

Olivier Allard and Harry Walker

Paper, power, and procedure: reflections on Amazonian appropriations of bureaucracy and documents

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Allard, Olivier and Walker, Harry (2016) *Paper, power, and procedure: reflections on Amazonian appropriations of bureaucracy and documents*. [The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology](#), 21 (3). pp. 402-413. ISSN 1935-4932

DOI: [10.1111/jlca.12237](https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12237)

© 2016 [American Anthropological Association](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/68818/>

Available in LSE Research Online: January 2017

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Paper, Power, and Procedure: Reflections on Amazonian Appropriations of Bureaucracy and Documents

By

Olivier Allard and Harry Walker

KEYWORDS: Amazonia, bureaucracy, documents, Brazil, Peru, social anthropology, Venezuela

PALABRAS CLAVES: Amazonia, antropología social, Brasil, Perú, Venezuela

Amazonian peoples are today increasingly involved in bureaucratic processes of one kind or another, as a consequence of their expanding scope of interactions with state agencies, corporations, and non-governmental organizations, among others. They frequently possess or seek to obtain identity cards and land titles, file legal complaints and participate in local elections, manipulate electoral lists and medical registries, negotiate collective agreements, and claim grants or subsidies—to outline just some of the cases discussed in this collection of articles. Effective participation in such procedures often requires the use or production of written documents, as well as interaction with designated ‘officials’ who perform a specified function within an institutional hierarchy, who ostensibly make decisions in accordance with set rules or procedures, and who use or manufacture a range of specialized textual objects and related material artifacts. At first glance, this might appear to be simply a familiar story of state expansion: of a central government controlling and subordinating its subjects through modern administrative techniques. Yet what is particularly striking to us—and what gave initial impetus to this volume – was how Amazonian people themselves were often enthusiastic about having and producing documents, and how they have developed creative and sometimes innovative ways of using and conceiving them. This was our point of departure for grasping the contemporary life of Amazonian peoples as at once deeply enmeshed in contemporary global processes and strikingly original.

The processes of appropriation described in these articles take place in spaces that have always been at the peripheries of South American nation states—even if those spaces have sometimes been central to the national imaginary. The Amazon rainforest represents a geographical frontier whose inhabitants had to be transformed somewhat to be included as

citizens: in this sense they represent a “margin” of the state (Das and Poole 2004: 9). In parts of Peru and Venezuela, some Amazonian peoples have only recently acquired identity documents, if they have acquired them at all (see Penfield and Walker, this volume). Even in a country such as Ecuador, which now defines itself as multi-ethnic and multicultural, indigenous representatives must learn the ways of bureaucracy in order to take part in political processes. Amazonian peoples are in a position of exteriority towards the state because of their political and geographical location, but also insofar as they are characterized as ‘oral cultures’. The very term ‘bureaucracy’, of course, means ‘rule by writing desk’: originally coined ironically, it highlights the centrality of writing to formal organization and modern forms of governance. As Scott (2009) has argued, however, an absence of writing does not necessarily represent an earlier stage of social or technological development. In fact, orality or nonliteracy might in many cases be considered as a kind of stance or ‘positionality’ vis-à-vis state formation and state power—akin to swidden agriculture and egalitarian mobile settlement as elusive, “jellyfish-like” social and economic forms that help to impede appropriation by states.

These processes take on specific forms in native lowland South America, where the active appropriation of documents and other bureaucratic artifacts and procedures transpires, not merely at the margins of the state, but also in areas that have long been defined precisely by the absence of state structures and even a potential antagonism towards them (Clastres 1989). Amazonian peoples’ experience of writing has in many cases been sudden, or at least erratic,¹ and in contrast to the Andean region (and many other parts of the world) it would be difficult to argue that they have grown accustomed over centuries to documents and dealings with state officials, giving rise to a state of comfortable coexistence (Gupta 2012: 199, 218). The presence of bureaucracy in lowland South America could thus potentially be seen as the sign of a radical transformation, a transition from one type of political system and sociality to another: a crossing of a ‘Great Divide’, destined to happen despite certain inevitable archaic obstacles. Similar points have, of course, been made about the rise of literacy as a revolutionary form of ‘domestication’ (Goody 1977). In another, equally dichotomous formulation, Clastres distinguished ‘societies of the mark’—such as those in Amazonia, where violence is inscribed on the body—from ‘societies with writing’, where it is instead invested in the written word. Writing points directly to the law of the State: “Writing is on the side of the law; the law lives in writing and knowing the one means that unfamiliarity with the other is no longer possible” (Clastres 1989: 177).

