The Thesis Committee for Sharon Gorenstein
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:

Collective responses to state-led displacement and relocation projects:

Lessons learned from Beleninos river communities

APPROVED BY

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

_____

Javier Auyero, Supervisor

_____

Michael Young

Collective responses to state-led displacement and relocation projects:

Lessons learned from Beleninos river communities

by

Sharon Gorenstein

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Dedication

There are many people involved in this investigation; However, the first person to thank, for opening the doors of her house, for sharing her life and her family, is Jovita Ruiz. Undoubtedly, one of the strongest, bravest and most beautiful women of Belen that life allowed me to know. Also, thanks to all the women and men who let me understand their Belen.

I thank my mother and my father for always supporting and encouraging me throughout this process. For understanding that risk situations during fieldwork are occupational hazards.

To Aldo Panfichi, with whom I began to draw the ideas of this research. To Javier Auyero who helped me to make them come true. To Michael Young and to Daniel Fridman for the constant incentives. Thanks for all the advice and teachings.

To all the people who got involved in some way with this project. Especially Helene, Jihan and Aida for helping me survive and fill me with strength.

Existen muchas personas involucradas en esta investigación; sin embargo, la primera persona a agradecer, por abrirme la puertas de su casa, por compartirme su vida y la de su familia, es Jovita Ruiz. Sin duda, una de las mujeres más fuertes, valientes y hermosas de Belén que la vida me permitió conocer. Asimismo, gracias a todas las mujeres y hombres que me dejaron entender su Belén.

Abstract

Collective responses to state-led displacement and relocation projects: Lessons learned from Beleninos river communities

Sharon Gorenstein M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

Supervisor: Javier Auyero

Most social sciences scholarship on the relationship between environmental issues and forced displacement on poor communities in Latin America, and particularly in Peru, explores the risk recognized as evident by all involved actors; however, in this study, it is the state that is producing a perception of risk by attempting to forcibly displace the residents of a community adjacent to the Belen river in the Peruvian Amazon. This research focuses on the perceptions of the residents, ex-residents and the institutions involved in the process of displacement. Thus, the central themes of this thesis seek to answer the following questions: how poor people respond to government initiatives of displacement and relocation based on their local knowledge of risk assessment? How they perceive risk? What are their subjective and material worldviews of space? And how they understand their decision to either stay or leave Bajo Belen? This study demonstrates that the government's risk assessment policies resulted from the reorganization and simplification of nature by the Peruvian government to suit developers' and public and private institutions' goals, instead of leveraging on the local know-how as the basis for the design of public policies.

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Beleninos River Communities Standpoint

The vocabulary used to organize nature typically betrays the overriding interests of its human users. In fact, utilitarian discourse replaces the term "nature" with the term "natural resources," focusing on those aspects of nature that can be appropriated for human use.

James C. Scott. 1998. *Seeing Like a State*. p. 13

Most social sciences scholarship on environmental issues and their relationship to forced displacement on poor communities in Latin America, and particularly in Peru, focuses on extractive industries, mining activity, and political violence. These studies focus on examining the case of rural and Amazonian areas these studies explore the evident risk recognized by all involved actors. In this thesis, I inspect the case of the communities adjacent to the Belen river. In these communities, it is the state that is producing risk by attempting to forcibly displace the residents.

Beleninos river communities organize their daily life around river variations, and their ideas of safety are based on principles of morality and solidarity, including their relationship with the Amazon and their identity as a river community. Belen is a district located on the riverside of the Itaya River, at the east and the northeast of the city of Iquitos, in the province of Maynas, in the region of Loreto [Insert figure 1]. Belen is one of the four districts of the city of Iquitos. It has

a surface area of 119.998.18 square kilometers (Kanatari, 2015) and is divided into an urban area and a rural area. It also has an upper area, Alto Belen, and a lower area, Bajo Belen, with important economic, social, and mostly cultural differences.

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 light and water systems. For many months of the year, the neighborhoods are organized with wood board bridges functioning as aerial sidewalks [Insert figures 2-6]. 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. Absent an epidemiological study, the degree of to which this contamination impacts on the health of inhabitants is unknown.

The city of Iquitos is isolated because of the absence of road infrastructure to connect it with the rest of Peru. It is an exclusively fluvial city, which means that the only way to get there is by plane or river. The main features of this city are the fast-flowing rivers of the Amazon basin, tropical humid weather, and poor soil for agriculture and livestock. Indeed, the interaction between the weather and the soil contributes to movement towards the rivers; consequently, the territory appears unstable (Vega-Centeno, 2007). Rainfall also shapes the social and urban development of Belen. For example, during the rainy season, the 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/m^2), during the "tahuampa" between January and March, the rainfall can

exceed 1000ml/m^2, varying the level of the rivers by 25 meters and flooding the riverbanks for hundreds of kilometers (Vega-Centeno, 2007). The variance in rainfall creates a diversity of geographic spaces and the regenerative cycle of the Amazon for the flora and fauna. As Iquitos is essentially in a riverbed, it is a movable territory or floating city that has incorporated flexible urban-architectural systems including residential complexes, commercial areas, and places of leisure. These systems can change their physical configurations to adapt to the variations in the river levels and flooding.

