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Feeding "True People": Childrearing, Dependence and Autonomy in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Like many other Amazonian indigenous people, Runa people in Ecuador place a high value on self-reliance and independence while simultaneously celebrating the virtues of conviviality and sharing. Drawing on my fieldwork among the Runa, I explore how child feeding practices materialise local philosophical concerns about the relationship between independence and dependence. In particular, I examine how through feeding the Runa value and recognise their children's unique will, while simultaneously cultivating their responsiveness to other peoples' needs. A key feature of feeding practices is an overt asymmetry between those who feed and those who are fed — asymmetry that is not limited temporally to adult-child relationship but that is rather constitutive of Runa social life and ethos. Finally, drawing on the ethnographic work on children in postindustrial families in Europe and the US, I reflect how child feeding practices offer a unique window into thinking about different concepts of care, autonomy and dependence.