Such binary thinking might nevertheless be misleading when faced with the complexity of contemporary situations. The state is not an unambiguous force of order opposed to passive Amerindians who could, at best, merely resist. As Lévi-Strauss (1955) pointed out in his reflections on the ‘writing lesson’, the link between writing and power is far from obscure to Amazonian peoples themselves—which may, of course, constitute a large part of its appeal (see also Walker, this volume). Rather than subscribe to any teleological narrative about literacy or state control, it would seem more fruitful to direct attention towards transformations of the relations of exchange between written and oral economies (Gupta 2012: 206). The relationship between the transmission of documents and delivering public discourses, for instance, is complex and fascinating, and even people who would not typically be described as literate, or who possess only a limited understanding of the dominant language (Portuguese or Spanish, for example), can act through various meta- or para-linguistic codes: as the Enawene-nawe do, for instance, in delaying their signature, or demanding a reformulation of a document in order to assert their perspective (see Nahum-Claudel, this volume). This is why a focus on laypeople’s uses of documents and interaction with bureaucracy is a particularly effective way of exploring ethnographically the everyday workings of the state as it intersects with the lives of ordinary people. With the recognition that the state can no longer be treated as a coherent ‘entity’ separate from society as such, everyday encounters with bureaucracy emerge as central to the ways in which the state comes into being. As Heyman observes, we can no longer assume that bureaucracy or bureaucratic activity is outside of power, or is built on a pre-existing set of power relations: “bureaucracy, with its peculiar social, cultural, and linguistic life is itself a constitutive site as well as an expression of social formation” (2012: 1270). Everyday bureaucratic and documentary practices are central to how states are imagined and encountered by the population (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 12). The state is effectively reproduced in and through these practices, existing not simply as a bureaucracy of regulation, but also, as Veena Das has put it, “as a spectral presence materialized in documents” (Das 2004: 250–1).

Research inspired by this growing body of work, therefore, has special value for the understanding of contemporary Amazonia. Contributors to this issue seek to avoid the opposing pitfalls of treating Amazonian appropriations of documents as either fully autonomous (as if native people could freely exercise their creativity regardless of socio-political constraints), or as merely anecdotal (as if they mattered little compared to the ‘real’ subordination of Amerindians through global capitalism or to the state). This is not to

downplay the potentially negative effects of bureaucracy on Amazonian peoples, not all of which may yet be fully apparent, and which certainly warrant further study. In demonstrating how bureaucratic and documentary practices shed light on Amerindian experiences of South American states and organizations more generally, the articles gathered here make clear that the conception and use of official documents by Amazonians must always be understood within specific socio-historical contexts of power relations, state intervention, and entrenched inequalities. Focused on particular settings, they enable a controlled comparison of sorts between three South American countries (Brazil, Peru, Venezuela), but do not rely on the top-down approach pervasive in Foucauldian-inspired research on the ‘microphysics of power’. Instead, they stress the “creativity of the margins” (Das and Poole 2004: 19), thanks to fine-grained ethnographic accounts of the diverse uses to which bureaucracy and documents are put, allowing native theories of language and materiality to illuminate a range of emerging literary and communicative practices as well as modes of political interaction and organization.

We also hope that the articles gathered here will open up new possibilities for dialogue with scholars working in the Andean highland regions, where the study of writing in particular is markedly more developed, and continues to open up in exciting new directions:² not to mention the many other rural, non-indigenous, and urban peoples for whom elements of bureaucracy have become crucial parts of peoples’ lives as they are reworked into new political practices (Hetherington 2011; L’Estoile 2015). While emphasizing that Amazonia is far from being a self-contained world, we also hope to underscore the ways in which engagements with documents and bureaucracy take on specific and recognizable forms in the region; and to suggest that a fuller understanding of these may shed new light on their workings in general.

