ELASTIC SELVES AND FLUID COSMOLOGIES: NAHUA RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Elastic selves and fluid cosmologies: Nahua resilience in a changing world

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I, Conrad Feather, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2003 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology in the same date; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2003 and 2010.

date 7/2/10 signature of candidate

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In memory of Federico Ramirez

Abstract

In May 1984, the Nahua, a Panoan speaking indigenous people living in a remote corner of the Peruvian Amazon, experienced their 'first contact' with Peruvian national society. 25 years later they appear to many observers to have 'thrown away their culture' under pressure from the outside world. This thesis argues instead that these changes were adopted by the Nahua for their own very good reasons and that these transformations reflect greater continuity with the past than first appears.

The apparent lack of nostalgia that the Nahua have for the past instead reflects an inherent capacity for flexibility. This flexibility is manifested at a collective level in the frequent fissions of local groups and at an individual level in their susceptibility to losing their sense of self. The thesis focuses on two key aspects of this flexibility.

The first is that the Nahua understand the site of their personal transformations to be the body which they describe as 'soft'. This 'softness' refers to its ability to incorporate other worldly powers and become like the animals they eat or the people with whom they co-reside. Nevertheless, this capacity also means they can become 'other' when they live apart from their kin. This elasticity of selfhood is typical of many indigenous Amazonian peoples but the Nahua sit at the more flexible end of this spectrum. This is because they cultivate an attitude of radical hunger towards the outside world and place relatively less importance on techniques of restraint and control.

The second aspect is the astonishing flexibility of Nahua worldviews. This is because their cosmologies are less a fixed set of facts and more a shamanic technique of knowing the unknown. These techniques help the Nahua understand the mysteries of the spirit world, their dreams and the world of Peruvians.

In conclusion, it is the 'softness' of their bodies, the elasticity of their selves and the flexibility of their cosmologies that explain the extraordinary resilience of the Nahua in the face of dramatic transformations in the surrounding world.

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Acknowledgements

Writing a PhD was the furthest thing from my mind when I first traveled to Peru to visit the Nahua almost 10 years ago and it would never have occurred to me at all if I had not met the Nahua and fallen under their spell. For this privilege I owe my first debt of gratitude to Charlie Munn, Graham Townsley, Glenn Shepard, Stephen Hugh-Jones, Terry Roopnaraine, Thomas Moore, Lev Michael and Chris Beier who suggested that I visit the Nahua. Lev and Chris in particular provided me with an overwhelming wealth of logistical information and local contacts that enabled me to travel to Serjali.

Arriving in Peru however, I would never have arrived amongst the Nahua if I had not made contact with Federico Ramirez in Sepahua. Having worked with many researchers before, Federico was far better equipped than me to explain my presence to the Nahua. Beyond his skills as a translator and guide, Federico was a wonderful friend and companion, an endlessly patient teacher and an unforgettable storyteller who was quick to laugh at the world and at himself. He possessed extraordinary humility for a man of so many talents and was astonishingly patient with my endless questions despite being constantly "tired, hungry and bored".

On my frequent trips to Serjali I spent considerable time in Sepahua where I found a small haven in the welcoming home of Juan Lao Gonzales and Dina Fasabi. For their food, affection and support in times of need I am grateful. I also owe a great debt to Padre Ignacio Iraizoz and all those at the Mission el Rosario in Sepahua; in particular to Madre Meche for those long conversations in Serjali and for the mutual affection we both have for the Nahua. In Peru, my paths often crossed with Mary Ann Lord, Merillee Goines and Kim and Carolyn Fowler from the Summer Institute of Linguistics and I am extremely grateful to them for their advice and linguistic assistance and generous hospitality in Pucallpa and Serjali.

My work in Peru began with a student expedition in 2000 to visit the Nahua and my biggest debt goes to my extraordinary team mates: Gregor, Aliya and Dora remained in Peru with me for five years after having established Shinai, a small indigenous rights NGO. Together we shared times of great romance and adventure, fantastic success and

despair. I am so glad to be able to share the memories of these experiences even if their memories might not always coincide with my own. The maps of Nahua territory are objects of real beauty which is entirely down to the wizardry of Gregor and Aliya. I owe Aliya in particular an unpayable debt for encouraging me to write this thesis and for her enthusiasm and support that was ever present. I could not imagine a better friend.

In Lima and beyond I found a small but committed group of people dedicated to the cause of indigenous people and Amazonian anthropology. I owe particular thanks to Margherita Benavides and Richard Chase Smith, Tom Griffiths and Marcus Colchester, Lelis Rivera, Cathy Ross, Pierre Déléage, Olaf Reibedanz, Manuel Cornejo and everyone at AIDESEP and Racimos de Ungurahui especially to Lily la Torré Lopez who, over the years, has been such a source of strength.

This thesis could never have materialised without financial support. The funding for my fieldwork came from a variety of sources. These included a Leverhulme Overseas Research Studentship, an Emslie Horniman grant from the Royal Anthropological Institute (funded by the Sutasoma trust), two grants from the Anglo Peruvian Society and a fieldwork grant from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Documentation Project (ELDP). I also received a Radcliffe Brown award from the RAI to help with the latter stages of writing up. I owe particular thanks to Jean Cater at the Leverhulme Foundation, John Forrest at the Anglo Peruvian Society, Glenn Bowman and Amanda Vinson at the RAI and Anna Greedharee and Peter Austin at the ELDP for their patience with my queries.

I would never have ended up in St Andrews however if it had not been for my supervisor Peter Gow, whose book *Of Mixed Blood* was such an inspiration to me as an undergraduate. My thesis would not have been what it is without Pete's subtle guidance. I thank him for his ability to see what I was attempting to achieve and for teaching me about indigenous Amazonian people while walking in the Scottish highlands, visiting grave stones and becoming stuck in the mud.

St Andrews could not be further from the Amazon; a small and ancient town that is made of stone and balances precariously on the edge of the North Sea. Appearances

can be deceiving however and its passion for Amerindian peoples is embodied in the Centre for Amerindian Studies (CAS). I thank Joanna Overing and Tristan Platt for their work in building the CAS as well as for their friendship and generous hospitality over the years. In St Andrews I found a perfect environment for writing a PhD thesis. Without the support of Mhairi Aitkenhead and Lisa Neilson this thesis would probably have taken another six years to finish and I thank many of the staff, especially Kai Kresse, for their friendly welcome. I am indebted to Steve Hamblin and Iain and Dot Cantlie of St Leonards School for always finding me a place to stay.

When I returned from the field, the writing up seminars organised by Christina Toren were responsible above all else for helping me understand my task as an ethnographer. I thank all the PhD students who, at various stages, were forced to read and comment on my rambling drafts. St Andrews would not have been the same without the firm friends that I made there and with whom I was lucky enough to be able to fashion fleeting but supportive communities. In particular I wish to thank: Jan Grill, Rodrigo Villagra Carron Griet Scheldeman, Margherita Margiotti, Paolo Fortis, Chris Hewlett, Lucas Dreier, Máire Ní Mhórda, Juan Pablo Sarmiento, Ioannis Kallianos, Vahe Boyadjian and Linda Scott for their insightful comments on my work and their friendship. Special thanks are reserved for two friends in Scotland: Rodrigo Villagra Carron and Nick Bard. Their visits to me in the field taught me so much about the Nahua and our friendship. On the occasions when St Andrews became a little too intense I was always able to escape to the first and last homely house in Scotland; Frances and Chris Ryan were always unfailingly generous with their delicious food and hospitality. I always left their house feeling ready to face the world.

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Apparently it is utterly normal in the last stages of a PhD for everyone to go slightly mad and I owe an apology to my friends and anyone who met me during this time who had to bear the brunt of this mild crisis. I wish to thank my sister and parents for their concern and support; they have always been there for me when I needed it most and have always understood my prolonged absences. I am indebted to Lucas, Ioannis and Ellie for their comradeship and clear headed thinking in the days before submission. I owe a huge debt to Lucas Dreier, Aliya Ryan, Linda Scott, Angela Marie Viola-Glapi, George Geddes and Catriona Forbes: my team of proofreaders and mapmakers who helped me so much at the last minute. The title and the proofreading were truly a collective effort; nevertheless, a PhD is a solitary task which can truly test one's self belief and I thank Ellie in particular for believing in me even when my own belief wavered.

My biggest thanks however, go to all the Nahua who captivated me from the moment we first met in April 2000. I was instantly seduced by their affection and enthusiasm, their carefree spirits and their utter liberty. There are many times when I have felt truly at home with the Nahua as I have never felt anywhere else and I hope to be involved in their world for the rest of my life.

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The Nahua at a glance

The Nahua are a Panoan speaking people who currently live in the village of Santa Rosa de Serjali which is situated at the confluence of the Serjali and Mishagua rivers in the rainforests of South East Peru (Map 1).

Panoan speakers live in the border areas between Bolivia, Brazil and Peru but D'Ans (cited in Townsley 1988:11) classified the Panoan language family into three linguistic branches. The Nahua belong to the 'South Eastern Panoan language group' which corresponds to the languages spoken by groups inhabiting the headwaters of the Purús and Yurúa rivers and includes the Cashinahua and Amahuaca. Cashinahua[1] and Amahuaca[2] are both considered sufficiently distinct to occupy their own linguistic categories while the various other Nahua groups (Sharanahua, Yaminahua, Marinahua, Chitonahua etc.) are classified as Purús Panoans as they speak languages that are mutually intelligible and because it seems that historically they have all occupied the headwaters of the Purús and Yurúa rivers (Map 2). These different Nahua groups should not be confused with a coherent ethnicity. They are best understood as unstable local groups of the same broader ensemble.

At the start of the twentieth century, Nahua ancestors were living in several dispersed villages in the headwaters of the Purús River and avoiding any peaceful or direct contact with non Purús Panoans. After an internal conflict, the group split and Nahua ancestors migrated to the headwaters of the Manu and Mishagua rivers (Map 3) where they lived in three dispersed villages and avoided any direct or sustained contact with other indigenous peoples (including other Purús Panoans) and Peruvian national society.

Since the 1950's the Mishagua River, rich in natural resources, attracted increasing numbers of loggers and oil prospectors. This resulted in increasingly violent clashes

[1] Studied by Kensinger, McCallum, Lagrou, Keifenhiem and Deshayes amongst others.
[2] Notably studied by Carneiro and Dole.

with the Nahua. Sporadic efforts, by missionaries, to contact the Nahua met with failure and their first sustained contact with national society was triggered in May 1984 after a violent encounter with loggers. Within a year, a series of lethal respiratory infections had eliminated almost half the population to about 110 individuals because they had little or no immunity to these diseases. In the immediate aftermath, the survivors became rapidly dependent on outsiders for medical treatment and food.

By 1995, after several years of dispersal, all the surviving Nahua had moved to the confluence of the Mishagua and Serjali rivers where they established the village of Santa Rosa de Serjali (Photo 1). The village lies three days downriver from their old villages in the headwaters of the Mishagua and Manu rivers and three days upriver from Sepahua, the nearest town.

Today, the population has recovered to over two hundred and eighty people. Their economy is based predominantly on hunting and fishing with cultivation of small swiddens for their staple crops of bananas, manioc[3] and corn. In recent years they have begun to extract small volumes of timber to meet their increasing demands for material good such as clothes and soap, shotgun cartridges and gasoline for their boat motors.

Santa Rosa de Serjali receives considerable support from the Catholic Dominican Mission which operates a small post in the village that is manned by two nuns who are present during the school year. They also manage a state sponsored primary school in the village and provide some logistical support for the community health post that receives no state support. They provide medical support for the Nahua in case of an emergency and also have attempted to support several Nahua students studying secondary education. Thus far, one female student has completed her secondary education and has become a teacher in the primary school.

Sepahua, the nearest town, lies on the mouth of the Sepahua River as it flows into the river Urubamba (Map 1). From Sepahua it takes three days on a boat powered by a two cylinder engine (known locally as a *peke peke* because of its characteristic splutter) to travel upriver to Serjali but it takes only one day to make the return journey. Sepahua is

[3] Cassava, an edible starchy root.

home to approximately 5000 people the majority of whom are indigenous peoples; a mix of Arawakan speaking groups such as the Piro, Machiguenga and Ashaninka and other Panoan speakers including the *Amahuaca* and Yaminahua. The remainder of its inhabitants are longstanding non indigenous residents of the Amazon region who are referred to in Peru as *mestizos* (mixed) to reflect their mixed European and indigenous heritage, as well as more recent migrants from the Andes. The economy of Sepahua is largely dependent on the logging industry but in recent years has begun to be affected by the burgeoning oil and gas industry that is developing in the region. After Sepahua, the nearest town is Atalaya, a one day boat journey (with an outboard motor) downriver from Sepahua. Atalaya is the provincial capital and a further three days travel downriver on the River Ucayali is the regional capital of Pucallpa (Map 2).

Legally, Nahua territory lies within a State Reserve established to protect and safeguard the land rights of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation and initial stages of contact (Map 1). The intention of the Reserve is to safeguard the inalienable right of these peoples to their land until such time as they are in a position to make a land title claim. The Nahua share this reserve with isolated Machiguenga communities and another Arawakan speaking group, the Nanti, who some refer to by the pejorative term of Kugapakori[4].

[4] This term means assassin in Machiguenga.

Orthographic Note

Throughout the thesis, all words in indigenous and foreign languages are written in italics with the exception of Spanish personal and place names and the ethnonyms of indigenous peoples. Spanish words are indicated with (Sp). Some personal names have been changed to protect the identity of their owners. Quotations from published works and individuals are noted in double quotation marks. Glosses in English of Nahua phrases are indicated in single quotation marks while translations of individual words are noted in brackets following the text. Longer narratives and quotations are separated from the main body of the text with the use of italics, indentation and single line spacing.