Belen has 68,806 inhabitants (INEI, 2007) distributed over 56 caseríos [small villages] and 19 neighborhoods in the urban area. It is important to note that the main means of transportation that inhabitants use are peque peques [canoes] and motocars [motorcycles with extra seats in the back] [Insert figures 7-10]. The port of Belen is the principal trade source and it has the highest rate of criminality in the whole district. In general, Belen is the most extreme example of Loreto's poor standing as a region in terms of health, education, and violence (ENDES, 2012).

It is not possible to determine the precise origin of Belen; however, cartography in the Amazonian Library in Iquitos identifies Belen at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1890, health reports of Iquitos make reference to the "neighborhood of Belen" as well as the concept of "societies of the water" and "people of the river" (Villarejo, 1988; Larrabure y Correa, 1905-09). Nevertheless, it was not until 1988 that the district of Belen was legally recognized (Kanatari, 2015).

In 2014, the government of Peru declared the river communities of Belen in a state of emergency and in need of relocation because of the constant inundation by the Itaya River. In the law that supports the resettlement project, the Peruvian government proposes ideas about risk that delegitimize the Beleninos worldview. This study, draws upon scholarship on the manufacturing on housing insecurity and on the constitutive role of subaltern struggles in transforming space, to show that this state-led displacement is in fact *producing* danger among residents of Belen.

The first set of literature focuses on housing insecurity and risk of eviction in poor communities. These studies show how US housing policy has seen a shift from affordable housing for public good to for-profit affordable housing. There are also cases of private interests shaping the implementation of state housing regulations intended to protect residents (Sullivan & Ward, 2012; Sullivan, 2016a, b, c; Olmedo & Ward, 2016; Ward & Peters, 2007; Desmond, 2014, 2013, 2012; Hartman & Robinson, 2003). These authors focus on poverty, spatial inequality, and housing, with special interest in both forced and voluntary residential mobility. What is clear is that housing has profound impacts on health, income, education, and social stability, and yet the US is crippled by an affordable housing crisis. The second set of literature concentrates on how residents excluded from formal channels of political participation create their own informal organizations and engage in sustained direct action to shape urban change. These studies show how what appears as adequate policy from the government's perspective can exacerbate social isolation, perpetuate squatting, and aggravate unemployment, transport costs, and interpersonal violence (Levenson, 2017a, 2017b; Auyero, 2012, 2000; Ferguson, 2015, 2007; Chatterjee, 2011, 2004; Huchzermeyer, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2011; Makhulu, 2015; Yiftachel, 2009a, 2009b; Strauss & Liebenberg, 2014; Lemanski, 2011, 2009, 2007; Lemanski & Oldfield, 2009). These authors

discuss how the consolidation of a representative political organization can make demands more effective while in cases where factionalism prevails, the government imposes its policies. Thus, understanding urban change requires thinking about political processes from above and from below as profoundly intertwined.

The story of Sergio that follows outlines the central themes of this thesis: how poor people respond to government initiatives of displacement and relocation based on their local knowledge of risk assessment, how they perceive risk, their subjective and material worldviews of space, and how they understand their decision to either to stay or leave Bajo Belen.

Sergio. June 2, 2017

It's 4pm and the heat is overwhelming. The humidity is almost 100% and I can feel the sweat building all over my body. The air is hot enough to warm my nostrils, but it is not as bad as it is during midday when the heat makes conducting regular activities almost impossible. Usually people prefer not to talk to me about the resettlement project that the Peruvian government has been trying to implement since 2014, which seeks to relocate inhabitants of Bajo Belen to a distant area. However, at this time people, are usually finishing their work day if they work in commerce, as the vast majority of people in Bajo Belen do.

Sergio moved to Bajo Belen when he was 21 years old, after leaving the chacra [farm] to finish high school. He is now 76, and lives with his wife, his two daughters and his son-in-law. He has a spacious wood stilt house with two levels [Insert figure 11]. They are currently using the second level because of the higher precipitation. His house is divided into two big areas. The sleeping area has two bedrooms and the common area includes the kitchen and the dining room. While walking me through the organization of his house, Sergio is telling me how proud he is of it because he did it all by himself and is able to provide shelter for his family. He ruminates about the time when he arrived to Belen, when the space was almost empty, and he tells me how he started to organize with other neighbors to build a community. Sergio likes Belen; that is what he keeps telling me during conversations, even though he recognizes that there are problems of citizen insecurity and pollution in some areas, but he reinforces the idea that other areas are worse.