Blurring the Periphery: Documents as Mediators

It is well known that written documents represent a medium of communication that enables extended interaction across time and space (Goody 1977). Recent work has also revealed the constitutive effects of the circulation of documents: how limits imposed on their transmission, for example, produce the boundaries of a particular organization (Verdery 2014), or of the state in general (Nugent 2010). It is also through documents, however, that

“the state can penetrate the life of the community and yet remain elusive” (Das 2004: 245): their meaning is never as fixed as assumed in classical accounts of bureaucracy, according to which writing established a stable relationship between the words and things necessary for bureaucracies to implement regimes of control. In fact, documents may not be fully legible even for state officials.

The contributors to this issue focus on cases where documents travel to, or are produced in, relatively ‘remote’ communities. Yanomami health agents, for instance, draw up their own medical registers (Gonçalves, this volume), while acquiring identity documents can have very local stakes for Urarina men engaged in interpersonal conflicts (Walker, this volume). Such situations reveal how bureaucracy is, in a way, coproduced by officials and their indigenous clients in lowland South America. Without romanticizing the situation, it is remarkable that officials often have to adapt themselves to Amazonian uses of documents, as much as the other way round. State-employed Sanema and their semi-literate relatives, *criollo* brokers and national guards, elected politicians and appointed functionaries, are all involved in producing and negotiating the collection of paperwork locally known as the *guia*, which will enable Sanema villagers to buy petrol and successfully pass through military checkpoints (Penfield, this volume). Yet such co-production is generally “tentative” on the part of Amazonians (Navaro-Yashin 2007: 95), and documents may also have an “affective underside” that must be taken into account (Navaro-Yashin 2007: 95).

Indeed, writing is also an opaque medium of communication and can instill uncertainty when it extends interactions. People are often unsure about the impact of the documents they produce. Nahum-Claudiel (this volume) shows that even when the Enawenawawe “harden” the documents they send—by writing them in assertive language and gathering the signatures of as many community members as possible—they are well aware that their demands might not be met by Brazilian officials and state representatives. They know that they must also, at specific moments, shut down attempts at mutual understanding (which rest on the exchange of documents), for instance, by blocking roads in order to impose their will on outsiders. The Venezuelan Warao are even uncertain about the actual recipients of the lists of names and ID card numbers they use, always fearing that others might appropriate their rightful due, which accounts for their distinctive anxiety when it comes to writing (Allard 2012). At the same time, this very opacity may be a source of the efficacy of documents, as Walker (this volume) shows through a discussion of how

documents can acquire an authoritative voice through being read aloud by Urarina people who are not their authors.

The durability and permanence of textual objects, in turn, ensures that communication paths are more than merely metaphorical. Among the Venezuelan Yanomami, documents leave material traces that create ‘paths’ connecting them to the wealth of outsiders, and especially of the state (Gonçalves, this volume). If properly controlled—censuses, for instance—can open up a path for the arrival of material goods. Even when such paths fall into disuse and appear closed, the traces left by documents enable them to be re-opened at a later stage. Such an idiom offers a powerful way of understanding how Yanomami relate to state (health) institutions. The extended space created by bureaucracy is also exemplified in Penfield’s (this volume) analysis of how documents for the Venezuelan Sanema represent both a means and a motive for heightened mobility, to administrative centers and the like. If lowland South Americans were always far from inhabiting closed, sedentary, self-sufficient communities, the introduction of bureaucracy and documents has nevertheless brought new motives as well as new forms to long-distance interactions. In the case of ambitious Sanema men, the very circularity between documents and petrol, each needed to acquire the other, promotes new forms of sociality while extending opportunities for social as well as geographical mobility.