This text uses the practical orthography for Yora/Yaminahua (Eakin 1991) developed by the linguist/missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)[5]. The descriptions of pronunciation are drawn from Eakin and Shepard (1999).

In this orthography the alphabet has 18 letters (a, ch, e, f, I, j, k, m, n, o, p. r, s, sh, t, ts, x, y). Most of these are pronounced in a similar fashion to their Spanish or English equivalents with the following exceptions:

E is a complex sound produced by pronouncing a sound like an English *ee* deep in the throat with the lips spread. When occurring at the end of the word it tends to produce a sound like a guttural Arabic *gh.*

O is between the *o* and *u* in English. Example 'or'.

F is somewhat intermediary between *f* and aspirated *w* in English (for example 'whale' with a strongly aspirated *h*. Before *o* it is nearly like a Spanish *j*.

[5] Today, SIL International is a U.S based, worldwide non-profit organization, whose main purpose is to study, develop and document lesser known languages. SIL International is a partner organization of Wycliffe Bible Translators, an agency dedicated to translating the Bible into minority languages.

K at the beginning of words and after consonants it is like an English *k*. Between consonants it is more like a glottal stop. For successive occurrences of *k* between vowels in adjacent syllables it alternates between the glottal stop and *k* sound.

M varies between *b* and *m*. Pronounced *m* in nasalised words and *b* in others.

N Varies between *d* and *n*. Pronounced *n* in nasalised words and *d* in most other words. When occurring in successive consonants, the first is pronounced *d* and the second *n*.

R varies between *r* and *l*.

Sh is produced more towards the front of the mouth than English *sh*.

X is an *sh* pronounced with the top of the tongue elevated and arched toward the alveolar region.

Terminology

For some time I never knew what to call the Nahua. Before 1984 they were referred to as the Parque-Nahua or the X-Nahua. This denomination reflected a general consensus that they were an unidentified Purús Panoan group living in Manu National Park. After 1984, the names increased. In Sepahua, local people still refer to them as the *shara* (good) or the *yamashta* (person who almost died) having heard the Nahua use these terms amongst themselves. The more politically conscious anthropologists and indigenous organisations began to call them *yora*, broadly translatable as 'person' as this seemed to correspond to a more 'authentic' auto denomination.

From my perspective it seemed strange to use *yora* while continuing to use the Nahua suffix to refer to other Purús-Panoans such as the Yaminahua who also referred to themselves as *yora.* Given that *yora* actually means 'person like us' while Nahua

means ‘enemy’ or ‘stranger’ it seemed even odder for me, or any other outsider, to call them *yora*.

I have often heard curious *mestizos* in Sepahua ask Curaca, the Nahua headman, “What is Nahua?” “*Mestizos*” he answers which invariably leaves them with a puzzled frown on their brows. This confusion is created because ‘Nahua’ is used both as an ethnic denomination and to refer to an ontological category of otherness (enemy/stranger) and because *yora* and Nahua are relative rather than substantive concepts: their use depends on one’s position. It made sense for me to refer to them as Nahua (other) just as they refer to themselves as *yora* (us) but to outsiders as different kinds of Nahua. They are all *yora* from their own perspective, yet aware that they are Nahua from the perspective of others.

Nafa or Nahua

It was even more complicated to know how to write the word Nahua. Some authors choose to refer to the Purús Panoan groups with the ‘Nawa’ rather than Nahua suffix while if we follow the SIL orthography it should be written as Nafa.

To avoid the endless creation of new words I refer to the people who today live in Serjali as Nahua, a term that best reflects my own relationship with them, the positional meaning of the term and its most common spelling in Spanish. However, I refer to the ontological category of otherness as *nafa*. For purposes of clarity I refer to all Purús Panoan groups with a ‘Nahua’ suffix except when specifically citing the work of those authors who write ‘Nawa’.

If this was not complicated enough, the same word also refers to one of the moieties; a classificatory system in which everything in the universe is considered either as A or B; or in the Nahua case: *roanifo* and *nafa*[6]. For purposes of clarity I write this in bold as ***nafa***.

[6] See Chapter 1 for more detail.

Thus there are many kinds of *nafa*. I am classified as belonging to the *oxonafa* (white people) while their neighbours in Sepahua are Yaminahua (axe people) and in the Purús are Sharanahua (good people). Broadly speaking, *nafa* refers to those who are not *yora* which in turn refers to the people with whom one lives. While the Nahua would rarely if ever refer to me or a Peruvian as *yora* they often refer to the Yaminahua and other Nahua groups as *yora* if they do not want to distinguish themselves from each other. By choosing to refer to someone as *nafa,* the Nahua establish foreignness and potential enmity.

Today, the Nahua refer to other indigenous peoples such as the Machiguenga as *yora fetsa*, 'other real people'. When they were living in the Manu however they referred to all other groups as different kinds of *nafa*. The Machiguenga were known as the *pianafa* (arrow strangers) and the *mestizos* as *fianafa* (smelly strangers). Today they refer to other indigenous peoples as *yora fetsa* as they are evidently very different from themselves but clearly distinct from *mestizos* who are simply referred to as *nafa*, the exemplary other.

The Nahua in the ethnographic record

In recent years there has been an explosion of excellent ethnographic studies of Panoan speaking groups as well as efforts to describe the Panoan ensemble as a whole (Erikson 1986, Hörnborg 1993).

For the Purús-Panoan groups, excellent ethnographies have been published about the Sharanahua (Siskind, Déléage) and Yaminahua (Townsley, Calavia Saez, Perez Gil, Carid Naveira). The Nahua themselves were understandably a subject of great interest immediately after their 'first contact' (Zarzar 1987, Hill and Kaplan 1995, Macquarrie 1991) and these studies tended to focus exclusively on their recent contact and its implications. In 1999, Glenn Shepard published a doctoral thesis that compared the sensory perceptions of the Nahua and the Machiguenga, a neighbouring Arawak speaking people. In 1999, Rodolfo Tello, a Peruvian anthropologist, published a masters thesis and subsequently several articles about the Nahua which focused on the influence of external agents such as the Dominican Catholic mission.

The protagonists

José Nixpopinima/Curaca
José is the chief of the Nahua and is also known as Curaca. He has two wives and twelve children, he is a shaman and is in his early 60's.

Marta Xaya
Marta is Curaca's younger sister and one of the most influential ladies in Serjali. She is married to a Yaminahua man called Auxini.

Juan Seido
Juan is in his mid 40's and was one of the first Nahua men to visit Sepahua. Juan is married to Edith with whom he has four children. Juan also has six other children from four other partners.

Lucco Ochapaxiya
Lucco is in his mid 30's and is training to be a shaman. Lucco and his wife, Maria Luisa, were my hosts on various occasions. They have three children.

Jader Flores Gomez
Jader is Lucco's younger brother who was born in the Manu before 'first contact' but was raised by a *mestizo*/Yaminahua family in Sepahua. He returned to live with the Nahua in 2004 and has a Nahua wife and two children. In 2008, after the death of his brother Teocho, he returned to live in Sepahua.

Mario Finima
Mario is in his early 40's and is a former President of the village. He has accompanied me to Lima on two occasions.

Raya Amenafa Makofene

These are three of the oldest men in the village and the authors of many of the myths and stories in this thesis.

Dora Seido Elena Seido

Dora and Elena are two sisters in their early 50's whose husbands died during the epidemics. I lived with Dora and next door to Elena for many years.

Julio Makofene Antonio Ramirez Jorge Atonoima

Julio, Jorge and Antonio are all in their mid to late 20's and have small children. They were my principal assistants for the transcription and translation work and spent several weeks with me in Atalaya and Lima on various occasions.

Jorge Ninafa Tomas Raya

Jorge and Tomas were two of the four Nahua men who first established contact with the loggers in 1984.

José Ramirez/José Chorro
José (*comaroa*) is a Yaminahua man who was born in the early 1940s in the headwaters of the River Piedras where he lived until he was about 15 when he moved with his family to the River Purús. José has spent an eventful life in the frontier region between Brazil and Peru as a logger, animal fur trader as well as an interpreter for oil companies, missionaries and anthropologists working with Panoan speakers in the region. José was the key intermediary who facilitated the Nahua's 'first contact'; he later married a Nahua lady and moved to Serjali where he established himself as chief. He was replaced by Curaca in 1998 but continued to live in Serjali until 2008 when he moved with his Nahua wife to Sepahua where he lives today.

Map 1

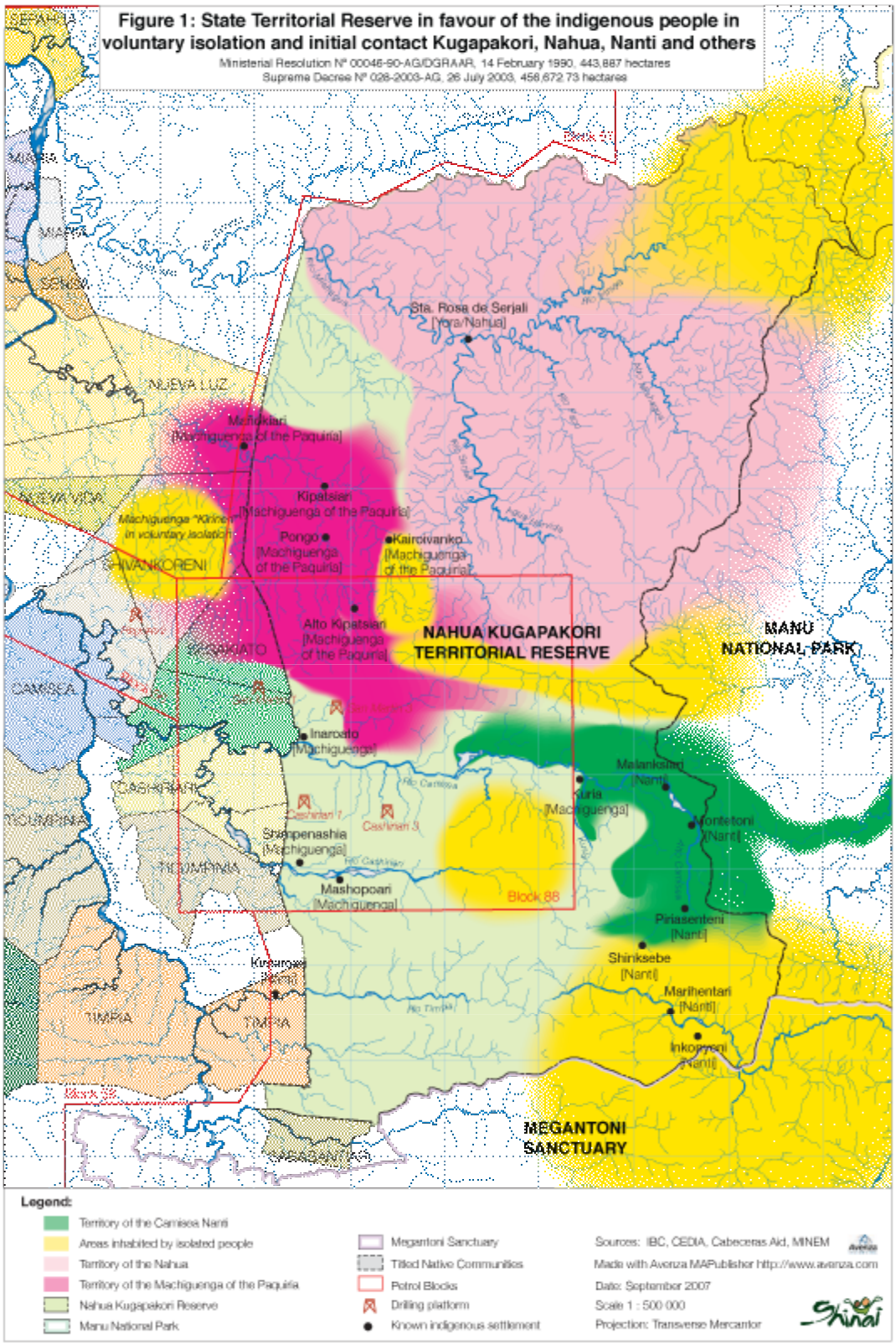
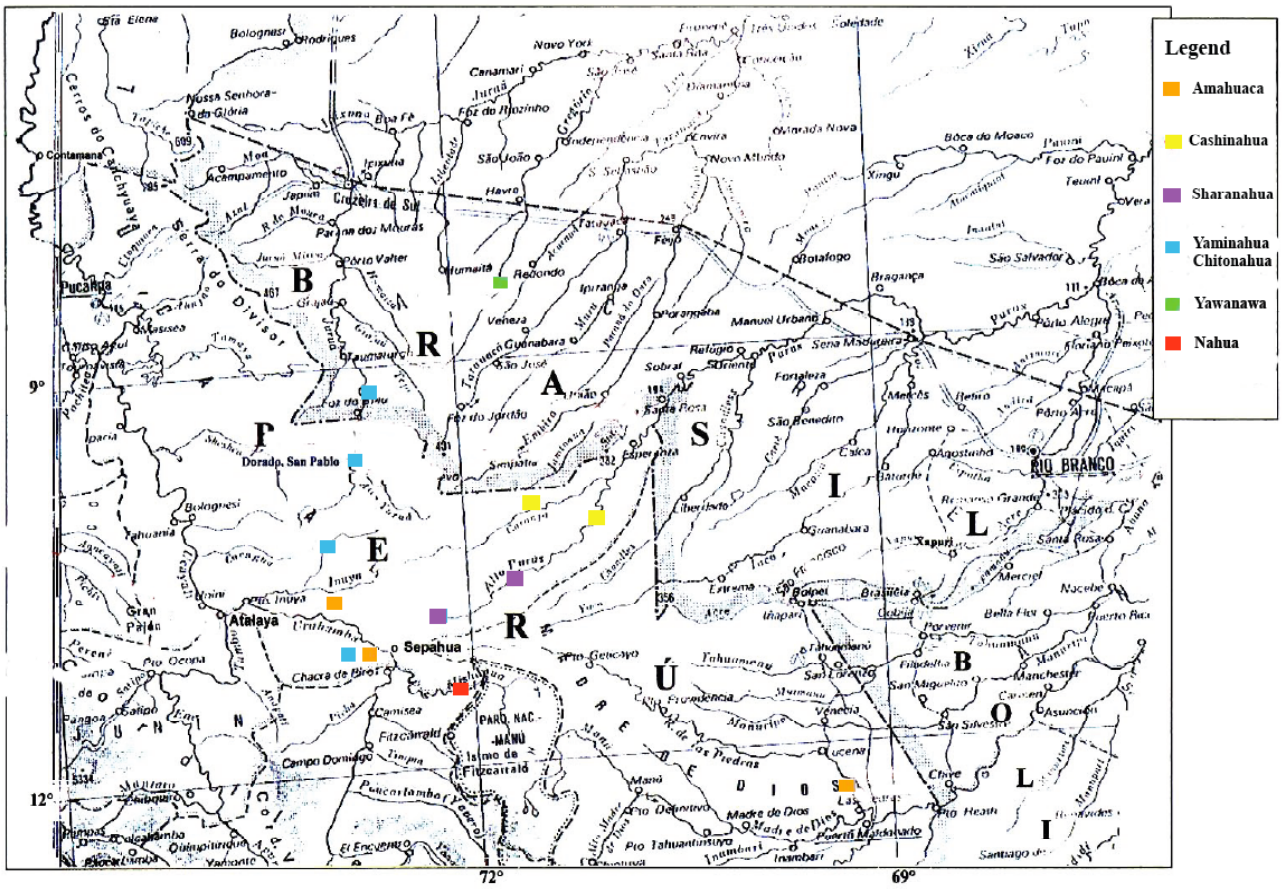