He has two jobs: during summer, he works in agriculture, while during the period of higher rainfall, he works as a fisherman. He is proud of his jobs because they have allowed him and his wife to raise their children. He believes that living in Belen allows him to survive because there is always something to work on. When we talk about the resettlement project, he passionately asks me, "How am I going to survive in Varillalito? You cannot harvest that land. You cannot fish. How am I going to live in a house that looks like a tiny drawer? That house is for a couple, not for a family. Here we can have a concrete house." Varillalito is the resettlement area, a distant place at kilometer 12.6 of the Iquitos-Nauta Highway [Insert figure 12]. *Varillalito is one to two hours away by bus, and the round trip costs 4 soles [1.25 dollars], which is a large amount of money for the average Beleninx, who makes around 20 soles per day and travels with at least two children.*

Now Sergio stands up from his chair and shows me his outboard motors for the boat, "Where am I going to keep my motors, and all my material for work? How much I am going to pay for someone to keep it for me, just to be able to go fishing?" He says that many people in Varillalito want to come back, but the Beleninos and their authorities have an agreement about not letting any "traitor" return. "They have betrayed their people, like a soldier can betray his homeland." With a mischievous look, he tells me that he knows four neighbors who went to the resettlement area but now want to come back because they say that there are no work opportunities, and they do not like the atmosphere. Now his face becomes excited as he exclaims that in Belen, people grab their canoes and go to the market, and they can eat with 10 soles [3.15 dollars]. He says that in Varillalito, the houses have no iron support: "Imagine with the rainfall! Those houses are going to cave in. They are built with sand, not with earth; those house are going to fall!"

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Sergio is convinced that the authorities of Iquitos want them out of Bajo Belen because they want to use the space for business, particularly for tourism. That is why the Beleninos held many protests. "People in the government say that this place is uninhabitable because of the flooding, and that it is not possible to build concrete structures, but here we have houses, churches, and high schools built with it." I remember the protests; there were actually at least two per year since 2014. He says that there are some communities that do get flooded, but not theirs. They have a plan when the precipitation changes. "They [the government] do not know the geography like us." Sergio claims that the government tries to buy the decision-making of Beleninos about the resettlement project, but that, in his perspective, everything is a huge lie to take advantage of their space in Bajo Belen.

"One day, the head of the MVCS[1] came and we all took out our whistles and started to make noise. All the neighbors went outside their houses and we saw that the MVCS wanted to have a meeting to advertise Varillalito. We closed off their path, and we prevented the meeting. The police came and told them that it was better not to come unannounced, that Beleninos have an internal law, and that they need to talk with the community leader in advance." Sergio's wife, Rosa, intervenes and says that Beleninos are very peaceful, that they can handle it, but they have their limits, and that the people will rise up because Belen is their home. By this time, Sergio is trying to hide his already weepy eyes. He explains to me that Bajo Belen is a land that was born in nature. "I serve this town; it is painful to see people leave. I will fight until death. I owe it to this town, and they owe me as well. I will fight for my people and I will only leave this place if I

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[1] Ministry of Housing, Construction, and Sanitation

am dead. There are laws here that we can use to defend ourselves, I have studied those. I sowed here and I am here until now; all my kids grew up here. I will defend myself and all the people who want to fight for this town." With tears in his eyes, he looks at their surroundings.

The government's understanding of risk differs from that of most Beleninos, like Sergio and his wife. The Peruvian government argues that the households settled in Bajo Belen[2] are at high risk because of the flooding of the Itaya River caused by the variations in rainfall. Therefore, in November 2014, the government of Peru enacted a law declaring the emergency resettlement of the communities of Bajo Belen. According to law Nº30291 (El Peruano, 2014) the constant flooding makes Bajo Belen nearly uninhabitable. Thus, in 2015, the Ministry of Housing, Construction, and Sanitation (MVCS) financed the first project of resettlement to give the inhabitants of Belen safer living conditions with potable water, sewage systems, electricity, and resources, such as a medical center, market, parks, police station, elementary schools, and high schools.

After presenting the local and cultural context of Bajo Belen, and where this study is situated in a broader spectrum of literature and research themes, this thesis is organized into two main sections. The first presents the fieldwork process, the methods used along with their benefits and limitations. The second section, based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews, analyzes a map of the three main groups' responses to the resettlement project, and the crucial role of the government in framing risk to justify forced displacement and relocation.

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[2] Bajo Belen is organized into 8 areas: Santa Rosa, 4 de Octubre, Sachachorro, Belén III etapa, Bajo Belén, 30 de Agosto, Pueblo Libre, and Nuevo Liberal.

The "getting down" Ethnography and Language

This study is based on 54 formal in-depth interviews distributed between 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). In addition, I carried out countless informal conversations and ethnographic fieldwork over a 10-month period; distributed over October of 2014; February, March, and December of 2015; April, June, and December of 2016; and May, June, and July of 2017. In addition to archival work mostly in Iquitos, I conducted all 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.

I was constantly seeking immersion[3] within the community to see how the people lead their lives. I believe that I truly committed myself both physically and mentally to penetrating and experiencing their situation (Emerson, 2003), and to "inscribing" their social discourse; writing down the situations and events of their everyday lives. I turned passing events into written interpretations for future reference (Geertz, 1973). However, it was important for me to recognize the fluidity of "outsiderness"/"insiderness" as a methodological aspect. Ethnographers are never fully outside or inside the community studied. My relationship with the community was never

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[3] It is not possible to have total immersion. There will always be moments that will remind a researcher of their limitations. This is what Jooyoung Lee (2016) recalls when he talks about ethnography and the process of showing that he was "down" instead of getting totally "in"[mersed].

expressed in explicit terms but constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in everyday interactions (Naples, 1996).

