk. However, as time went by and protests increased, new arguments flourished. For some public servants, Beleninos have chosen a "vicious lifestyle" by living on the river with its pollution and interpersonal violence. These new arguments arose to defend the legitimacy of the project (Hall et al. 2011). The river's designation as a resource depends on the exclusion of Beleninos from the river. Thus, portraying Beleninos as deviants worked as a political strategy to support the project. Meanwhile, the workshops and talks hosted by the government suggested that Varillalito was an opportunity to start a new way of living.

The government offered Beleninos who decided to move psychological assistance and other workshops on behavior, general grooming practices, and healthy social and personal relationships. Public servants promoted the 'habilitation' as a method of re-schooling (Collins & Mayer 2010) in a new solid space that, in their words, would not accept robbers or people with vicious habits. Thus, the resettlement project used notions of development as a risk reduction strategy to not only create new perceptions of risk regarding the river, but also to enable a new way of life to come into being by rejecting and stigmatizing the old one and labeling it as undeveloped, risky, and in Goffman's lens (1970), the spoiled identity. However, risk is constructed reflexively (Beck 1992). It does not exist 'out there' independently of people's minds and cultures; it constitutes a feeling (Slovic 2010, 2004; Loewenstein et al. 2001) embedded in daily routines and regular processes which structure people's thinking (Heimer 2001). It manifests as social constructs with real effects that can be aligned with the role of both perceptions and social activity based on systems of meaning provided by culture, developed through social interactions, and produced through claims-making activities (Slovic 2010; Kahan & Slovic 2006; Petryna 2002; Douglas & Wildavsky 1983). However, in practice, not all approximations of risk are equally valuable. Even though, in general, risk is socially and reflexively constructed, it is not equally legitimized when it comes to power and the politics around it. This occurs with more intensity when talking about development experts that transform "risk" into "risk management," making it possible for risk management policies to be applied to social problems as assets to secure well-being (Gordon 1991: 38-39) even though risk in developmental policies continuously envisions the state as an entity with legitimate actors that are allowed to ignore the essential features of local cultures' social orders (Pierce 2006: 897).

From this perspective, risk becomes a calculative rationality linked to a way of thinking about the field of political action and governmental intervention (Dean 1998). Rather than an inherently subjective perception (Slovic 2014, 2010, 1999), it supposes an expert rationale. It is true that risk may exist in the imagination of people and not necessarily be experienced but collectively constructed (Das 1997, 1996). However, that construction, in practice, does not include the whole community. It only merges perceptions that already share similar ideas on quality of life, communal wellness, and trust between the members of a community. Thus, while Beleninos perceptions of the river and nature are locally constructed and reproduced, the government's and experts' come mostly from systematic assumptions of laboratory knowledge (Beck 1992: 4, 79) about what it means to live on the river. Therefore, through intentional and unintentional practices of contradicting local assumptions about risk (Mathews 2008), whether as a power-laden discourse (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994) or as the result of a project of legibility (Scott 1998), the government and experts ignore local risk discourses and collaborate in creating knowledge and ignorance.

Thus, the government's understanding of risk does not correspond with that of the beneficiaries and therefore fails to achieve its stated objectives by being based on a "construction" of the country/community/space that bears little relation to local culture (Ferguson 1994). Essential features of Belenino river communities are inaccessible to the government because they have different systems of meaning (Mitchell 2009; Babb 2001; Ferguson 1994). Risk production goes beyond the question of how is produced, but explains how risk is politically constructed and has a power structure that does not equally consider definitions of risk that do not come from experts. In this way, risk is constructed subjectively, but it is materialized as a calculative rationale that is legitimized by a group of privileged actors that justify the resettlement project based on their notions of risk.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I found that the overlapping of perspectives unveils risk as politically, socially, and reflexively constructed. However, not all approximations of risk are valued equally. Public servants generally consider living on solid ground as a resource for development. For them, resettlement in Varillalito is the right way to optimize development. Living on the river constitutes a risk because it is difficult to effectively control the environment and to regulate how Beleninos live their lives (Goldman 2001, Li 1999). This approximation of development, however, embodies an inherent paradox in the context of development. By using the logic of the "greater good," it rationalizes and justifies a forced/manipulated resettlement (Cernea 2000) that bears little relation to Beleninos' local culture.

As protests increased, new arguments emerged positioning Beleninos as a population with a 'spoiled identity' requiring protection. This new persuasive element defending the legitimacy of the project further shaped public servants' concept of risk, view of the river, and notions of development and the Belenino identity. First, the natural fluctuations of the river and the rain are variables that present an obstacle to the government's ability to provide development. In their view, resettlement is easier as a risk reduction strategy. Second, the government sees Belen as an undeveloped, polluted, and dangerous place without access to potable water and drains. Thus, the government approaches nature and the river as things that hinder proper development. Finally, the right manner of development also includes not being a Belenino. For some public servants, Beleninos are the object of intervention, living a "vicious lifecycle" that needs to be regulated (Li 1999) for the sake of development (Defert 1991).

Resettlement as a risk reduction strategy is confusing to them for two reasons. First, the Belen Sostenible project featured development ideas that supported the local and cultural context of Beleninos (Jha 2009). Then suddenly, when the government realized that the project was not sustainable, it changed its narrative and view of Belen by creating a sense of risk that considers the whole space undeveloped (Ferguson 1994; Li 1999) and in need of governmental intervention. This abrupt change demonstrates that the construction of risk is part of a power structure that does not equally consider meanings of risk that do not come from 'experts.' This also explains why some Beleninos changed their thoughts about living in Belen and decided to be resettle in Varillalito arguing that the government "should know better" (Mathews 2008; Scott 1998) while others continue to defend their view of the river, notions of development, sense of Belenino identity, and belief in local know-how. In their view, the Amazon environment has organized their conception of space and taught them to live with river fluctuations rather than seeing them as a risk. Beleninos' notions of development include living on the river and using their surroundings as a resource for their development and survival.

This analysis of risk has implications for risk construction and development theories as well as studies of disasters and resettlement. First, it illustrates the importance of risk as a concept that is constructed reflexively, in constant conversation with people's minds and cultures, and manifests as social constructs with real effects in terms of perceptions and social activity based on systems of meaning provided by culture (Slovic 2010; Kahan & Slovic 2006; Petryna 2002; Douglas & Wildavsky 1983). However, it also underscores the variable of power that gives or takes away the legitimacy of how risk is constructed. Thus, risk is embedded in regular processes that structure people's thinking (Heimer 2001), is politically constructed, and therefore legitimized by a group of privileged actors, in this case, the government positioned as experts. This approach to risk explains why after the failure of the Belen Sostenible project, the government's changing ideas about the river and manner of communicating with Beleninos were accepted by the majority of public servants as a government technique, and even some Beleninos, who believed in the legitimacy of the government's new discourse about the risk of living on the river. Second, this analysis reveals that the concept of risk is inherently related to development. Thus, it is possible to understand development as a risk reduction strategy, which in this case, came in the form of power aimed at regulating people's lives (Li 1999). I believe that many developmental programs are genuinely guided by an equity compass (Cernea 2000). However, in this case study, the resettlement project, as a developmental policy, was a political

opportunity to cover up a failed project. This resulted in the disruption of the Beleninos' local culture and identity construction.

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