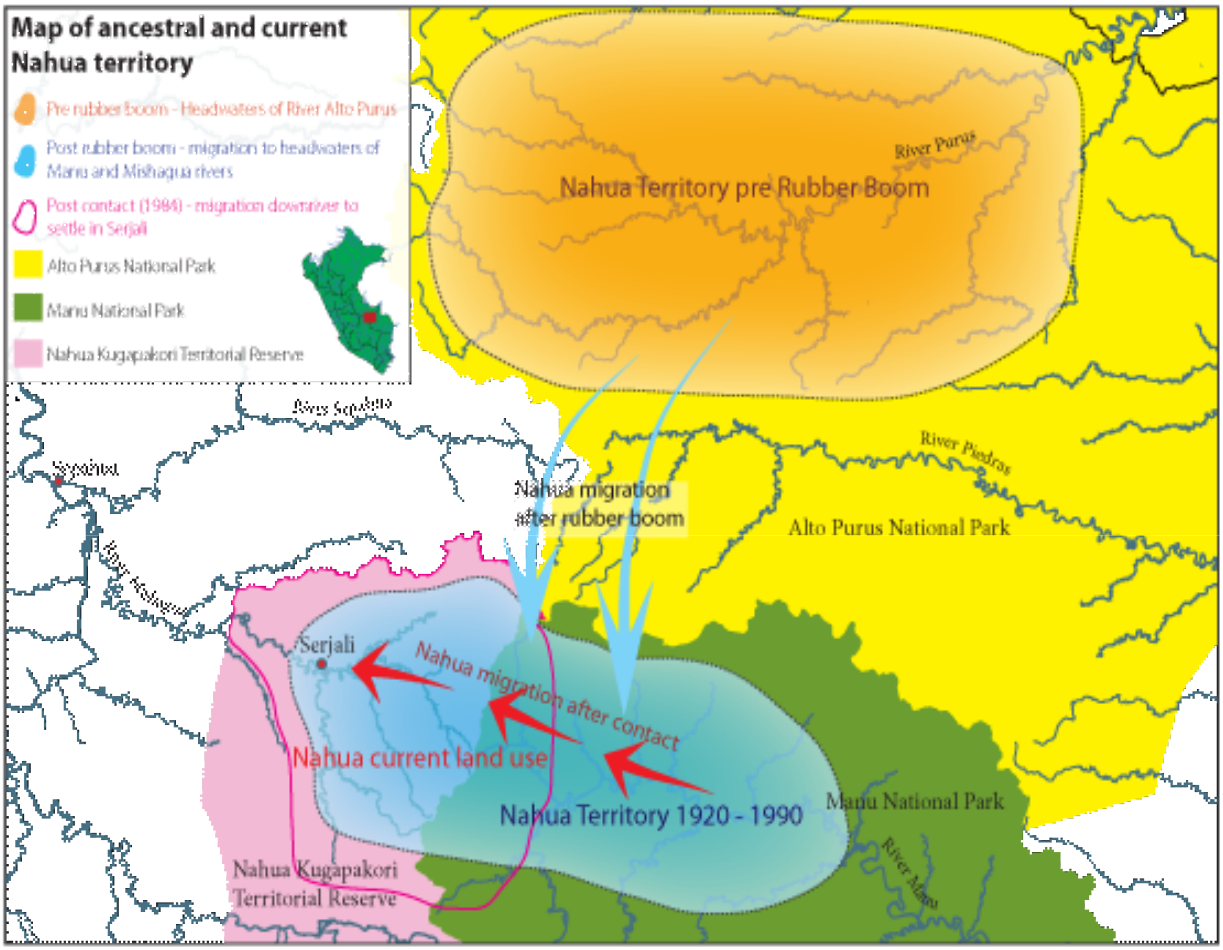
Figure 1: State Territorial Reserve in favour of the indigenous people in voluntary isolation and initial contact Kugapakori, Nahua, Nanti and others
Ministerial Resolution Nº 00046-90-AG/DGRAAR, 14 February 1990, 443,887 hectares
Supreme Decree Nº 028-2003-AG, 26 July 2003, 458,672.73 hectares
Sta. Rosa de Serjali
[Yora/Nahua]
NUEVA LUZ
Mafiokiari
[Machiguenga of the Paquirja]
Kipatsiari
[Machiguenga of the Paquirja]
Machiguenga "Kirineri" in voluntary isolation
Pongo
[Machiguenga of the Paquirja]
Kairoivanko
[Machiguenga of the Paquirja]
SHIVANKORENI
Alto Kipatsiari
[Machiguenga of the Paquirja]
NAHUA KUGAPAKORI TERRITORIAL RESERVE
MANU NATIONAL PARK
CAMISEA
Inarocato
[Machiguenga]
Melankiari
[Nanti]
[Machiguenga]
Montetoni
[Nanti]
Shimpenashia
[Machiguenga]
Mashopoari
[Machiguenga]
Block 88
Priasenteni
[Nanti]
Shiniksebe
[Nanti]
Marihentari
[Nanti]
Inkoriyari
[Nanti]
TIMPIA
MEGANTONI SANCTUARY
Legend:
Territory of the Camisea Nanti
Areas inhabited by isolated people
Territory of the Nahua
Territory of the Machiguenga of the Paquirja
Nahua Kugapakori Reserve
Manu National Park
Megantoni Sanctuary
Titled Native Communities
Petrol Blocks
Drilling platform
Known indigenous settlement
Sources: IBC, CEDIA, Cabeceras Aid, MINEM
Made with Avenza MAPublisher http://www.avenza.com
Date: September 2007
Scale 1 : 500 000
Projection: Transverse Mercantor
Shinai

Map 2

Location of Purus Panoan groups mentioned in text



Map 3


Map of ancestral and current Nahua territory
Pre rubber boom - Headwaters of River Alto Purus
Post rubber boom - migration to headwaters of Manu and Mishagua rivers
Post contact (1984) - migration downriver to settle in Serjali
Alto Purus National Park
Manu National Park
Nahua Kugapakori Territorial Reserve
Nahua Territory pre Rubber Boom
River Purus
River Piedras
Nahua migration after rubber boom
Alto Purus National Park
Serjali
Nahua migration after contact
Nahua current land use
Nahua Territory 1920 - 1990
Manu National Park
River Manu
Nahua Kugapakori Territorial Reserve

Map 4: Nahua territory use and occupation

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Introduction

"The most affectionate people in the Amazon"

Nothing had prepared me for the shock I experienced when visiting the Nahua for the first time. As our boat rounded the last bend of the river before the village I saw a stream of tiny figures pouring towards the beach. As we got closer I heard a steadily growing roar of voices that were shouting, laughing and whooping. As the boat pulled in I was surrounded by a crowd patting me on my arms and hands and speaking to me in a tone so high pitched I was afraid that their words might break. I understood nothing of what they were saying but the sparkle in their eyes as they tugged gently on my necklace or the amorous glances they gave to my new wellington boots left little room for interpretation. Somehow I survived this initial full frontal assault on my senses, personal space and belongings and the next few hours passed in a blur. I was adopted by somebody and whisked off to their house where I was seated in a hammock and offered endless bowls of manioc beer[7] and a smoked foot of an unidentified creature plucked from the leafy rafters of the roof.

There is no space for reticence or reservation in these breathless first encounters (Photo 2). The good visitor must respond with equal generosity of spirit, they must ask questions and eat and drink heartily with appreciative murmurings while their personal belongings are scrutinised by nimble fingered children. Within fifteen minutes, the entire village will know the identity of the visitor, their likely length of their stay and the exact number of machetes and shotgun cartridges they have brought as presents (Photo 3).

[7] A drink consumed throughout the Amazon which is made from fermented manioc and sweet potato. It is known in Peru as *masato*.

One might think that such enthusiastic receptions are reserved for exotic foreigners. One afternoon during the early stages of my fieldwork, Julio, a young Nahua man, arrived in Serjali by canoe. A torrent of small children rushed down to the river to meet him. "Julio has arrived, Julio has arrived" they shouted excitedly. His mother and father began to cry and sing quietly, "My beautiful son, my beautiful son" while his brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts overwhelmed him with bowls of food and drink. In high-pitched nasal tones they flooded him with a barrage of questions and demands for his clothes, jewellery, fish and meat[8]. At last he reached his own house where his mother gave him corn beer to drink and some fish with roasted manioc. I concluded that Julio must have been returning from a long and arduous expedition and have faced certain death at every bend of the river to elicit such relief from his relatives. I turned to the man standing next to me and asked, "Where did he go?" "Oh, he just left yesterday to go fishing" he replied casually.

The immediate expression of such affection for the visitor or returnee is by no means typical of indigenous Amazonian peoples. Arriving amongst the Piro, Nanti and Machiguenga, the Arawak speaking neighbours of the Nahua, could not be more different. A visitor to a Piro village will raise no apparent interest amongst his hosts, he will be offered something to drink but no questions will be asked; the experience of the first few hours in a Piro village is simply to be ignored (P.Gow pers comm)[9].

Enrique Tante is a pilot for the Dominican Catholic missionaries. He has been paying flying visits to indigenous villages in the Peruvian Amazon for almost 30 years. In his opinion the Nahua are "the most affectionate people in the Amazon".

A people with no culture

Arriving amongst the Nahua was a shock. Instead of being perturbed by the arrival of an outlandish, gangly and bearded young white man they were unsurprised and apparently pleased to see me. I was immediately invited to stay in a house with a

[8] Such receptions resemble the famous 'welcome of tears', the tearful greeting that Thevet and de Lery reported for the 16th century Tupinamba in Brazil (Cited in Clastres 1998:55).
[9] Such reserve seems to be common amongst other indigenous Amazonian peoples. Amongst the Ache, "a calm and discreet arrival was favoured - even for a friend an hour might elapse before they are even greeted!" (Calstres 1998: 46-7). For further discussion of this issue see Chapter 5.

family, to go on hunting and fishing trips and to join the collective labour parties on their small farms. People were willing to sit down and teach me how to speak and they were intensely curious about my life and repeatedly asked me about my home, my family and the size of the plane that had brought me to Lima. They were concerned about my emotional well being and I was never left alone.

Unfortunately, the things that other anthropologists studied in small-scale hunter gatherer societies did not seem to exist amongst the Nahua. There were no elaborate ceremonial feasts or initiation rites, no seclusion of women during menstruation, no extravagant lip plugs, body painting or skin scarification. Society was loosely organised with no complex division into marriage segments, and the moiety system (the only apparent classificatory system for structuring marriage), village layouts and many other aspects of daily life, had seemingly been abandoned soon after their 'first contact' in 1984. I found myself in a situation similar to that described by Viveiros de Castro of his time amongst the Arawete: "Living was easy….what was difficult was to do anthropology" (1992:9).

It was this relatively recent 'first contact' that had caught my interest. I had been raised on a diet of adventure stories where intrepid explorers were the first people to make contact with cannibals and headhunters and astonish them with the wonders of matches and mirrors. The myth of an isolated people who lived in a different epoch had been broken after two years of studying anthropology, yet some romantic debris had clearly remained[10].

I was searching for the exotic but when I arrived amongst the Nahua there was none to be found. Bows, arrows and spears had been abandoned in favour of shotguns and fishing nets. Manchester United shirts had replaced penis strings and body paint and the small impermanent villages in the narrow headwaters had become one sizeable village on the banks of a large river (Photo 4). It seemed that the Nahua had thrown away everything that made them distinctive. Only their language was obviously different, and given the intensity of their interaction with Peruvian national society and

[10] Fabian's 'Time and the other' (1983) was particularly influential.

the monolingual (Spanish) primary school in their village, surely it would not be long before this too would disappear.