I recall my first day in Belen when I was getting to know the Beleninos and I was called "señorita" [Miss] as I was seen as the girl researching their community. After spending some months with them I became "Sharito" [little Sharon]; however, there was always an ongoing shift between my two denominations. The experience of 'hanging out' in Belen was indispensable to my research. The familiarity and bonding created by my participation in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Belen and ex-Beleninos, focusing on the "activities of people in face-to-face relations" (Rock, 2001: 26. In: Emerson, 2007), allowed me to "get close" in a minimally intrusive way to observe and understand their lives [Insert figure 13]. From washing 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 the rainfall, and the Beleninos explained to me that from their perspective, the higher the precipitation and river level, the more usable the water is because the garbage sinks to the bottom of the river.

My fieldwork was restricted to Bajo Belen, the communities next to the port and the market, which are the only ones included in the resettlement project. The Beleninos and ex-Beleninos that shared their lives with me are all of low socioeconomic status, with no formal education (or only primary education), and native Spanish speakers. They categorize themselves in relation to their geographical area; for instance, "Beleninos" are from Belen, and "Sanjuaninos" are from San Juan, the district of the resettlement area. On the other hand, the public servants and scholars from Iquitos had a variety of socioeconomic statuses from lower to middle, with formal education resulting in

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technical or college degrees. They too categorized themselves in relation to their geographical area. All interviews were conducted in Spanish after explaining to the participants the purpose of the study and a verbal confidentiality agreement which includes not using real names in order to protect their identities. 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.[4]

Conducting interviews and informal conversations in Spanish with Iquiteño slang made me question how to translate the true meaning of Iquiteños' testimonies for this thesis. 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. First, in English, each phrase needs a subject, whereas in Spanish, the verb is conjugated, so the subject is clear without mention. Second, in English the adjective goes always before the noun and it is singular and gender neutral, which never happens in Spanish. Third, in English, verbal tenses are used differently[5], which makes literal translations challenging. Fourth, the accuracy and meaning of a sentence in English does not depend on one word but several and how they work together.

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[4] Creed-Kanashiro, H., Oré, B., Scurrah, M., Gil, A., & Penny, M. (2005). Conducting Research in Developing Countries: Experiences of the Informed Consent Process from Community Studies in Peru. *The Journal of Nutrition*, *135*(4), 925–928.

[5] For instance, the question "cómo se pasa?" in Spanish from Iquitos could be tanslated as "How is it pass?" Which have nothing to do with the meaning of the question, that means "how things are done."

Sentences in Spanish are more flexible because each word within a sentence has a complete, non-ambiguous meaning; for that reason, it is possible to move the words within a phrasal structure around without changing the meaning of the sentence.

I decided to articulate literal and interpretive translations to preserve the essence of the dialogue while still making it understandable for English readers. That articulation appreciates that the reader understand both Spanish and English. The quotes do not have perfect English grammar nor would it be possible to translate them from this English version to perfect Spanish. The results are an amalgamation of my senses, emotions, and perceptions in the translation/interpretation of the testimonies.

Seeing and Looking at Belen Like the State

According to enacted law Nº30291, the lower zone of Belen, Bajo Belen, is in a state of emergency because of constant inundation by the Itaya River, which makes it nearly uninhabitable. Even before this formal legislation, there was a movement for the resettlement of Belen, beginning in 1953 when former president of Peru, Manuel Odría, ordered a project to move families out of Belen. There were no more efforts until the recent law was passed. In 2015, The Ministry of Housing, Construction, and Sanitation (MVCS) financed the first resettlement project to move people from one of the communities of Belen to an area near the Iquitos-Nauta highway in order to give the inhabitants of Belen a safer lifestyle. This project has the support of an intergovernmental working paper signed by authorities of Iquitos and Lima, including the Mayor of Belen (April 30, 2015). The main argument for the project is a study conducted by the Navy that predicts that the Amazon River will flood Bajo Belen. This study calculates the rate at which the Amazon River will take over the Itaya River, following what used to be its path in the 1700s, thereby flooding Lower Belen (Navy technical report, 2015). Therefore, the state wants to relocate Bajo Belen for three reasons: flooding, pollution, and overcrowding.

Taking heed of James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998), and Steven Pierce's "Looking Like a State" (2006), in this study I critically translate their insights on public policy to the case of Bajo Belen.

On the one hand, in *Seeing like a State*, James C. Scott asks why well-intentioned plans for improving the human condition go tragically awry. By analyzing failed cases of large-scale authoritarian plans in a variety of fields, he provides a convincing account of state logic being the

failure of some social policies in the twentieth century. Scott argues that the success of public policy designs depends on the recognition of local and practical knowledge as being just as important as formal, epistemic knowledge. On the other hand, Steven Pierce in "Looking Like a State," analyzes how the history of Nigerian corruption is also a history of Nigerian state formation due to western-ethnocentric and ahistorical attempts to shoehorn African policies into developmentalist western categories. Pierce argues that this problem emerges from the processes through which government institutions and actors have come to be called "state agents," which envision the state as an entity constituted by legitimate actors. Both approaches to development policies dialogue in how the state always ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order. This case examines the role undertaken by the Peruvian government by declaring Bajo Belen in a state of emergency, which contradicts the Belenino worldview.