A Technology of Action: Bureaucratic Rituals and the Magic of the State

In interactions and practices such as these, documents do not merely represent ways of recording, keeping, or transmitting information, to take three of the features highlighted by Goody (1977). As textual artifacts, the formal and material dimensions of documents are intrinsic to their performative power: in the bureaucratic world, writing may be tantamount to acting; how one writes may determine the outcome and felicity of actions (Fraenkel 2008; Hull 2003)³. As Hull (2012) emphasizes, documents may work to create or modify social relationships, as material forms or substances that circulate, connecting and perhaps also separating and displacing individuals and groups. More than mere instruments of bureaucratic organizations, documents are themselves “constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves” (Hull 2012: 253).

It would seem, then, that many Amazonian peoples confront and seek to appropriate bureaucracy as a particular technology or set of techniques enabling certain ways of acting on persons or things: coercing, extracting, compelling, persuading, and certifying. It is often precisely here that parallels may be drawn to similar modes of action found in other contexts, such as ritual. To be sure, adopting such a perspective can help to break down the abstract and overarching concept of bureaucracy in order to focus on its affective dimensions and pragmatic effects, which implicate new material artifacts as well as forms of collective organization. It can also offer a kind of grassroots corrective to homogenizing, top-down narratives of modernization and control, which risk obscuring the creativity and resourcefulness with which indigenous peoples respond to these new challenges and opportunities.

It is equally clear from the articles collected here that Amazonians often take the initiative when using documents or dealing with bureaucratic agencies: sometimes with unexpected results, but often with results nonetheless. If, as we have observed, it is impossible to maintain clear distinctions between state and society (and between ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ societies), it is futile to construct a radical opposition between the ‘official’ or objective logic of bureaucracy and its indigenous appropriation in peripheries where it supposedly fails to produce order (Das and Poole 2004: 4–6). Amerindian conceptions of documents and bureaucracy may at times surprise an outside observer, but they are not delusional; often, modes of appropriation are based on some specific aspect considered crucial by all parties, but which also reverberates in some way with pre-existing practices. For instance, documents read aloud may represent a “displaced voice” that evokes both shamanic ritual discourse and the distinction between person and office (Walker, this volume); or the exchange of written documents may match the rhythms of ceremonial discourse in ways that help to establish them as a privileged means of communication (Nahum-Claudel, this volume). Writing can itself be seen as performative, especially when it involves names—in line both with a shamanic emphasis on naming and with bureaucratic implications of inscription practices (Allard 2012). Conversely, valid ID cards may rely on the use of ‘false’ names and identities, insofar as native personal names are kept secret and are therefore inappropriate for public matters (Alès 2013). Writing can also be related to pre-existing uses of graphic designs, for example, such that people who master bureaucratic techniques are likened to the powerful ‘painted beings’ of mythology (Echeverri 2013).

In many cases, the conceptual basis for such appropriations is found in ritual contexts and practices. Indeed, much anthropological research has already been devoted to showing how elements of Western bureaucracy have been incorporated into rituals by the peoples exposed to it, especially in contexts of colonial rule, such as sub-Saharan Africa. Anthropologists have described numerous instances where the formalism of administrative procedures, specific textual objects modeled on documents, or some of their linguistic properties, have been introduced by ritual specialists making creative moves, in order to gain salvation, say, or protection from witchcraft.⁴ In lowland South America, writing is similarly frequently found in ritual contexts, for instance, at the foundation of prophetic movements, or in innovative new forms of shamanic practice - such as the Mapuche 'shamanic literacy' discussed by Bacigalupo (2014), in which textualization can store or augment power. Research to date has mostly focused on non-bureaucratic forms of writing, such as newspapers and letters introduced by traders or travellers (where they would receive news from distant people and places), or Bibles and prayer books brought by missionaries (who used them as a support for Christian rituals). In such cases, texts are often used as means of gaining access to visionary knowledge, or to communicate with divine beings—even by people who cannot read (Déléage 2010; Gow 2001;)⁵. Texts play a key role in new forms of ritual authority, but are interpreted as continuous with pre-existing practices: writing may be linked to abstract graphic designs, for example, and 'reading' produces effects akin to ayahuasca-induced visions. Visionary and textual knowledge may, in fact, be closely linked in a number of ways (Greene 2009).