On my second night, however, I was invited to accompany about twenty men who had gathered in a little hut to drink *xori* (*ayahuasca)*, the hallucinogenic brew[11]. Although it had little physical effect I felt that I had at last found something ancient and venerable, something that made the Nahua different. This perception did not last. *Ayahuasca* turned out to have been introduced after contact by the Yaminahua. Even Manchester United shirts were more 'traditional' than *ayahuasca*.

There seemed to be nothing that was sacred to the Nahua. They did not have the hand carved stools of the Achuar[12] or the beautifully painted ceramics, cloths and weavings of the Machiguenga. Even other Panoan speaking peoples, such as the Shipibo and Cashinahua, had intricate body painting. Although 'first contact' was so recent, the Nahua seemed to have become rapidly dependent on manufactured products; if they ran out of shotgun cartridges they would go hungry rather than hunt with a bow and arrow. Their voracious consumption of tobacco for healing and pleasure was something that had not been affected by contact, but when they had no money to purchase more, they simply went without rather than grew their own.

The only material objects they still made were simple cotton hammocks but when these had disintegrated they would rather craft a makeshift replacement from an old piece of plastic than go to the considerable trouble to weave a new one from cotton. Even *ayahuasca*, the medium for communicating with the world of the spirits, had no special associated material culture. What kind of self respecting indigenous people, drink a spiritual brew out of a decrepit plastic bucket? These were worrying times for a young and impressionable student. What on earth was I to study?

Like the Yaminawa, the Nahua seemed to be a "riteless people" lacking anything that could be considered a ritual in a classic anthropological sense (Calavia Saez 2004:158). Obvious social rules and regulations seemed almost non-existent. Like most

[11] The word *ayahuasca* is of Quechua origin and refers to any of various psychoactive brews prepared from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine. It is usually mixed with the leaves of dimethyltryptamine-containing species of shrubs from the *Psychotria* genus.
[12] A Jivaroan speaking indigenous people who inhabit the border area between Ecuador and Peru.

Amazonian indigenous peoples they had no coercive form of authority and very few formal means of social control; the Nahua were apparently teetering on the edge of anarchy. Their occasional attempts to organise village meetings were touchingly chaotic; they would often be abandoned spontaneously to hunt wild boar, to listen to a conversation on the village radio, or would easily be diverted when someone raised the perennially thorny issue of chicken shit in the village.

With no rites of passage or complex pottery to analyse I dedicated myself to speaking with the Nahua. Nevertheless, even sitting down for a chat proved difficult. They never stopped travelling and this made participant observation in the village particularly tricky. One morning I woke to see Shico, the father of my household, heading off to the river with a bunch of bananas and a machete. Waving casually, he told me he was going to Puerto Maldonado, a town over three weeks away on foot and by raft, and said he would return in a year or two. I had barely recovered from the surprise when Shico returned four days later. He had forgotten to take enough manioc and had run out of food. This apparently whimsical and spontaneous attitude to travelling was, and continues to be, a regular feature of Nahua life. They would often disappear overnight for weeks or months on end and then, like Shico, reappear just as unexpectedly as they had left.

Their geographical restlessness was complemented by a more general unpredictability. The Nahua never seemed to do what they said they were going to do which earned them a reputation for being fickle and thoughtless amongst local peoples. Unlike their more constant neighbours, the Nahua lived on emotional highs or lows, either on waves of joy and exuberance or in the depths of melancholy and despair. They did not adopt a stoical attitude in the face of physical pain or sadness, were constantly nostalgic for absent kin and they would leap to morbid conclusions if their relatives did not return when expected.

Those who observed the Nahua from afar shook their heads in despair. The rapid social changes that had followed their 'first contact' were explained either as a process of rapid acculturation whereby the Nahua had been forced to adopt the culture of the dominant society, or as a process of deculturation in which they were throwing away everything that made them different. When I began fieldwork I was equally guilty of

holding such assumptions and I too struggled to rid myself of an approach that reduced 'culture' to technique, artifact, rites and regulations and in which culture becomes a rule book about order (Wagner 1981:29)[13].

Questioning acculturation

These assumptions were by no means peculiar to me. Their intellectual background is reflected by the one question I am always asked in Britain about the Nahua: "Are you changing them?"[14] Today I find this an amusing proposition. First, the question assumes that 'change' was somehow a phenomenon alien to the Nahua and second, that before contact, and my arrival, they had existed in an undisturbed state. The implicit assumption is that, for indigenous peoples, 'change' and contact with the outside world are inherently negative phenomena. It always struck me as ironic that when it came to my own society; to be static was devalued as small-minded, whereas those who travelled were lauded as cosmopolitan.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this question was the level of influence I was attributed. Apart from the allure of the exotic, my interest in the Nahua derived from a longstanding concern with the fate of the rainforest and the rights of indigenous peoples. Before contemplating a PhD, I spent two years helping the Nahua to stop illegal logging activity in their territory and to gain more secure legal recognition of their lands. These efforts to control external factors were challenging but ultimately successful. However, my efforts to help the Nahua reflect on the implications of their own lifestyle was an even more frustrating process that revealed the stark differences in our points of view on the world. Herding cats would have been easier.

The assumption that I could somehow change the Nahua reflected a Euro-centric vision of the world that struggles to understand that indigenous peoples were doing

[13] As Calavia Saez observes: "the Yaminawa problem according to outsiders is that they are 'deculturated' Indians who have moved to the city" (2006:173). The Yaminawa are always thought of as Indians of the centre of the forest but they are just as much Indians on the margins of towns. Today, a group of them enjoy an apparently precarious existence living and begging under a bridge in the town of Rio Branco in Brazil (Ibid:56).

[14] A slightly cruder version of the same question was whether I slept with any of the Nahua. Again, this reflects the allure of the exotic and the perceived 'otherness' of the Nahua, except this time the focus of interest was their sexual rather than temporal otherness.

things for their own reasons long before Europeans arrived and are continuing to do the same today.

Nevertheless, it was precisely the question of how the Nahua were responding to the dramatic transformations in the world around them that I found intriguing. However, this thesis examines how the Nahua understood these changes and appreciates their extraordinary ability to adapt to transformations in the world rather than collapse in their face. Townsley (1987) points out that until relatively recently, anthropology had struggled to deal with such changes. These were either airbrushed out of studies because they represented inconvenient contradictions or were seen simply as an indication that indigenous peoples were passive recipients of acculturative processes. This thesis is effectively a critique of the concept of acculturation[15] (whereby cultural traits are passed from one culture to another) in its application to Amazonian indigenous peoples who are often described as "constantly on the point of disappearing" (Gow 1999: 231) and becoming subsumed in the greater mass of Latin American peasant society[16].

To date, most critiques of acculturation studies have focussed on those peoples with a long history of contact with outsiders in order to show that what is seen as a radical rupture from the past tends to be less novel than first appearances would suggest[17]. My task was different: the Nahua had only experienced 15 years of contact but apparently they were already 'acculturated'. In fact, it had not even taken 15 years. Within minutes of their 'first contact' the Nahua were throwing away their clothes, eating sugar and attempting to speak Spanish. This was instantaneous acculturation.

This thesis thus attempts to deconstruct an assumption that there is a discontinuity between the pre and post-contact world of the Nahua. This discontinuity seems to be supported by the fact that today their clothing, settlement patterns, healing practices and

[15] I am not using this term in the classic anthropological sense whereby acculturation entails two-way processes of change (Herskovitz, Linton and Redfield 1936). Instead I refer to its more popular usage that describes the homogenisation of societies in which the distinctiveness of minority groups disappears in response to their contact with a dominant society.
[16] Classic acculturation studies of Amazonian indigenous peoples include Murphy's, *Headhunter's Heritage: Social and Economic Change among the Mundurucu Indians (1960)* and Wagley and Gustao's *The Tenetehara Indians of Brazil* (1969).
[17] Notable examples include Gow's study of the Piro (1991) and Cocama (2007) and Whitten's study of the Quichua, *Sacha Runa, Ethnicity and adaptation of Ecuadorian jungle Quichua* (1976).

technologies are radically different from before. If, however, these changes are seen not as things in themselves but as tools for achieving certain objectives then we can see that while the rules may have changed, the game has remained the same. For example, the current obsession of the Nahua with aftershave and soap can be seen not as a new phenomenon, but as a variation of their previous obsession with aromatic wild basil and red body paint[18].

Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that the Nahua are not changing at all. In fact, the Nahua see themselves as living in a different manner from the past. The difference is that they do not see these changes as inconsistent with their own identity or as a process of change that is unique to their lives today. Continual transformation was, and is, an inherent part of what it means to be Nahua; the Nahua have always been engaged in a constant process of becoming similar to some people and at the same time different from others.

Thesis outline

The thesis can be broadly separated into three parts. The first chapter focusses on Nahua version of their 'first contact' and their remarkable flexibility at a collective level. It describes the elasticity of local groups, their constant fissions and recombinations and the ability of *yora* (self) to become *nafa* (stranger). This chapter argues that, for the Nahua, the differences between the present and the past are less radical than they might seem. Thus, from their perspective, history is less a displacement in time and more a displacement in space and social relations.

The following four chapters explore Nahua flexibility at a personal level and argue that history is also experienced as a displacement in bodies and perspectives. The Nahua are constantly exposed to transformative influences depending on the food they eat and the clothes and perfumes they use. Their capacity to switch rapidly between happiness and sadness, joy and nostalgia, memory and oblivion is a reflection of the embodied nature of these emotional states. Emotions, however, are not just signs of

[18] See Chapter 3.

these transformations because shifts in emotional states also trigger transformations in their perspectives.

The principle that permits this astonishing personal flexibility is associated with the concept of the body (*yora*) which the Nahua explain as a complex mix of matter and spirit. *Yora* is best understood as 'embodied self' and as something that is inherently unstable or mutable. For the Nahua, it is the body, rather than the mind, that remembers and knows and that is considered to be the locus of one's point of view. Thus, transformations in the body can trigger shifts in perspectives.

This embodied aspect of change is of course the experience of anthropological fieldwork, which is often as much a process of the body learning new techniques, as it is a process of learning a language or a set of kinship terms. Living amongst the Nahua I had to learn how to walk in wet flip flops and on the slippery edges of boats, how to spit, throw a fishing line, drive a motorised canoe, enjoy the taste of manioc beer and see cuddly monkeys as lunch. In this way, fieldworkers get an embodied sense of what it means to be the people whose lives they share for a short time. As I ate their food and shared their lives my body changed and adapted and the Nahua would jokingly say I was *yora cescara,* 'like *yora'*.

The Nahua problem is how to control this inherent mutability. Their ability to adopt the characteristics of those around them, be they animals or white people, is a source of power but also one of danger as they risk losing their sense of self and becoming irreversibly 'other'.

The struggle to regulate these transformations and encounters with the outside world is one familiar to numerous Amazonian indigenous peoples many of whom train their children to control emotional states and responses to physical pain. The Nahua, however, are much less disciplinarian and have a 'hungrier' attitude towards the outside world. Nevertheless, they do use a variety of techniques including dietary restrictions and the control of their emotional states to regulate this instability. It is revealing that those Nahua who have been trained in shamanic practices, a process that involves great self-restraint are most capable of managing their emotional states.

The final chapter returns to the issue raised in Chapter 1: the extraordinary ability of the Nahua to make sense of the radically different world they were exposed to after 'contact'. Over the course of several years I was able to travel with the Nahua throughout Peru and what I consistently found astonishing was the ease with which they made sense of experiences, experiences that I assumed would be utterly bewildering to them. Not even the vision of the world from a plane, eating in a Chinese restaurant, nor seeing a zebra and a rhinoceros in a zoo were sources of surprise.

This ability to make sense of new phenomena is associated at a much broader level with the ways the Nahua generate knowledge about the world. This is best understood as a technique of knowing rather than a system of knowledge as it is based not on 'what they know' but on 'how they know'. The knowledge practices that enable them to make sense of zoos and aeroplane flights are comparable with the techniques they use to heal the sick and interpret dreams.

The conclusion reflects on how Nahua flexibility contributed to the frustrations I felt when working with them as an activist. The struggles of a 21st century indigenous rights activist are perhaps not so different from the frustrations felt by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century in their attempts to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. Both were confronted with the "inconstancy of the savage soul" (Viveiros de Castro 2002:183).

Ultimately, the thesis attempts to understand the extraordinary resilience of the Nahua and their flexibility in the face of dramatic transformations in the world. Their unstable bodies and shamanic knowledge practices that explain their flexibility and are also the keys to their collective and individual resilience. In this fluctuating world in which the Nahua pay little attention to techniques of self-discipline, I argue that what prevents them from losing their sense of self entirely is *shinai,* the love and memory of their families.

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1: 'Falling out of the forest': Nahua narratives of 'first contact'

For many observers, the 'first contact' of the Nahua in 1984 triggered a radical reformulation of their relationship with the world. The objective of this first chapter however, is to re-tell this story from a Nahua point of view and thus challenge these ideas of 'first contact' as a rupture with an unchanging past, a temporal shift between tradition and modernity and as an experience in which the Nahua were victims of history. Instead, the Nahua situated themselves as agents in this process. The term 'first contact' is a misnomer from a Nahua perspective. They understood it as a spatial and social change: a 'falling out of the forest', rather than the temporal shift that the term 'first contact' implies.

The consequences of 'falling out of the forest' were anything but surprising for the Nahua and their responses to it, in terms of how they dressed, spoke and acted, were based on their existing understanding of the power of the 'other' rather than the imposition of the values of a prejudiced national society. This helps in the understanding of certain contemporary features of Nahua life. Their highly mobile lifestyle, their shopping trips and logging expeditions are comparable with, rather than a radical departure from, their warfare and hunting practices. They were, and are, strategies of engaging with powerful yet dangerous 'others'.