In what follows, I describe the perceptions of the three main groups related to the social process of the resettlement project: public servants of institutions involved in the project, ex-Beleninos who have 'benefited' from the project, and Beleninos who are the main opposition. Even though the government argues for resettlement due to flooding, public servants have a broader spectrum of ideas regarding the resettlement project that goes beyond the enacted law. Ex-Beleninos go from praising their new space to remembering Bajo Belen with nostalgia. Finally, Beleninos' perceptions range from a strong conviction to defend Bajo Belen which also provides insights into their risk estimation of Varillalito, to resignation recognizing the power of the Peruvian government.

Institutions

Despite the diverse institutions and offices related to the resettlement project, public servants can be clearly delineated as those that support the project and those that do not. Some civil servants consider Bajo Belen uninhabitable because of the local customs, hygiene deficiencies, insecurity, and flooding risk. They often downplay the flooding, supposedly the core reason for the resettlement project, and focus on Beleninos' everyday habits which are considered immoral and dirty. The government undervalues the Bajo Belen inhabitants' decision to stay and delegitimize civil servants that refuse the project. For the civil servants that support the resettlement project, the comparison between Bajo Belen and Varillalito is radical. To them, the inhabitants of Bajo Belen demonstrate ignorance by refusing to move out. They argue that by opposing the project, Beleninos aim to preserve and benefit from immoral practices such as robbery, drug dealing, alcohol sales, human trafficking, and informal businesses. In addition, these employees question the Beleninos' worldview because by living around and with the river, they willingly accept the risks of diseases from water pollution and subpar standards of living. Consequently, this group has a positive perspective of Varillalito and believes that this space represents cleanliness, safety, health, and modernity.

Three major themes run through civil servants' disagreements on the resettlement project. The first is water and the concept of flooding in the Amazon. Public servants against the Beleninos' displacement focus on the resettlement project's central argument: flooding and the inadequate living conditions of Varillalito. This group considers that the concept of flooding misinterprets the natural river fluctuations. For this group, the Amazon environment naturally cohabitates with water, which organizes the Belenino conception of space around and in water. Thus, the

resettlement project does not consider the local context of Iquitos, as these two public servants suggest:

"Three-quarters of the Amazon floods, you would have to convert three-quarters of the Amazon into relocation, (...) It is a business... they want to make a tourist boulevard here" (Public Servant, 7).

"The flooding is a mentality that comes from the outside; here, what we have is the *creciente* and *vaciante* [the higher and the lower levels of the river] (...) There is a whole focus on sustainability… on climate change, and they try to see how to do risk management; they talk about floods and *huaycos* [mudslides/landslides], I cannot understand, here there is no flooding (...) In politics, resettlement is easier for them, the last thing in risk management policy is resettlement" (Public Servant, 5).

This group also acknowledges Varillalito's deficiency in basic living conditions, highlighting the lack of potable water and its poor quality. Varillalito has a water treatment plant that is supposed to distribute potable water to the 197 already installed houses. However, the water distribution works for less than a fourth of the total. Nevertheless, the water quality naturally contains higher amounts of iron, which makes it untreatable unless using a considerable amount of chlorine. Varillalito´s lacking living conditions also provide some insights into Belenino cultural practices, which have been shaped by their use of river and rainwater. Consequently, ex-Beleninos

keep using rainwater and Varillalito´s lagoon water, not just because of the lack of water but also their comprehension of the natural use of water, as this public servant says:

> "They have learned to live with nature (...) Families are rooted, there is already a feeling, it is a cosmopolitan place, there is a Belenino identity, there is a nostalgia for the land, the people do feel that they are Beleninos (...) The people settled in a river area a long time ago and [know how] to live with the water" (Public Servant, 5).

Thus, the water is not just considered as part of the local context of Bajo Belen, but as part of the Beleninos' cultural practices. The understanding of the river water as natural and cultural relates to the second theme: natural pollution versus moral pollution. Civil servant relocation supporters interpret the resettlement project beyond the flooding problems. For this group, it is not just about Beleninos living in a dirty space, but having dirty practices and deviant culture. Thus, the project functions as a way to discipline their behaviors, as some public servants explain:

> "Families live in permanent contamination, without exaggerating, over garbage (…) That environment is unhealthy; the family overcrowding, it is their custom, it is their style, but that style, that form can modify (…) The families living in Varillalito have adapted (…) The goal is for all to leave (…) We consider that it is not a place for human beings to fully develop" (Public Servant, 4).

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"When the river is higher, you see in the morning that [while] a child is washing

his teeth, another one is going to the bathroom; everything with the same water (...)

It is a different mentality from what we live here; they see it as normal (...) To

change the adults' mentality is going to be more difficult, but it easier with children

(...) To improve the quality of life, we have to boost values" (Public Servant, 13).

For this group, the resettlement project includes guidance to a "moral self" and re-socialization, sometimes through punitive and confrontational means. Fermín, one of the leaders in Varillalito, sheds light on this idea by explaining how in Varillalito, burglars, drunkards, and domestic and sexual aggressors are threatened with expulsion from the community. Thus, residents of Varillalito look to socialize Beleninos with healthy morals that do not replicate the way they used to live in Bajo Belen. In other words, they work towards the dissolution of a "vicious lifecycle" of dirtiness, poverty, disorder, and immorality.