Each type of textual object may nevertheless remain essentially linked to the powerful institution or category responsible for its introduction (such as states and ID documents, traders and accounts, missionaries and the Bible), as Hugh-Jones (2010: 207–8) has observed. Indeed, in Lévi-Strauss's writing lesson, the Nambikwara chief uses a 'list' in a way that differs from shamanic or prophetic uses of texts, namely, as a means of legitimizing his decisions (to allocate goods), rather than in his (ritual) discourse. Contributors to this issue mostly focus on the implications of Amazonian peoples' uses of documents for their changing relations with state officials and institutions, but they succeed in doing so without assuming any barrier between political and religious contexts. As Walker (2015) has shown, shamanic techniques and legal documents such as the *denuncia* may constitute complementary and in many ways analogous strategies in local conflicts, albeit with opposing political consequences in the longer term. Gonçalves (this volume) also notes that

the 'paths' that make up and structure the Yanomami world are crucial both to their healing practices and to their interactions with state institutions. It is often in different yet compatible modes of action that parallels may be drawn between bureaucracy and ritual.

This interest in ritual practices by no means results in an exoticization of Amazonian peoples. Rather, it is a way to explicate their answers to the question of the magic of the state (Taussig 1997). The state manages to appear as 'real' through public performances of self-representation; yet state magic refers also to the performative force of many bureaucratic practices, and it is this dimension that intersects most deeply with the lives of Amazonian peoples. While its ostensibly 'modern' aspect is often contrasted to the 'traditional' elements of non-Western societies, bureaucracy can also appear as the West's own form of ritual. It functions as a kind of 'social magic', which tends to make the results of human 'rites of institution' appear as given and indisputable, in spite of the arbitrariness of its outcomes (Bourdieu 1991; Herzfeld 1992). This is less surprising when we consider that Western law originates in Ancient Roman religious practice. Although Roman law was secularized as early as the fifth to fourth centuries, it remained the esoteric domain of experts (Schiavone 2012) and was a technology designed to produce certain effects, much like any ritual, rather than a body of (normative) knowledge (Thomas 1995).

Wealth and Violence: Bureaucracy as a Resource and a Constraint

In Europe and in many other parts of the world, especially where bureaucracy was introduced by colonial powers, research has tended to focus on the violence exerted by the state and on the ways in which documents and bureaucratic procedures have functioned as tools of domination. In Amazonia, documents have long been associated with the control of native labor, especially since the beginning of the first rubber boom in the late nineteenth century, sometimes in ways tantamount to debt bondage. Since money is mostly used as a unit of account, account ledgers are administrative artifacts that enable control over labor (Hugh-Jones 1992). As a way for citizens to gain protection from violence, ID documents similarly promise a kind of control: Gordillo (2006) describes how the Toba of the Gran Chaco would hold documents written by traders or missionaries to certify their 'good behavior', offering them a way to avoid being the target of state violence; today, they continue to exhibit their ID cards to visitors. In many other parts of lowland South America, documents may similarly be

valued for the way they can offer protection in interethnic relations, or guarantee mobility (see Penfield and Walker, this volume).

Yet it is striking that, for many groups, the state is also primarily experienced as a potential provider of wealth and material goods. Consequently, many of the usual connotations of bureaucracy for Westerners (slowness and delays, unnecessary paperwork, and other measures that constrain the individual) are not necessarily those that appear most salient for many Amazonians, for whom bureaucracy may appear as more enabling than constraining. It is as if the explicit or stated function of state institutions—to provide services to the public—was indeed its main feature in the region. Documents frequently serve as an instrument for extracting an appropriate (material) response from authorities, sometimes with surprising success. This dimension seems to shape confrontations between Enawene-nawe and hydroelectric dam companies or the Brazilian state (Nahum-Claudel, this volume), demands made by Yanomami on health agencies (Gonçalves, this volume), or attempts by other indigenous groups to benefit from one of the many social programs introduced by Chávez in Venezuela (Penfield, this volume; see also Allard 2012). It can lead to descriptions of native ‘consumerism’ and inflation (Gordon 2006) and, in several South American countries, usually yields results as much as frustration. This may or may not be a situation specific to Amazonia, but it certainly helps to account for the enthusiasm of its peoples when it comes to possessing and using documents.