Chapter 2: 'Soft bodies'

This chapter begins to explore the mutability of the self (*yora*) and the relationship between matter and spirit (*yoshi*) through the analysis of dietary restrictions and the mechanisms by which the Nahua 'become what they eat'. *Yora* or self is a complex mix of material and spiritual elements and this intimate connection explains how Nahua persons are made and fashioned through bodily interventions. This logic of physiological identity allows them to become similar to each other, and outsiders to

become similar to them through co-residence. However, it also means that their sense of self is inherently fragile and they can become 'other' with great ease. The Nahua explain this mutability with the term, a 'soft body', an idiom that reflects their inherent instability and their embodied sense of self.

Becoming a Nahua person is not only a matter of process; it is also a matter of their relationships with others. It is influenced by encounters with the multiple beings in the universe which can result in the loss of one identity and the adoption of another. These transformations are associated with a shift in one's perspective on the world and thus all these encounters can be understood as 'battles of point of view'.

Chapter 3: Of aftershave and moisturising cream

It is not only the consumption of food that triggers the personal transformations of individual Nahua. This chapter explores the power of smell and vision to generate transformations in senses of self. Powerful scents and body decoration (including clothing) are particular techniques used by the Nahua for transforming the way a person is perceived by others. Smell, however, is the more powerful of these two senses because it can also affect the way the bearers of sensory information perceive themselves and can thus engender profound changes in senses of self. The difference is that smell is associated with the yora, the person's sense of self, whereas clothing is associated with skin. Skin, unlike *yora*, is a powerful tool for communication but is less connected to the *yoshi* (spirit/capacity) than smell which is more comparable to the consumption of food than the use of clothing. Nevertheless, I argue that using the clothes of 'others' allows the bearer to temporarily become 'the other' through a process of 'genuine impersonation'. The risk of 'genuine impersonation', unlike simple impersonation, is that it can lead to a loss of sense of self.

The only way to understand why the Nahua abandoned penis strings and aromatic plants in favour of tee shirts and aftershave immediately after 'first contact' is by appreciating that, for the Nahua, aesthetic choices are fundamentally about influencing the way they are perceived by those around them whether they be game animals,

potential lovers or Peruvians. The events of 1984 thrust the Nahua into a world of very different beings with different aesthetic values. It should come as no surprise that their perfumes and clothing changed accordingly.

Chapter 4: The sorcery of laughter

For the Nahua, the good life is not a given state of affairs. Instead, conviviality must be continually fashioned from the suspicion and mistrust that are endemic features of village life. This chapter explores the role of emotions in achieving this conviviality. The Nahua are acutely aware of the power of emotions. Just as laughter and good humour weave the fabric of conviviality, they know that it can be unraveled by sadness, grief, loneliness and anger.

Unlike many indigenous Amazonians who stress restraint and the tempering of grief, pain, illness and anger, the Nahua do not repress the expression of negative emotions. Just as laughter, cheeriness and tenderness are encouraged as they contribute to the conviviality of life, the expression of negative emotions (with the exception of anger) is similarly unrestrained. Although these emotions are considered dangerous, their expression is considered positive as they elicit compassion and love from others.

Chapter 5: Remembering and forgetting

This chapter addresses the management of emotions at another level by exploring the s extraordinary capacity of the Nahua to 'forget the dead' so rapidly. To understand the volatility of their various emotional states (including memories) it is important to appreciate that memory (*shinai*) is a form of embodied knowledge that is an essential part of their sense of self. As such, memory, or the lack of it, is a key component of healing and grieving practices and is implicated in the causes of, and treatments for, states of 'becoming other' including nostalgia, sadness and anger. This embodied nature of memory explains why many of the techniques the Nahua use to remember and forget revolve around transforming the body.

Chapter 6: Scientists of the Amazon

The Nahua take for granted that they live in a dangerous world, a world where everything is not as it seems and where even co-residents can be suspected of sorcery. This chapter examines the steps the Nahua take to protect themselves and take advantage of the opportunities of this dangerous yet powerful outside world. Through the prudent use of personal names and the care taken with bodily substances, the Nahua avoid many of these dangers.

To take advantage of these encounters, however, requires further training in the sphere of shamanism and dream interpretation, both of which are best understood as sets of techniques for knowing the 'unknown'. The unknown is a source of power and danger, thus to know the unknown is to avoid these dangers and simultaneously appropriate its power. This capacity is evident in the astonishing ability of the Nahua to be unfazed by the new worlds in which they find themselves whether represented by a new illness, a new social actor, a Chinese soup spoon or a solar powered torch. To the extent that all the Nahua have this ability in some measure, all Nahua are shamans.

Chapter 1

‘Falling out of the forest’: Nahua narratives of ‘first contact’

Warriors to beggars

In the early 1980’s anyone venturing up the River Mishagua in South East Peru was risking their life. This was Nahua territory and those who entered often never came out alive. Increasingly frequent reports of attacks on oil workers and loggers at the hands of unknown Indians were emerging from the area and the efforts of missionaries attempting to establish peaceful contact had been unsuccessful.

The Peruvian anthropologist Alonzo Zarzar describes Nahua recent history and their ‘first contact’. “For decades this group refused all contact with national society, rejecting all efforts by loggers and oil workers from whom they stole machetes and axes…fleeing ever further into the highest reaches of the smallest tributaries” (1987:94). “It is most likely that the Nahua had been pushed into this isolation by the turn of the century when the rubber boom was at its peak in the region (1988:1). However, on the 3rd May 1984 “Nahua destiny would suffer the start of a series of dramatic changes when they attacked the campsite of a group of loggers on the upper River Mishagua. The next day the Nahua were surprised (by the loggers) when sleeping and were tied up and taken to the town of Sepahua” (1987:95).

The capture of these men ruptured their isolation and the Nahua were suddenly exposed to an alien world of tall white people with guns and motor boats and unlimited supplies of coveted machetes, axes, clothes, salt, sugar and soap. Lethal epidemics of respiratory diseases soon broke out however, killing almost half the Nahua within six

months. The survivors were so weak they could barely walk and became reliant on handouts of food and medicine to survive.

For Zarzar, the Nahua had lost not only their lives but also their self esteem; "they suffered an extended and collective depression as a result of the deaths and the cultural discrimination on the part of Sepahua's inhabitants…the Nahua are changing from being a society in a state of war…to a defeated society. By accepting relations with national society they have lost an essential characteristic of their selves and their ancestry" (1987:110).

For Zarzar, the events of 1984 also triggered a loss of identity and he cites the young Nahua leader, Curaca, who told him he wanted to "become Peruvian" when having his hair cut (1988:4). "Today, one can see them wandering about the town of Sepahua and begging for food or doing servile tasks such as the collection of rubbish from the houses of *mestizo* bosses" (1987: 111). In only a few months the Nahua had gone from free men to servants and from "warriors to beggars" (1988:3).

I had just started studying anthropology when I heard this extraordinary tale. I had never been to the Amazon but the story sounded familiar, yet another example of the clash of cultures that began with European colonisation of the Americas. Five hundred years may have passed but nothing much had changed.

Zarzar describes the immediate aftermath of Nahua contact but Rodolfo Tello, another Peruvian anthropologist, provides what is in many ways a typical analysis of the subsequent changes in Nahua society. He describes changes such as the settlement in a single village, the use of clothing, the abandonment of "traditional healing practices… as a disruption of a prior situation" (2004:129) and as a process in which the Nahua were losing their ancestral knowledge (Ibid:138).

Tello attributes these changes not only to the sudden dependency of the Nahua on manufactured goods (Ibid:130) but also to the corrosive influence of powerful external actors such as the Dominican Catholic missionaries and local loggers, as well as the influence of an evangelical pastor, radio and television (Ibid:147). For Tello, the current social situation of the Nahua can only be understood in the context of 'contact',

a defining moment in which the future of the Nahua was radically altered, a moment of "significant cultural restructuring and a collection of generational and cognitive ruptures" (Ibid: 144) that "produced a profound relationship of cultural discrimination experienced in their relations with *mestizos*" (2002:191).

For Tello, the influence of these external agents resulted in "a process oriented towards the substitution of *yora* ancestral knowledge" with new knowledge and alien values (Ibid: 194). In turn, this generated "a general disinterest amongst the post-contact generations (youths and children) with respect to their ancestral knowledge including the knowledge of medicinal plants, a mythic repertoire and productive activities" (Ibid: 193).

Having arrived in Peru, I found that Tello's and Zarzar's narratives were broadly similar to those held by anthropologists, indigenous activists and environmental NGO workers. The basic argument was that although the Nahua had physically survived 'contact', the survivors of this traumatic experience had been left with their integrity shattered and highly vulnerable to the loss of a unique identity. Intercultural contact was considered something new and disruptive and the changes after 1984 were attributed to the acculturative influences of a dominant and racist national society that devalued Nahua knowledge.

Tello's, and to a lesser extent Zarzar's, characterisation of Nahua 'first contact' reflect three key assumptions that underlie most depictions of 'first contact' situations. The first is that 'contact' is almost always seen in temporal terms; a breaking point between the past and the future, a defining moment that propels indigenous people from 'tradition' to 'modernity'. The very term 'first contact' implies a point at which history starts, before which everything remained the same in an undisturbed traditional state (Gow 2001:294). Gow demonstrates that while 'traditional' peoples are seen as having no history, the 'acculturated' are seen as victims of history. Nevertheless, both are seen as historically impotent (1991:1).

The second assumption is that 'contact' and the changes that accompany it are always imposed upon indigenous peoples who have little or no choice in negotiating contact or their response to it. Both these presumptions reflect a Euro-centric model

that insists on positing European colonists as either civilisers or destroyers of indigenous cultures.

The third assumption is that expressed by Tello with the idea that new systems of knowledge replace old forms. This reflects a vision of culture as one associated with a specific material culture, rules or rites. In this way the Nahua can only continue to be Nahua if they do not change[19].

Living with the Nahua I was confronted with the problematic nature of these assumptions about their history. The objective of this chapter is to re-tell this story from their point of view and ask, how do the Nahua "set about constituting the historical situations in which they become embroiled" (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007:15-16)[20]. The objective is to challenge the idea of 'contact' as a rupture with an unchanging past, a temporal shift and an experience in which indigenous peoples are victims of history and demonstrate that what distinguishes 'Nahua culture' is not a system of established rules, but a way of relating to the world.

For the Nahua, 'contact' was a social and spatial change rather than a temporal one. History is a displacement in space and social relations rather than time. They did not view their life before 1984 with nostalgia, nor did they experience their life afterwards as one exclusively of exploitation and discrimination. For the Nahua, the events of 1984 were as hilarious as they were tragic, as productive as they were destructive and as understandable as they were bewildering. They did not represent it, or any of the changes that followed, as imposed on them by outsiders but as choices motivated by their own desires. The consequences of contact were anything but surprising for them, and their responses, in terms of how they dressed, spoke and acted were responses to their own existing worldview and cosmology rather than a reaction to a discriminatory national society.

Nahua oral histories demonstrate that it is misleading to describe the events of 1984 as 'first contact', or as discontinuous with the past as the Nahua have had a long, if

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[19] For reasons of thesis structure this third assumption is mainly addressed in Chapter 6.

[20] "History is what is meaningful for the subjects concerned and the task of the ethnographer is the discovery of these meanings (Lévi-Strauss cited in Gow 1991:14).

indirect relationship, with the 'outside world'. These stories also show that the apparent instability of Purús-Panoan groups is not a result of contact with Europeans but a chronic feature of their social organization. To explore these continuities with the past further the analysis is extended to their mythology and the uncanny similarities between the story of 'first contact' and two myths that blur the distinction between 'myth' and 'history'.

The comparison between their stories of first contact, their oral histories and myths reveal key principles of Nahua social life and attitudes to the outside world that help explain their responses to the events of 1984. The first is that the chronic instability of Nahua local groups and their ability to 'become other' is facilitated by an understanding that they live in a transformational universe in which everything is seen as being in the process of becoming something else. Thus, transformations in identity are inherent to, rather than a radical departure from what it means to be Nahua.

The second principle is that all these stories revolve around long and arduous journeys that result in encounters with unfamiliar 'others' who, on closer inspection, are revealed as close kin and the source of powerful knowledge and material goods. The importance of the 'other' in Amerindian thought has been extensively documented but permits an appreciation of the continuity between Nahua lives before and after 1984 which otherwise appear so radically different. The highly mobile lifestyle of the Nahua, their shopping trips and logging expeditions are comparable with, rather than a radical departure from, their warfare and hunting practices. They are all strategies for engaging with powerful yet dangerous 'others'.

The issue of isolated indigenous peoples and contact goes beyond an academic question. It is a question of life and death today for many Amazonian indigenous peoples who, for their own reasons, are avoiding sustained interaction with their national societies. The arguments presented here should not be interpreted as belittling the very real traumas of these processes. Instead, it is a critique of the terms in which this isolation is framed with the objective of doing this process more justice from an indigenous perspective.

Chapter outline

The first section describes the events of May 1984 from the point of view of three Nahua men who were involved in different phases of this 'first contact'. The second part outlines Nahua recent history, from the late 19th century until the early 1980s, and reconstructs their migration from the River Purús to the River Mishagua, their daily lives as well as their occasional interaction with outsiders. Interlaced with these narratives are references that provide some historical and regional context. The detailed territory map (Map 4) will help the reader travel through Nahua space and time. The third section explores the analogy between two key myths and the story of 'first contact'. This permits a brief examination of some of the wider theoretical questions concerning the relationship between 'myth' and 'history'. The fourth part examines the role of the 'other' in its Amazonian and, more specifically its Panoan context, highlighting an analogy between warfare and hunting and more recent practices of travelling, shopping and logging. Ultimately, this attempts to demonstrate that 'pre contact' versus 'post contact' is a false dichotomy; Nahua way of life today cannot be divorced from its past.