However, the level of sanitation and the quality of potable water in the resettlement area lead to the third theme of the selection of Varillalito. Civil servants against the project acknowledge the microbial contamination of Varillalito's sandy soil. The land used to be a piggery, which explains the high amount of flies everywhere, and why the children, who usually go without shoes, have started exhibiting foot fungi. And although Varillalito has a water treatment plant that is supposed to distribute potable water, the water naturally contains higher amounts of iron, which makes it untreatable unless using a considerable amount of chlorine and makes the use of the natural water inevitable. Thus, this group recognizes the deficiencies of Varillalito, as a public servant states:

"The president of the Republic had a [sense of] commitment to them [the Beleninos]. How are we going to do it? (…) Paternalism and a policy of social handouts (...) they [the government] ask for the first stone of anything to inaugurate, and *then* ask how do we implement this? A law (…) it needed to impose a law that authorized them to do something (...) Now we needed a piece of land (…) After all this, these technical and social processes, (…) we asked the leaders of the two main mafias of land invaders in Iquitos (...) We started the project with them (…) In San Juan, in a land they had already started to invade (...) There was already a process there. And we imposed the power of the central government's authority over the regional and the local government for the occupation of that land (…) Then the water does not come, that is more than a problem, that is a shame for the Ministry of Housing (...) The problem is that the demand for that project is deficiently focused, poorly done (…) What are the water points, where does the water come from, the drain, the water from the piggeries, where the water goes, everybody knows that, they have done the project wrong (...) even if you do not believe it, it is water and sanitary management; these are technical problems (...) they have put too much chlorine [in the water] to distract from the other problems. It is a technical problem." (Public Servant, 17).

Interestingly, while the public servants that support the project cite the inevitable flooding of Bajo Belen, the dirty practices and deviant culture of the Beleninos, and the safe conditions and

dignity that Varillalito provides, they also consider Bajo Belen a usable space after the Beleninos' displacement. Some Public Servants mention the possibility of a tourist boulevard.

Finally, it is possible to identify two levels of power beyond the two groups of public servants—the medium tier leadership and the top leadership. The first represents the well-known conflict about the support and rejection of the project; they work hand-in-hand with the perceptions that Beleninos and ex-Beleninos have about the resettlement project. However, the top leadership represents interests behind the project that go further than flooding, pollution, and inhabitability: state-led development policies that only seek to fulfill a number of portfolio projects.

Ex- Beleninos

This group supports the resettlement project and the Ministry of Housing (MVCS), and believe that Varillalito will constitute the new city of Belen, a place of safety, cleanliness, order, development, and exemplary moral and religious values, as Fermín (42 years old) explains:

"We live as a family; we cope with what will be in the future of this city (...) In Bajo Belen, customs are chaotic; crime, drug addiction, prostitution, and child trafficking, that should not cultivate here (...) We must direct them, tell them what they should not do (...) We proclaim how family life should be, how to guide children, with good manners. We have asked for help from the Ministry of Housing with psychologists for the mothers; the Ministry is giving us support (...) This city comes with all the services. This city is going to be an example for other towns;

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water, drains, lights, a health center, a market, a police station, a school with all the tools, even a computer room. Everything we will have in the future is an essential benefit (...) [It is] a city with the highest manners, the envy of the city of Iquitos and other towns because we no longer cultivate what Bajo Belen is nowadays, a town of nobody (...) If yesterday we were thieves, here, we come to wash our consciences and our hands. Things don't change overnight; it is a process, that is why we need Ministry support, to make people understand what they shouldn't do (...) We organize as a family; people should behave well at home and in the street too. For example, if there is an abuser that beats his wife, we are going to punish him (...) Those people of Bajo Belen are not committed to development (…) Two people have already left because they were [caught] stealing chickens, clothes, in block 3. Your children are thieves, outside! The bars here in Varillalito are not forbidden, but they are not allowed to fight; however, there are some drunks…"

In the words of ex-Beleninos, Bajo Belen is a dangerous, dirty, and chaotic place where there is no trust between people. For them, the choice to relocate is obvious, and without the power to challenge institutional values outside established normative channels, they see the government's threats to make people move as justified (Castells, 2014).

"Those who do not want to come here will have to go to another place because Bajo Belen will be a tourist malecon [esplanade, levee]" (Ex-Beleninx, 4).

"The Navy is going to be in charge, people who do not want to leave Bajo Belen

are going to be displaced with heavy machinery. Everyone who leaves must be here

in Varillalito; nobody should be in Bajo Belen" (Ex-Beleninx, 7).

The delays caused by the Beleninos' resistance to the resettlement project only further their beliefs in the instability of the project and Varillalito's lacking minimum conditions. Meanwhile, ex-Beleninos boast of their consistent light and water, the possibility of enlarging their houses, and the rich land for farming.

