

Beyond Stockholm: An Amerindian perspective on hostage-taking as political overture

Capture via hostage-taking has long been interpreted as an act of unilateral violence. Several Indigenous collectives in Ecuadorian Amazonia, however, deploy it as an act of hospitality: for example, by feeding and caring for the captive hostages (such as soldiers and functionaries) and introducing them to the plights of the locals through community involvement. This paper interprets hostage-taking as a political rather than criminal act. Through the lens of Amerindian capture and familiarization, hostage-taking turns into an eminently diplomatic manoeuvre that inverts the terms of exchange: the hostage turns into the aggressor and the hosts' capture is a way to transform cold acts of aggression into opportunities for political redress. This also allows for a reconceptualization of the popular "Stockholm syndrome", an alleged unintended consequence of capture whereby the hostage develops a sort of pathological attachment to the captor provoked by grief, anguish and despair. In Amazonia, the captors deliberately provoke such an attachment but they frame capture as a non-coercive and pedagogic process for the parties. By exploring this difference, the paper contributes to understanding Amazonian styles of negotiation with extractive governments as ways to outdo state sovereignty.

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