Part 1: 'Falling out of the forest'

In May 1984 the Nahua were living in three different hamlets on the headwaters of the Manu and Mishagua rivers[21]. Each hamlet was about a day's travel from the other and the Nahua visited each other frequently (Macquarrie 1991:195). One day, four Nahua men (Tomas, *Isonafa*, Jorge and Walter) decided to go and look for the *mestizos* and their 'things'. The first part of the story is told by Tomas who today is in his late 30's.

> *I was living by the river of sweet water (nofamawaya-Cashpajali) with my brothers in a house made of leaves. We would hang our hammocks inside and I slept there with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters and my brother-in-law. We lived in fear of the fianafa, the people with pungent smell (mestizos) because they would*

[21] The villages were located in the headwaters of the rivers Cashpajali and Condeja (Manu River) and the River *Mafaya* on the Mishagua (Map 4).

> *kill us with their guns. Ever since they killed my grandfather we did not want to come out of the forest. We used to fire our arrows at them from far away. We would often go to look for their machetes, knives and axes. We knew they were cutting down trees but we did not know why. We thought it was for making their canoes. We did not know who these people were or where they came from. Perhaps they come from the end of the earth we thought, or perhaps they live underwater? We did not imagine they were coming from so near.*

The four men travelled from the River Cashpajali to the upper Mishagua River. They stopped at a beach (*sharaplaya*) and Jorge and Walter ventured into the forest where they found a logger's campsite that was unoccupied[22]. They collected machetes, axes, knives, cooking pots and mosquito nets and returned to the beach but on the way they met two loggers who Jorge and Walter attacked. The arrows missed their targets and the loggers escaped downriver while the Nahua returned with the spoils. Tomas continues.

> *I said to my brother Isonafa "Where shall we sleep, the nafa are everywhere?" Isonafa said "We will sleep here, we almost killed them today, they will not come back, they are afraid". The four of us slept on the beach that night.*

However, in the early hours of the morning, the loggers returned in a canoe. They punted silently upriver to the beach where the Nahua were sleeping and shot them at close range. Jorge was shot in the knee and the ear while Walter was shot in the arm. The four Nahua all escaped into the forest and watched as the loggers travelled up and downriver. In the forest they began to discuss the situation amongst themselves. Tomas said.

> *"I am going to call to these nafa", but my elder brother Isonafa said "No, do not call to them, they have already shot us, we should go back home through the forest". But I did not take any notice and I was the first to leave the forest and come down onto the beach. I came out with nothing, no arrows, nothing. Walter came behind me also with no arrows. "Call to them" I said. The nafa had not seen us and their motor was coming slowly downriver. Walter called to them, "father, father, take me in your canoe".*

[22] Tomas and *Isonafa* remained to guard the canoe.

The loggers returned their call and pulled up to the beach. There were three of them including one man of Amahuaca and Yaminahua heritage (Miguel) and two Ashaninka men[23].

> *They had three guns and they were all pointed at our heads as they walked slowly towards us. We were afraid and took five steps back but then we stood still. They pointed their guns at us but now we had no fear and Walter and I started walking towards the mestizos. Miguel spoke a little of our language and we listened closely to what this man had to say. "I am not nafa, I am Yora, where have you come from?" he asked. Miguel had put on a cushma (a tunic) of the Ashaninkas and he gave this to Walter. They gave us their shirts and Isonafa, who was watching from the forest, said to himself, "Damn, look at my younger brother receiving all these things and here I am the older brother and I am afraid". Isonafa came out from the forest and said to Miguel, "you have given clothes to the two boys, now you must give to me, I am older". So they gave him another shirt. Now the mestizos were only wearing their shorts and it started to rain!*

Eventually, the four Nahua emerged from the forest[24] and the loggers took them to Sepahua where they were left in the village of the Yaminahua at the house of their chief, José Chorro.

> *"We know you from the other side[25], where have you come from?" said José Chorro. He asked us our names. "We do not have any" we lied. If I had been older I would have spoken but I did not and Isonafa said nothing. They gave us clothes and machetes, axes, tee shirts, beads, necklaces and some sugar to try for the first time. José told us that he had gone to the sky to bring sugar and beads. This is why we call sugar naiene (*sky water*). With him we tasted salt for the first time, ooh how sweet it tasted. After five days we wanted to go home. José took us back upriver where we had left our canoe, we gave him a hammock.*

Macquarrie reports that while the four Nahua were in Sepahua, José Chorro told them that the machines, dolls and white people they saw were all *feroyoshinafa* (spirits of the dead) and that, if they stared at them, they could die (1991:131). After they had

[23] The Ashaninka are an Arawak speaking indigenous people who constitute the largest Amazonian indigenous population in Peru.
[24] Initially, Jorge refused to come out while Tomas, *Isonafa* and Walter spent the night in the logger's campsite on the river Tigre. The next day they returned for him. He was still waiting as he was convinced that the loggers had killed his companions and he was waiting to ambush them in revenge. When he saw they had not been killed he came out from the forest.
[25] Referring to the other side of the Urubamba and Manu watershed when the Yaminahua were also living on the rivers Piedras and the Purús.

been left by the Yaminahua, they returned to the headwaters of the Manu. When they finally arrived in their villages the narrative continues to be told by José, the current headman of the village who is known as the Curaca.

> *When Walter, Isonafa, Jorge and Tomas did not return, everyone was afraid. "The nafa have killed them, they will kill us too, we should run away" we thought. Then they came back and that night messengers traveled to spread the news to all our villages. When I heard I set off in the middle of the night with candles*[26]*. When I arrived they told me they had been amongst the nafa and other yora (*referring to the Yaminahua*). I remembered that my father and the old people used to say that other people like us existed. I asked, "Who are these people, what group are they from and what is the name of their chief?" "His name is Comaroa", Tomas explained (*referring to José Chorro's real name*). "Keerrrrr*[27]*, this is the same name as my father" I exclaimed.*

When the four men returned, they explained that they had seen where the *feroyoshinafa* lived: the land of the dead. Those who were listening were so afraid that they were shaking with fear and saying 'we are going to die' (Macquarrie 1991:132-133). The story is continued by Juan Seido, another man who had heard the news.

> *All my people came to listen and also wanted clothes and machetes. I asked my brother Isonafa to give me some clothes. Some people said, "These nafa are not real people (enikoima*[28]*), they made us see a burning fire in our eyes"* (reference to the flash photography used by local people in Sepahua). *They were afraid and wanted to run away to another river. But my brothers, Jorge and I wanted to see the nafa, so that night we went downriver. We called out to the nafa,"papa, papa". We did not want to be afraid.*

When they heard the news, Juan and six others (including Jorge who participated in the first expedition) set off immediately to visit the logger's campsite at the mouth of the River Tigre on the upper Mishagua.

> *They shook our hands. We sat down and they gave us spider monkey to eat, we ate salt for the first time, it was so sweet, like sugar. They gave me a long sleeved shirt and trousers and I put them on and we threw off our penis strings and monkey teeth necklaces. They said,*

[26] The Nahua made candles from the resin of wild rubber trees.
[27] An exclamation of surprise and wonder.
[28] *Enikoi* real or proper (see Chapter 4).

"Let's go down to Sepahua". In the night they took us down in a motor. Apa (father) we called it because it takes us to places just like our fathers. When we arrived in Huaihuashi[29], Julio and Juan (two Yaminahua men) came to see us. "What's this, yamashta have you come again, where have you come from?" "The nafa brought us" we said. "Let's go to see José Chorro, our chief" they said. We all went, and José Chorro gave us clothes, beads and machetes. I was even given a helmet. They gave Shoma my younger brother a skirt and knickers to make fun of him! We cut our hair; we did not want long hair anymore. We washed in the river and they gave us soap which smelled so nice we threw away our sweet smelling plants[30]. We wanted to be like the mestizos and have sex with their women.

During this second visit to Sepahua[31], the SIL arranged for Juan and his companions to visit their base in the Machiguenga community of Nueva Luz (Map 1) where the Nahua spent three to four days with linguists who conducted a preliminary analysis of the language. After a few days the Nahua wanted to return home but this time they were accompanied by José Chorro and several other Yaminahua from Sepahua. Juan describes this return journey.

I went ahead in my new clothes, with my trousers and my helmet. Eight boats had come downriver from our villages. From far away they did not recognise me as I had thrown away my nose ring and they ran away. I called them back and the nafa gave them clothes and machetes. They were no longer afraid of the nafa.

The story is picked up again by Curaca.

I was waiting for José Chorro and he came wading upstream surrounded by five nafa. I only wanted to speak with José not with the nafa. I approached him and we embraced, "aicho aicho" we said[32]. We were happy that we were knowing each other for the first time. The nafa were afraid that my people would kill them but we told them "Nobody will kill you, we want to live amongst you". Right then the illnesses came: coughs, fevers just like that. Before this, people used to have a little fever sometimes but no one had ever seen this burning fever before. People had vomited and suffered diarrohea but no one had ever coughed before. Many died, we were almost finished and the vultures ate the bodies because no one buried them. When the white

[29] The name of the Yaminahua village in Sepahua.
[30] They used to wear bunches of aromatic plants on their arms and legs (Chapter 3).
[31] Approximately the 12th June (Daggett 1991).
[32] An expression of contentment.

> *people came (*missionaries*) they speared everybody* (injections) *and gave them pills.*
>
> *Afterwards, only a few children were born, everyone kept dying. José Chorro took me down to Sepahua, I had to carry my daughter she was so ill. Then I lived in Sepahua and did not go back. I did not want to go back and I made my farm in Sepahua. My elder brother* (Manahui) *died and was eaten by the vultures in fakesmaiya* (river of dead) and *my nephew as well. I thought we will no longer live in the centre of the forest; we will live by the banks of the river. This is the story of how we fell out of the forest.*

The epidemics had devastating consequences. Those that were living with Curaca on the River Cashpajali ended up moving to Sepahua and living with the Yaminahua in Huaihuashi. Those that were living on the Mishagua ended up forming the basis of a settlement that the SIL established on the River Putaya and those who were living on the upper reaches of the River Condeja moved down to its mouth.

Macquarrie describes how the Nahua were well nourished and in good health at the time of contact (1991:160). From my own genealogical reconstruction it appears that there were at least 259 people living before the epidemics struck of which only about 110 survived (a 42% mortality rate)[33]. It seems that the illnesses were predominantly viral infections such as influenza derived from an outbreak in Sepahua. Daggett reports the first signs of these illnesses when the Nahua were in Nueva Luz on the14th June 1984 (1991:52). In 1990, Curaca, with assistance from the Dominican mission, established a single village for all the Nahua at the confluence of the Serjali and Mishagua rivers, a location that was almost exactly halfway between their old villages in the Manu and the town of Sepahua[34].

1984: A defining moment?

The Nahua are often used as a classic example to illustrate the disastrous consequences of 'first contact' for a people with no natural immunity to unfamiliar diseases. Within six months their population had almost halved and those that were still alive were barely

[33] Macquarrie estimates that only 117 people, of the 192 people he approximates at contact survived the epidemics, a population loss of approximately 35% (1991:164). Shepard also estimates a 42% population loss (1999:38).
[34] For more details see Shinai 2004.

clinging to life. This moment also triggered an encounter with a radically different world: new technologies, new peoples and new languages. It is very easy to assume, as Tello and Zarzar suggest, and as I did during the early stages of my fieldwork, that it was this moment that would dominate Nahua everyday lives and constitute a defining moment in their history.

The reality, however, was that I attributed a definitive significance to the events of 1984 that made no sense to the Nahua. They talked about it freely when asked but I never heard it discussed as a subject of conversation amongst themselves. In fact, what is intriguing is precisely the ease with which the Nahua adapted to this very different world rather than their bewilderment. As Juan described: they instantly threw away their penis strings and necklaces and put on clothes[35]. The Nahua began to try and speak Spanish within minutes of their first arrival in Boca Manu (G.Shepard pers com). They cut their hair, fearlessly approached these powerful outsiders and eagerly accepted injections and pills from white missionaries without a murmur. Zarzar reports that the Nahua were so excited by needles that they even tried to use the disposable needles themselves (1987:95)[36].

The remainder of this chapter explores why this new world did not present a conceptual problem for the Nahua. Their responses to the aftermath of 1984 can only be understood if they are appreciated as a transformation of an existing view of the world rather than a schism. The following section begins to provide a deeper historical perspective.

[35] Zarzar describes how they used these new goods in creative ways. For example, shorts were used as hats and bottle and shotgun caps used for facial ornamentation (1988:3).
[36] The power attributed to needles reflects the power the Nahua attribute more generally to stinging insects in shamanic initiations (See Chapter 4).

Part 2: History

Life on the Purús

Nahua oral histories describe how their ancestors were, until approximately 1910, living alongside several interrelated groups on a tributary called the River Pixiya (with juice of *shapaja*, a palm tree) that probably refers to a tributary of the river Embira, Purús or Curanja[37]. The Yaminawa on the River Mapuya also say their predecessors came from the River Pixiya at around the same time so there was probably a simultaneous migration of Purús Panoans from this area (Carid Naveira and Perez Gil 2002:169)[38] (Map 2).

It was only in the late 19th century that non-natives began to explore the Purús and Yurúa rivers and Chandless was the first to map the Purús in 1865. The rubber industry used this information to expand rapidly in the Purús and Yurúa regions and the population of the Purús is estimated to have increased from 2000 in 1871 to 90,000 in 1902. Reports from Von Hassell in 1906 refer to 1000-1500 Yaminawa inhabiting the headwaters of the river Embira (Calavia Saez 2006: 227) and in 1902 Rivet refers to the "Yura living on the river Yurúa" (Cited in Macquarrie 1991: 36)[39]. "The violent incursion of the rubber market into their territories forced the majority of these groups to flee and take refuge in the most inaccessible headwater areas and to reject all contact with non-natives" (Macquarrie 1991:41). The general depiction of the Purús-Panoans at this time was that they were hostile to whites, greedy for material goods and unstable. This instability was though to have been a direct consequence of the rubber boom (Villanueva cited in Calavia Saez 2006:228)[40].