Ex-Beleninos also talk about how Varillalito's lagoon will function as a fishpond and tourist attraction in the future. At the same time, they complain about inefficient services and the absence of potable water and water in general. There ways to cope, however:

"It's been two weeks since the cistern came. Usually, we use tap water; there is a

Ministry tank. First, the water came out gummy, now a lot of chlorine; my hair was

very dry when showering. They say that now they are cleaning the tank, that's why

we don't have any water. Sometimes a red car comes with treated water that sells

it to us (…) In the Brook of Love [Varillalito's brook], we can wash clothes, bathe,

even boil water to drink" (Ex-Beleninx, 6).

While ex-Beleninos praise their new space, they also often criticize it and remember Bajo Belen with nostalgia: "Here, everything is cement; I cannot *anzuelear* [fish] here, I miss the river" (Ex-Beleninx, 8).

Kelly (68 years old) moved to Varillalito about a year ago and is one of its wealthiest inhabitants. She lives in one of the households closest to the water treatment plant and is one of the few people in Varillalito that always has water. However, she prefers to use water from nature as she did in Bajo Belen. She uses rainwater and water from the brook to bathe, wash dishes, drink, and cook. However, she complains about the sandy soil: "This land is no good to farm. Also, I don't know why my kids have wounds on their feet; I think the sand is dirty." Indeed, the sand has fungus, which makes the land poor for farming and walking barefoot, a habit in Bajo Belen that people still practice in Varillalito.

Beleninos

The Belenino view of and approach to river level variations differs profoundly from that of the government. The group denies the concept of flooding as understood outside the Amazonian reality. Beleninos organize their perceptions of space in special practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1974). For this group, the changes in the river level are part of their everyday reality, their community and family habits, their shared knowledge of living with and in the river, and their history from the beginning of the development of Bajo Belen. Thus, their perceptions of risk and their decisions in regard to the resettlement project are oriented by principles of morality and solidarity (Dickert et al. 2012; Gusfield, 1986, 1968) and include their relationship with nature and their identity as a river community. It is not just a different understanding of risk and their economic means; it is also that the resettlement area does not provide their ideal climate and resources, making it dangerous for their survival. Therefore, they

have different attitudes towards what the government perceives as dangerous (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1986; Douglas, 1973). As some Beleninos explain:

"There is no other argument… 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" (Beleninx, 2).

"Because of the *huaycos* [mudslides/landslides][6], that's why they have started talking about flooding. Here we have the *creciente* and *vaciante* [higher and lower river levels]. Here there is no risk; the only thing we have to do is be careful" (Beleninx, 8).

Thus, government plans for relocation are based on an outsider understanding of risk, which excludes the Beleninos knowledge of nature's behavior. Beleninos react to the proposed

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[6] The term *huayco* is frequently used in Peru to describe landslides or avalanches of stones and mud that usually affect the city of Lima, located in the valleys of the Chillón, Rímac, and Lurín rivers, in the central coastal part of the country. This word has its roots in the Quechua language. It comes from the terms *wayau* (ravine) and *lloclla* (alluvium). During a *huayco*, a significant amount of land from the surrounding slopes falls off and drags water; it can also lead to strong debris flow, depending on the amount of sediment it brings. The *huaycos* tend to occur in streams where it rains continuously, or when torrential rains occur. Unlike *huaycos*, a flood is the occupation by water of areas that are usually free of this. River floods are natural processes that have occurred periodically and have been the cause of the formation of the plains in the valleys of rivers, fertile lands, fertile plains, and riverbanks.

resettlement plan based on a different understanding of what is dangerous for them. Therefore, this case provides a competing understanding of risk driving positions about displacement.

Belenino moral principles, which include constant interaction and dependence on solidarity, organize their cultural construction of risk as well as their relationship to space and social order (Douglas, 1970). While Beleninos are accustomed to living around the fluctuating river, they also search for physical security, economic security, and respect as "activities of dependency" within their community networks. To achieve these assurances, they participate in exchanges of solidarity (Auyero, 2015; Gusfield, 1968) regarding their survival strategies such as sharing food, work, transportation, and childcare. The relationships that Beleninos build around their survival strategies constitute contractual relationships with other members of the community. Thus, they refuse to be relocated not only because they do not see the risk that the government emphasizes, but also for the sake of their livelihood. The river is seen as a risk by the government but as a resource by locals. Therefore, in their opinion, the resettlement project acts against their culture as well as their social and economic development, as two inhabitants of Bajo Belen say:

"These are attempts against the fundamental rights of the person, and against the economy of thousands of families in Bajo Belen (...) The government wants to relocate us where there is no development. 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 (…) Where the government intends to relocate us is about 20 kilometers away from our space; if we only talk about daily transportation cost, we would be spending between 10 and 15 soles per day [3.25-5 dollars]. Families that

live here make a daily income of 20, 25 soles [6.25-7.5 dollars]; families survive with that" (Beleninx, 2).

"We know how we live; we know how to live (...) They want to take us to a place where there is nothing; if they are going to do something, they should do it 100%. They say that they will put in a mini-market. How will a poor person buy there? That land has nothing. It's a lie (...). They do not have water; they do not have sewage; it's a lie. They are deceiving people (...) 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" (Beleninx, 3).