There is, however, an important ambivalence at the heart of bureaucracy, insofar as it represents a resource, but one that it is not always easy or possible to access, or that is conditional on crucial constraints (see Israël 2012, on law). Just as bureaucratic and administrative procedures have historically been used by dominant parties to exert power over the dominated (and especially over colonial subjects; see Comaroff 2001), they can also—at least for those skilled at following their internal logic—constitute resources, or tools, to achieve valued ends—to impinge on national authorities or even on fellow Amerindians, for example. This is why documents can be appropriated and used by Amazonians to assert their claims against one another or on national authorities while at the same time functioning as a source of internal differentiation: between those who succeed in acquiring an ID card and those who do not, for example, or between younger, literate schoolteachers and old-style leaders. Such ambivalence points to a broader paradox that emerges in much of the recent literature on bureaucracy, namely, that attempts at ‘rational’ human organization almost inevitably result in ever more diverse and heterogeneous bureaucratic worlds, and that what

appear to be forces of regularization or centralization are quickly matched by countervailing forces of pluralization and diversification (Hoag 2011). As such, if the study of bureaucracy was initially a way in to the understanding of forms of domination, it is now just as often tantamount to a study of resistance, subversion, and agency. We would go one step further, by emphasizing that the uses to which bureaucracy is put among Amazonian peoples today are not just reactive, but eminently proactive: they seek out, as much as resist, the power of the outside or the unknown. The forward-looking nature of such bureaucratic engagement is perhaps reflected in Nuijten's (2004) concept of development bureaucracy as a 'hope-generating machine' that continually creates great expectations, as well as enjoyments, pleasures, and fears, even if these are followed by disillusion and failure.

Replete with the promise of wealth and violence, instrumental in expansions of social space,; and marked by a deep ambivalence in which their intrinsic connection to power leads them to appear as at once resources and constraints, documents are thus instruments of power and persuasion that demand new forms of practical mastery. Amazonian appropriations of bureaucracy and documents reveal some intriguing points of articulation, congruence, and dissonance amidst the rapid social and political transformations underway in the region. For better or worse, they must now assume a prominent place alongside those other modes of action and interpretation in relation to which they stand in creative tension.

Acknowledgements

This dossier stems from a conference we organized at the École des Hautes Études Hispaniques et Ibériques of the Casa de Velázquez (Madrid, 28th February-1st March 2013). Its Head of Studies, Stéphane Michonneau, generously and actively contributed to the organization of the event, and we are grateful to Capucine Boidin, Véronique Boyer, and Jean-Frédéric Schaub, who chaired the sessions. Other participants took an important part in the debates, and we wish to thank them although their papers could not be included in this dossier.