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[37] In 1951, the Yaminawa were living on the Curanja rather than the Purús (Calavia Saez 2006:186).

[38] Gil and Naveira believe the Pixiya corresponds to the Embira. However, the Nahua story of the routes they took when their ancestors migrated from the Manu indicates that they were living much closer to the Manu than the Embira; it seems that *Pixiya* (for the Nahua at least) refers to the Upper Purús. Of course, the two groups may have come from different rivers entirely and the name *Pixiya* might not necessarily refer to the same river.

[39] It is unclear to whom this refers but the use of the term Yura indicates they are almost certainly a Panoan group. The presence of Panoan groups is probably why the river was called Yurúa, literally *yoraya*, with people.

[40] Like the Yaminawa in Brazil, historical references to the Nahua are very limited and imprecise. This is partly because they were the last indigenous group to establish sustained relations with national society so that all unknown Indians were simply referred to as Yaminawa (Calavia Saez: 2006:255).

The ancestors of the Nahua had by no means been sheltered from the impact of the rubber boom and their oral histories describe how they hid in the forest and spied on the *mestizos* who were making gardens and houses on the Purús. Several Nahua had been actively engaged in conflicts with *mestizos*. Their attitude to these *nafa* was mixed. They were intensely curious yet afraid of being killed.

In one of these stories, Curaca describes how the *Pisinafa* (smelly people) raided the village of a Nahua ancestor called *Maishato*[41] and killed a man called *Ferokochoparo* (scarred eye).

> *The Pisinafa killed and ate people and spoke the same language as Maishato. The Pisinafa were led by a white man with a big shotgun and it was he who killed Ferokochoparo. The Pisinafa were attacking because Maishato's people had raided their campsite and stolen their hammocks. When he heard the shots, Maishato and his nephew immediately grabbed their bows and arrows and set off after the Pisinafa. When the Pisinafa stopped to set up their campsite they recognised Maishato from his monkey teeth necklace. In the past, Maishato had lived amongst the Pisinafa but when they called to him he hid in the forest*[42]*. When night fell, the white man went to drink from the river and Maishato and his nephew killed him. They escaped and Maishato named his nephew Oxonafa (white enemy) because he had killed a white man.*

This story not only reflects their longstanding conflict with *mestizos* but also that these conflicts involved indigenous intermediaries. It is probable that this event refers to an encounter with rubber tappers in the Purús as it was common for the rubber tappers to use indigenous people as intermediaries[43]. The fact that *Maishato* had at one stage, been living amongst the *Pisinafa,* reflects the constantly shifting nature of these different Purús-Panoan groups.

It was not only conflict with *mestizos* that characterised their life on the Purús. Many Nahua oral histories also describe internal conflicts. One story told by *Amenafa* refers to an incident between *Maishato* and a man called *Inofene*.

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[41] A renowned Nahua shaman who appears in many of these stories.

[42] *Maishato,* however, had been careful to guard himself against sorcery and had given himself a false name (*Yafamao*) when he lived amongst them (Chapter 4).

[43] Calavia Saez, for example, describes how some Yaminawa working for rubber barons were involved in slave raids on other indigenous groups (2006: 229).

Inofene was angry with Maishato because he had taken bananas and manioc from his garden to plant in his own. To get revenge he uprooted Maishato's plants. Maishato shot at Inofene with an arrow. Inofene's group retaliated and hit one of Maishato's group with an arrow. From this moment the two groups did not visit each other despite living nearby. One day, however, Maishato's cross cousin (chai) who lived with Inofene's group fell ill and Maishato cured the man. Inofene was happy and the two became friends.

Calavia Saez describes many similar stories from his fieldwork amongst the Yaminawa whereby internal fighting was often the result of a perceived threat. Indeed, it only needed someone to blow on a house to be suspected of sorcery and trigger a conflict (2006:206)[44]. This infighting it seems was a chronic feature of Purús-Panoan groups rather than a consequence of the rubber boom.

Migration to the Manu

When I asked Curaca why his ancestors had moved from the River Pixiya he related the following story that I summarise below.

One day, a man called Naito wanted to travel upriver to visit his relatives in Maishato's group. Naito had to pass through the villages of another group whose chief was called Piasharaya[45]*. A rumour had been circulating that Naito had been threatening Piasharaya's group and so they attacked him when he passed through their village. Piasharaya eventually managed to calm his people but the damage had been done.*

When Naito's son (Luisa)[46] *heard of this incident, he was furious and set off to exact revenge. Piasharaya's group was sleeping on a beach in their hammocks. It was a full moon and Luisa hid behind the shrubbery taking aim with his bow and arrow and shot a woman in the buttocks. Piasharaya's group escaped downriver and their children are the Nishinafa* (Who today live in various villages on the Yurúa and Mapuya rivers and are known as the Yaminahua)[47]*. Meanwhile, Naito's group joined Maishato's people upriver. Maishato said, "I am not going downriver, they will kill me, let's go*

[44] Blowing is associated with shamanic capacities and was thus considered a threatening gesture (Chapters 3 and 4).
[45] *Piasharaya's* nickname was *Nepapairoma* (wounded by bamboo arrow). *Piasharaya's* group also included *Chaika*, *Cafani*, *Mainafakirikia*, *Cacanafa*, *Yamahunati*, *Sharanafa* and *Ashka*.
[46] His name derives from the fact that he had killed a *mestizo* whose name sounded like Luisa to the Nahua when he was called by his companions.
[47] One Nahua also told me that their descendants are the Cashinahua who live on the Purús.

upriver". They crossed over into the Manu, sleeping on the beaches and eventually settled in the headwaters of the River Manu.

One interesting feature of this story is that the migration to the Manu was attributed to an internal conflict rather than external pressure. The migration also split entire families down the middle. For example, while *Mokaya* migrated to the Manu (*Mokaya* was the father of *Yoranafa* - a man currently in his 70's in Serjali), his brother *Chaika* went downriver. *Maishato's* group was thus the ancestors of the contemporary Nahua[48] (Map 3).

Soon after they arrived in the headwaters of the River Manu (circa 1910), the Nahua established themselves on the River *Nofamaiya* (Cashpajali). They would probably have found a forest empty of people, as the area had recently been abandoned after the collapse of the rubber boom[49]. Curaca continues to tell the story from the point of view of Naito's son Luisa.

> *They had finished making their garden when Luisa said, "Let's go and see where this river comes out". As they came out at the mouth of the river they met a nafa sitting by a tree with a gun. The nafa raised his gun in the air* (in an unthreatening manner*) and gave Luisa some clothes. Luisa returned to the rest of his group and described how there was a group of nafa with a garden and houses. "They are good people, we will go and live with them" he said and his group took their wives and children and went to live amongst the nafa[50]. Maishato's group was afraid and stayed in the Manu while Luisa's group was never seen again[51].*

Curaca speculates that these people have probably become the Piro who today live in Miaria, a village on the River Urubamba[52] (Map 1). He told me,

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[48] *Maishato's* group included the following: *Faifati* (he who made a big garden), *Mainafarete*, *Komarete*, *Cheterioma*, *Chatopaini*, *Mokaya*, *Naito* and *Luisa*, *Yafakexa* (wild boar mouth), *Retefo*, *Oxonafairoma* (Wounded by a white man; he killed a light skinned Machiguenga and was wounded in the process).
[49] Also see Macquarrie 1991:69.
[50] Macquarrie was also told about the disappearance of some *yora* amongst the *nafa* soon after their arrival in the Manu. This probably refers to the same event (1991:72).
[51] The group included *Naito*, *Luisa*, *Nesa*, *Raonafa*, *Tsaipai*, *Shainafa* and their families.
[52] Interestingly, this coincides with Gow's (2003) observation that the Piro know a great deal about the Yaminahua including much of their language. It also coincides with the Piro version of their ethnogenesis; they say that the contemporary Piro originated from the mixing of different indigenous peoples.

"Sometimes we thought they (their relatives) would come and collect us but they never came"[53].

The region that the Nahua now found themselves occupying in the headwaters of the Manu and Mishagua was known as the Fitzcarrald Pass. In the late 19th century, the rubber baron Fitzcarrald developed a land passage between the Manu and Mishagua river basins in order to transport rubber from the Madre de Dios area to the Urubamba and then to Iquitos rather than transporting it through Brazil (Macquarrie 1991:57). Many Nahua river names are a testament to the heavy mark left on the area by the rubber boom (Map 4). For example, the river *nafafaiya*, 'path of the *mestizos'* in the headwaters of the Mishagua probably refers specifically to this passage. The Mishagua itself was called *yamipexeya*, 'river with axe houses', referring to the presence of houses with corrugated iron roofs. According to Macquarrie, the Nahua say that on their arrival in the Manu they saw cattle which they referred to as 'children of tigers'. This almost certainly reflects the lingering presence of whites in the area (1991:73).

Life in the centre of the forest

Elena Seido is a lady in her late 50s. She was born by the River Putaya ('turbid water') on the upper Mishagua and gives a taste of life in the forest.

> *We lived there until one day a big capirona (Sp)[54] tree fell down and almost crushed our house. Then we moved towards the Manu and a river called Asikaniya ('Paufil[55] that escaped') where my parents made a new garden. We lived in the centre of the forest. We were like peccary, we made a garden and then we left.*

There were five houses in Elena's little settlement and she lived in her house with her mother and her father's brother. In the tiny stream that ran close to their house they made their own pool from which to collect clean water. They travelled widely but went

[53] It is interesting to speculate who these mysterious *nafa* might have been. They could have been white people still lingering in the Manu after the end of the rubber boom. However, it is more likely that they were the Piro themselves for whom the Manu was home until the extraction of rubber began and to where some Piro had fled from the river Piedras after killing a rubber boss there at the start of the 20th century (P.Gow pers comm). Furthermore, many of the river names in this area, including Cashpajali and Serjali, are Piro toponyms.
[54] *Capirona decorticans* is a large tree distinguished by its smooth bark that peels easily.
[55] The razor billed curassow.

no further than a large cliff at the mouth of the Urubamba because they feared the *mafayoshifo*, the spirits of the hills.

> *Our houses reached down to the ground*[56] *and we slept in hammocks by the fire. We were naked and wore only our necklaces of spider monkey teeth and our nose rings. We found beads in the mouth of the River Rofeshaoya (*'with bones of rock').

This river name refers to the scraps of metal the Nahua found there when they arrived from the Purús. It seems that the Nahua established their farms precisely in the abandoned farms of the rubber tappers[57].

> *We had two very short axes (yami chete) and we made tiny machetes (rata) from metal saws that we found. We had cooking pots that we made from clay and had hardened in the fire. We lived by the side of the river and we used to visit the other groups to drink mama (Chicha Sp – corn beer) and eat sweet bananas. We used to make ourselves beautiful before visiting. We would paint ourselves with naifimi (achiote Sp*[58]*) and made necklaces for ourselves with small black seeds. We made a cap out of the feathers of vultures and the women made a skirt out of the bark of a tree (atanafa).*
>
> *Men never left their wives when they went to the forest to hunt. When a man wanted a woman he would bring her a packet of achiote so that she could paint herself. The man would go and live with his father-in-law giving him meat to make him happy.*
>
> *We had tremendous manioc and banana farms, much bigger than today. We would leave the bananas on our roofs to ripen and when they were sweet we would make them into a sweet banana drink. We grew lots of poa (potato), yefi (pituca Sp)*[59]*, kari (sweet potato), taba (peanuts) and tsofati (sugar cane)*[60]*. We did not have pineapples, cats or chickens but we raised many different birds as pets. When people were ill we collected plants from the forest and plastered them on their heads and stomachs.*

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[56] In contrast to the houses on raised platforms they build today.

[57] Here they found bits of broken bottles that they used to cut their hair (Macquarrie 1991:77).

[58] *Bixa orellana*, a small shrub that bears fruit which is used for making red body paint.

[59] A starchy cassava like vegetable also called taro or malanga.

[60] Garden products were much more diverse in the past than today. Apart from seven different types of banana the Nahua cultivated *xiki* (corn), *imixiki* (red corn), *yosho* (achipa Sp), *siu* (daledale Sp) *poa* (potato), *nochi* (yellow chili), *nafe* (tobacco), *niafara* (papaya), (*fara*) squash. From the forest they gathered various wild fruits and nuts including *fashafa*, *nefe* (guava Sp), *chashatoi* (a white seed similar to a peanut), *deda* (shikashika Sp), *nenefa* (pifayo Sp), *xikishi* (chalochuelo Sp), *pesafi*/*fepofi* (caimito Sp), *kora* (a seed used for necklaces).

> *My father would cure people with tobacco when they were ill or had been killed by a yoshi (spirit). They could make our feroyoshi's (*eye spirits*) come back to us and the people would live again. No one died in the forest, they were always cured. Today, nobody knows how to call back the feroyoshi. After my koka (mother's brother) died (he was a healer) everybody died. In the afternoons as the sun was setting we would swing in our hammocks. The men would think about their wives and sing.*

According to Marta they were afraid of the *nafa*.

> *We were afraid of the planes that flew overhead. My grandfather Komarete had been to many places. He knew the Kononafa (mushroom people), the Nishinafa (rope people), and the Neanafa (trompetero people) and told us about them. We were afraid of the mestizos, we thought they would shoot and eat us. Seeing their planes we were very afraid, we thought they could fall on our heads so we hid in the forest. We heard explosions (*probably referring to the seismic testing by Shell who had begun exploratory work in the area in the late 70s*) and my grandfather said. "This is the nafa shooting at us; they are going to kill us". We ran away but when we crossed over to the Mishagua there were many nafa, they were wearing cushmas*[61].