For this group, Bajo Belen represents certainty about their use of space and both its social and economic resources. Beleninos mention how living in Bajo Belen allows them to have socially and economically open development. They appreciate the proximity of primary and secondary schools for their children as well as access to different jobs. This group also values the possibility of building their own dwellings for their usual extended families of six to nine members per household in addition to having potable water, river water, and light. They believe that in Bajo Belen, even living in extreme poverty, they will never suffer from hunger or lack of income.

On the contrary, their perceptions about the resettlement area represent insecurity about primary resources. For them, Varillalito, is an undeveloped area with precarious living conditions, inadequate schools, a higher cost of living, insufficient government housing considering the

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average size of a Belenino family, and no potable water or light. The group considers Varillalito an inappropriate residential space because of the lack of minimum survival conditions, as this Belenino comments:

> "It makes me sad how these people are living… they are doing their bodily functions like cats. They have to walk 15 minutes to the brook to wash their clothes, and they don't have any water" (Beleninx, 9).

Even though Beleninos claim to respect ex-Beleninos' decisions to "look for a better place for living," they threaten them with the prevention of their return to Belen if they decide to leave Varillalito. They also interrogate the resettlement project's aim. They say that if the government wanted to improve the living conditions of Beleninos, it would have invested in enhancing Bajo Belen, or at least have presented a finished project with all the necessary facilities before making people move. Furthermore, for Beleninos, coercion represents the central problem of the arguments for moving out of Bajo Belen. The threats they receive contradict the freedom to decide as outlined in the resettlement project, as these Beleninos explain:

> "The government looks for the humblest families and tells them that if they do not accept the relocation, they will not have access to light, water, school, or the health center; would you stay in those conditions? And then, they sign; that's the strategy they're using (…) Nowhere in the law says that the resettlement is mandatory, but the government uses the argument that the Navy is going to come with a truck

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which is going to take your little house away; that's why some people left"
(Beleninx, 3)

"To cover up that bad project [Belen Sostenible], overnight they present this new
project, and in two months they approve it (...) They have made people sign, from
the most incautious families to the humblest families, lying to them" (Beleninx, 2).

On the other hand, even though they recognize their social and economic advantages in
Bajo Belen, and are certain in their decision to stay, they also share a sentiment of uncertainty as
well as hope for Bajo Belen's future. Beleninos recognize the government's power and
acknowledge their vulnerability. A recurrent idea expressed in interviews and informal
conversations is an unwillingness to leave along with a sense of resignation, as one Belenina
exclaims: "The only way they can take me out of here is if I am dead." The group hopes for the
resettlement law's repeal and for the government's investment in Bajo Belen, a space with lower
risks that they will keep defending.

"Ten of my neighbors have returned from Varillalito; they say they have no home
there, only land, that they don't have built houses, and that those that are built are
very small. I saw! (…) here [Bajo Belen] people work to get ahead; it is a lie that
we cook with this water. We don´t know what will happen to the people who stay.
I was born here, I know the people will rise up and protest here… even though I'm
an ignorant, I see, and I understand" (Beleninx, 20).

Failure and State-Led Projects After-Effect

Besides the case of Bajo Belen, this research teaches us about development projects that fail to achieve their aims because they are based on an inaccurate construction of social reality and an economic standpoint. It also provides some insight for social scientists on how to theoretically and methodologically research state-led development projects.

This study demonstrates how standardization works as a central problem in state-led development policies. I understand standardization as the creation of variables to measure a social reality. These variables work as tools to design, calculate, and monitor a public policy and its progress. As Scott mentioned (1998), the organization of the natural world is no exception, as in this study case. The government's risk assessment is the reorganization and simplification of nature to suit developers' and public and private institutions' goals.

Therefore, regarding the after-effect of policies, it is important to consider, following Lefebvre (1974), that any social reality within a specific space includes a dialectic interaction between that space and its society for its production and reproduction. Therefore, as in the case of public policies applied to a natural environment, it is indispensable to understand the everyday reality, for instance, the flow of people, daily practices, and ordinary objects that shape the space's meaning, rather than simply rationalizing and standardizing a certain reality into a more convenient format for monitoring. Rationalization and standardization ignore the main features of the already functioning social order and exclude the local know-how as the basis for the design of public policies. Therefore, this study, as well as those taught by Ferguson (1994), Hetherington (2011),

Scott, (1998), Pierce (2006), Babb (2001), and Mitchell (2009), teaches that standardized public policy designs are destined to fail.

These types of designs result from a market-driven standardization as well as from a state that does not have a rationalized bureaucratic system, but the legitimacy to exercise power over dependent citizens (Waldman, 1995:431. In Imbush, 2003). However, even without a homogenous bureaucracy, state-led policies can function as a repressive action directed at a community based on their current potential participation in disagreements (Earl, 2011) as in the case of the two sets of literature presented at the beginning of this study. In the end, forced displacement may be not just a failed public policy but the result of contentious politics and the cause of perceived risk versus its result (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto, 2008). As in the case presented in this study, state-led development policies from western/ethnocentric approaches can create a conflict that in a particular social reality did not previously exist.

Figures

Figure 1

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