References Cited

- Alès, Catherine. 2013. "Le papier, nous, on ne sait même pas ce que c'est": nomination, identités et transformations politiques en Amazonie vénézuélienne." Conference paper presented to Amerindians, Law, and the State, Madrid, 28 February–1 March.
- Allard, Olivier. 2012. "Bureaucratic Anxiety: Asymmetrical Interactions and the Role of Documents in the Orinoco Delta, Venezuela." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(2): 234–56.
- Bacigalupo, Ana Mariella. 2014. The Potency of Indigenous 'Bibles' and Biographies: Mapuche Shamanic Literacies and Historical Consciousness. *American Ethnologist* 41(4): 648-663.
- Bonhomme, Julien. 2009. "Dieu par décret: les écritures d'un prophète africain." *Annales HSS* 4: 887–920.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.
- Clastres, Pierre. 1989. *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*. New York: Zone Books.
- Comaroff, John L. 2001. "Law, Culture, and Colonialism: A Foreword." *Law and Social Inquiry* 26(2): 101–110.
- Das, Veena and Poole, Deborah. 2004. "Introduction. State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies." In *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, edited by Veena Das and Deborah Poole, 3-34. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- De la Piedra, María Teresa. 2009. "Hybrid Literacies: The Case of a Quechua Community in the Andes." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 40(2): 110–128.
- Déléage, Pierre. 2010. "Rituels du livre en Amazonie." *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 63–64(1–2): 229–50.
- Echeverri, Juan Alvaro. 2013. "La sal de la vida: de la fecundidad amerindia y las cuestiones burocráticas." Paper presented to the conference Amerindians, Law, and the State, Madrid, 28 February–1 March.
- Fraenkel, Béatrice. 2008. "Comment tenir un registre." *Langage et Société* 124: 59–71.
- Goody, Jack. 1977. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gordillo, Gastón. 2006. "The Crucible of Citizenship: ID-Paper Fetishism in the Argentinean Chaco." *American Ethnologist* 33(2): 162–76.
- Gow, Peter. 2001. *An Amazonian Myth and Its History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Greene, Shane. 2009. *Customizing Indigeneity: Paths to a Visionary Politics in Peru*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Guss, David M. 1986. Keeping it Oral: A Yekuana Ethnology. *American Ethnologist* 13(3):413-429.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 1992. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hetherington, Kregg. 2011. *Guerrilla Auditors: The Politics of Transparency in Neoliberal Paraguay*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Heyman, Josiah. 2012. "Deepening the Anthropology of Bureaucracy." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(4): 1269–77.
- . 1995. "Putting Power in the Anthropology of Bureaucracy: The Immigration and Naturalization Service at the Mexico–United States Border." *Current Anthropology* 36 (2): 261–87.
- Hoag, Colin. 2011. "Assembling Partial Perspectives: Thoughts on the Anthropology of Bureaucracy." *PoLAR. Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 34(1): 81–94.
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen. 2010. "Entre l'image et l'écrit: la politique tukano de patrimonialisation en Amazonie." *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 63–64(1–2): 195–227.
- Hull, Matthew. 2012. "Documents and Bureaucracy." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 251–67.
- . 2003. "The File: Agency, Authority, and Autography in Islamabad Bureaucracy." *Language and Communication* 23: 287–314.
- Israël, Liora. 2012. *L'Arme du droit*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. *Tristes Tropiques*. Paris: Plon.
- Nuijten, Monique. 2004. "The 'Hope Generating Machine' and the Positionality of the Anthropologist." In *The Development of Religion, the Religion of Development*,

- edited by Oscar Salemink, Anton Van Harskamp, and Ananta Kumar Giri, 51-58. Delft: Eburon Publishers.
- Rappaport, Joanne and Cummins, Tom. 2012. *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Riles, Annelise. 2006. "Introduction." In *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, edited by Annelise Riles, 1–38. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Salomon, Frank and Niño-Murcia, Mercedes. 2011. *The Lettered Mountain: A Peruvian Village's Way with Writing*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Schiavone, Aldo. 2012. *The Invention of Law in the West*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Taussig, Michael. 1997. *The Magic of the State*. New York: Routledge.
- Thomas, Yan. 1995. "Fictio legis: l'empire de la fiction romaine et ses limites médiévales." *Droits* 21: 17–63.
- Verdery, Katherine. 2014. *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Walker, Harry. 2015. "Justice and the Dark Arts: Law and Shamanism in Amazonia." *American Anthropologist* 117(1): 47–58.
- Zavala, Virginia, Niño-Murcia, Mercedes, and Ames, Patricia. 2004. *Escritura y sociedad: Nuevas perspectivas teóricas y etnográficas*. Lima: Universidad del Pacífico.

Notes

¹ Colonial sources offer evidence of literate Amerindians (Neuman 2007; Wilde 2008), although there is a long historical gap between the current situation and what took place in eighteenth-century Jesuit missions (which, in any case, concerned a minority of the continent's population).

² See, among others, Salomon and Niño-Murcia 2011; De la Piedra 2009; Rappaport and Cummins 2011; Zavala, Niño-Murcia and Ames 2004.

³ Riles (2006: 23) writes of the “agency of the form” to stress to the crucial importance of formal and aesthetic features in the filling out of documents.

⁴ To take one example, followers of the Ivory Coast prophet Atcho were given a “passport to heaven” signed by “Simon Kimbangu, king of Congo”. On this and other cases of “scriptural prophetism”, see Bonhomme (2009: 903).

⁵ See also Guss (1986) for a compelling account of the Yekuana’s rejection of written magic