Raiding and warfare

In 1984, no living Nahua had experienced any peaceful direct contact with *mestizos* but they had been involved in many violent encounters. One river that provides evidence of these conflicts is the *Nafamaposhakaya* ('with heads of *nafa'*), at the headwaters of the River Cashpajali, where the severed heads of *mestizos* were found on a beach sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s[62]. According to Rafael, a young Nahua man, his predecessors had killed two white men who had attempted to establish contact. The vultures ate their bodies while their heads remained on the beach. Macquarrie's informants confirm Rafael's version which describes how the two severed heads were impaled on spikes. This may shed light, he says, on the fate of two *mestizos* who disappeared in the area in the mid 1970s (1991:233).

[61] Further evidence to suggest that the Nahua were coming into contact with the Piro.
[62] This was observed by a young *Yoranafa* who, in 2010, is in his early 70s.

The conflicts with *mestizos* that characterised Nahua lives in the Purús were thus continuing in the Manu but here the Nahua also came into violent contact with the Machiguenga, an Arawak speaking people who the Nahua referred to as the *pianafa* ('arrow people'). Curaca explained how the conflict with the Machiguenga began with an incident that we can date to sometime around the 1940s.

> *Cheterioma and Mokaya were hungry and were taking manioc from a Machiguenga garden on the River Cashpajali. Fakono* (Cheterioma's wife) *was shot and killed by a Machiguenga with a gun. Cheterioma was only injured but after Fakono was killed, her brother (Afenafarete) and Cheterioma got their revenge by killing two Machiguenga and collecting their machetes.*

A few years later, Mokaya was killed by the Machiguenga. This triggered a cycle of violence between the Machiguenga and Nahua that continued until 1984.

The death of Mainafarete, a Nahua man who was killed by the Machiguenga sometime in the mid 1970's is characteristic of this cycle of violence in the years immediately preceding their 'fall from the forest'. It was described to me by Juan Seido who was present.

> *Seven of us had travelled downstream on the River Manu to collect nafa things*[63]*. We came across an empty campsite and found clothes, pots, machetes, blankets and a canoe. We did not return upriver immediately but decided to sleep on a beach. Isonafa, Juan and Xuri were standing guard while all night the xixi bird sang, (considered a bad omen) but they paid no attention. We said that "These nafa are cowards, they will do nothing". In the morning we were attacked by the Machiguenga. We jumped into the river but the older men who did not know how to dive were shot. Mainafarete was grabbed and dragged off into the forest where he was killed. The rest scattered into the forest and made their way back home on foot with nothing to eat for eight days. When we arrived, everyone cried and was furious. Soon after, a big war party of four canoes set off downriver. It was summer and the Machiguenga had arrived early in the morning to collect turtle eggs on the beach where we had prepared an ambush. We killed four Machiguenga and ran away. A motorboat came after us and took our canoes. We returned home through the forest.*

[63] The group was made up of Juan, *Mainafarete*, *Isonafa*, *Xuri*, *Shoponafa*, *Fariamapa* and *Pakatzakamis*.

The Nahua were not just fighting with the Machiguenga however, but were caught up in a continual cycle of violence with loggers who, since the 1950s, had been penetrating deeper and deeper into the headwaters of the Mishagua in search of valuable hardwoods (Feather 2000:14). Curaca described how, on one of these occasions, he and his brother *Asa*, were at the headwaters of the River Cashpajali watching a group of loggers. From their descriptions of red face paint and long tunics it is likely they were Ashaninka. *Asa* wanted to attack the loggers and shot an arrow which missed. The loggers gave chase and grabbed *Asa* who managed to stab one of his attackers with a small knife but was eventually shot and killed. Curaca was wounded but managed to escape. Exhausted, he lay down by a small river expecting to die but he woke in the morning. The river had risen and only his head remained above the water line. He managed to struggle homewards and eventually was found by his two *koka* who carried him back to the village.

> *I almost died but was healed by my grandfather's songs. After my brother was killed we abandoned our gardens and we came over to this side* (the Mishagua) *because we were afraid. For a time all we ate was chonta* (palm hearts). *Then in the summer we made our canoes and gardens in the headwaters of Mafaya ('with hills'). Soon after, my father's younger brother came, then my father-in-law with his two sons. They all came. Then we made an enormous garden with manioc, banana and corn and did not go anywhere. After this we were afraid of the nafa and did not come out from the forest. This is where we were living when my brothers-in-law (Isonafa,* Tomas, Jorge and Walter*) went off to see the mestizos.*

In the late 1970s, loggers from Sepahua employed armies of Ashaninka to try and forcibly pacify the Nahua (Zarzar 1987:92). This incident may refer to one such effort.

From the *nafa's* point of view

So far, this chapter has examined Nahua experiences of encounters with *nafa* but from the *nafa's* point of view, the presence of an unknown Indian group in the Fitzcarrald Pass area was also problematic. The first unequivocal historical reference to the Nahua was in 1947 when Padre Ricardo Alavarez Lobo, the Dominican priest based at the Sepahua mission, referred to the 'Cashinahua' on the Mishagua (Macquarrie 1991:81). However, from 1897, frequent mentions of the Amahuaca in Manu appear and it is

probable that some of the later references were applicable to the Nahua (Ibid: 81). From the late 1940s there had been increasing sightings of, and encounters with, the Nahua which almost certainly relates to the expansion of the timber industry in the area. In 1953, Piro travelers reported "feathered headdress wearing Indians" in the Fitzcarrald Pass area and throughout the 1950s there were many reports of natives being killed or disappearing while in the area (Ibid: 86). In 1954, reports came to Lobo of the same group having descended to Urubamba (Ibid: 86). Macquarrie claims that this may refer to an occasion when the Nahua were thinking of establishing contact but abandoned the attempt at the last minute (Ibid: 87). In the early 1960s, Lobo made an overflight and saw several small communities clustered on top of a small hill near fields of corn and concluded that each village was about one days walk from each other (Ibid: 88). In 1968, Lobo mounted another expedition to the Serjali and Mishagua, in an attempt to establish peaceful contact. They left tools and gifts at old camp sites but while the 'gifts' were taken the Nahua did not appear.

Loggers' attacks on the Nahua began in the 1950s but increased in frequency until 1984. Between 1980 and 1984 at least six loggers were killed in the area, presumably by the Nahua (Macquarrie 1991:91). In 1981, Shell began their exploratory work deep within Nahua territory. The Shell teams found many signs of indigenous people as well as ancient bronze and copper axe heads probably of Inca origin (Mcaquarrie 1991:55). In1982, Shell workers were attacked by what were certainly Nahua arrows on the upper Mishagua and had to be evacuated and the Nahua themselves described one of these attacks to me. There were two further attacks in 1984. One of these included an attack on workers building a heliport to prepare for President Belaunde's visit to inspect a potential site for a stretch of the trans Amazonian highway (Ibid: 93)[64].

[64] However, I have never been told anything by the Nahua that resembles this story.

Reconsidering Contact

These oral histories are a rich source of information about Nahua life in the Purús and Manu and their conception of the events of 1984. The information however is possibly confusing so before continuing it is worthwhile reviewing some of the recurring features of these stories.

Contact: A meeting of chance

Until 1984, the Nahua lived in fear of the *nafa*. It was a meeting of chance, rather than a deliberate strategy, that resulted in the events of May 3rd 1984. If they had only listened to their fears and not slept on the beach they would never have been attacked by the loggers. If the teenage Tomas had not disobeyed his elders they would not have made contact with the loggers. The events of that day are strikingly similar to the attack on the Nahua by the Machiguenga that resulted in the death of *Mainafarete* but instead of making contact with those *nafa,* the Nahua decided to return home on foot. As Tomas said, "If it was not for me we would still be in the forest".

'First contact'?

In 1984 there were no living Nahua who had engaged in peaceful and sustained contact with other indigenous or non indigenous people. Nevertheless, as their oral histories have shown, when they were living on the Purús, the Nahua were already in violent conflict with whites as well as other Purús-Panoan groups who seem to have been working with rubber workers as intermediaries. In addition, at some point after they arrived in the Manu, a substantial portion of the Nahua (Luisa's group) went to live amongst the *nafa*.

Thus, the history of Purús Panoan local groups cannot be framed in terms of a linear progression towards greater and greater contact that finally culminates in 'first contact'. The level of contact that these groups have had with each other, or with outsiders, varies enormously and was constantly shifting. Calavia Saez shows how Yaminawa contact with whites was intermittent (2006:234). According to the Shipibo, by 1936, the

Yaminawa appeared to know how to use guns and had beads; "they looked like good gringos" and it can thus be assumed that they had had some direct contact before 'first contact' in the 1950s (Ibid: 249).

An even more striking example is that of the remaining Chitonahua whose apparent 'first contact' was in 1995 and who, today, live scattered along the river Yurúa in Peru. From oral histories I have heard, it seems that around the 1950s the Chitonahua were living amongst white people in Brazil when a conflict broke out and they fled to the Yurúa in Peru fearing reprisals from the Brazilians.

The Chitonahua experience closely resembles the story of the Cashinahua who were living amongst Brazilians on the river Embira at the end of the rubber boom. One day, sometime at the start of the 20th century a fight started and the Cashinahua killed the rubber bosses and fled to the River Curanja in Peru. It was only in the 1940s that they decided to re-establish contact when the last machete had worn out (Montag 1998).

Contact as a spatial and social change

The Nahua did not see the events of 1984 in terms of a temporal shift from tradition to modernity. Such ideas are part of a Western project of evolutionism with its own particular intellectual history[65]. Instead, Nahua narratives focus on the spatial dimension of change, the move from the centre of the forest to the periphery. In Curaca's words, "We fell out of the forest". The word he uses for forest is *machi* which literally means 'centre' in order to emphasise its distance from the rivers that are considered to be the margins of the forest. In a similar fashion, the Yaminawa of the river Mapuya describe contact as a process of "leaving the forest" (Naveira and Gil 2002:162).

These ideas are connected with a prevailing regional idea of the 'wild Indian' as associated with the centre of the forest while 'civilised Indians' are associated with the

[65] Erikson shows that indigenous Amazonians often use the idiom of affinity to make statements about their past. This is more about alliance than descent and therefore departs from what might normally be understood as ancestors who, in fact, are more like ancestors-in-law. Temporal changes are, in fact, social and spatial changes, thus also explaining why, for Amerindians, there is continuity between the living and dead (2007: 237).

rivers (Gow 1993). This explains why the Piro and Cashinahua (Calavia 2006:254) who today live by the banks of large rivers associate the Yaminawa with powerful shamanism because they live in the centre of the forest[66]. This attribution of power works both ways as the Nahua associate large rivers with powerful shamans and the source of powerful tools and knowledge. The logic that links both these apparently disparate perspectives is that it is "the unknown and hidden that is essentially powerful" (Townsley 1987:372). The locus of power is always distant and thus always shifting.

Contact did not only constitute a spatial change but also a social transformation. For the Nahua, 'falling out of the forest' meant they were now living amongst the Yaminahua and the *mestizos*.

The local group

The multitude of Nahua names such as Sharanahua, Yaminahua, Marinahua and Chitonahua are often confusing to outsiders because they are erroneously associated with an ethnicity[67]. As this brief history of the Nahua has shown, these Nahua groups are less a coherent ethnic unit and more a set of shifting and temporary alliances. The groups were constantly splitting up before uniting with a different local group to form a new village. The various ethnonyms are thus best thought of as local groups of a larger Purús-Panoan complex (Townsley 1989). The names are never auto denominations. From the perspective of each of these groups they are all *yora* (us/body/people), a group of co-residents who live together, exchange and share foods and bodily substance. "They are a sociological subject but not an historical one" (Calavia Saez 2006:372).

Many of these fissions and fusions resulted from the conflicts caused by the rubber boom but some resulted from internal tensions and conflicts which undoubtedly were exacerbated by the presence of thousands of rubber workers. As Calavia describes for the Yaminawa, "disaggregation and conflict are by no means a result of conflicts with whites but something of a tradition in itself" (2006:302). It is likely that the Purús-

[66] Stephen Hugh-Jones also points out that while whites see Indians anachronically (as distinct in time): Indians distinguish other people in spatial terms (1988:145).
[67]The Wari experience was similar. "Before contact we did not know we were Wari, we only knew we were Wari when you (whites) told us!" For Brazilians, the Wari were all one 'tribe' but from the perspective of the Wari they were all different (2006:138).

Panoan groups have been oscillating between periods of stability and instability for much longer than we think (Naveira and Gil 2002:163)[68]. Nevertheless, the rubber workers probably pushed the different Nahua groups together in unusual proximity thereby making accusations of witchcraft much more likely (Calavia Saez 2006:261).

The picture that this generates is one of constant instability. Villages were made and then abandonded, new villages formed within which new tensions emerged, accusations of sorcery were made and people went their separate ways. This explains the current panorama of Nahua groups who, today, live scattered across the headwaters of the Purús, Yurúa and Curanja rivers. This historical instability also explains why many isolated Nahua groups find namesakes in distant villages (Chapter 6). While this may seem very precarious, this instability equips the Purús-Panoan local groups with historical resilience and extreme flexibility (Townsley 1989:153). The Nahua collective, just like the Nahua individual that is explored in the remainder of the thesis, is distinguished by its inherent mutability.

Becoming other

The disappearance of Luisa's group to live amongst the *nafa,* as well as the constantly shifting alliances between different Nahua groups, illustrates that the possibility of shifting identity and becoming other is not new to the Nahua. "Becoming a Peruvian", as Curaca told Zarzar after he cut his hair, or as Juan described when he put on *mestizo* clothes for the first time, was the newest manifestation of a longstanding project in which the Nahua conceive of everything as engaged in the process of becoming something else rather than a loss of a unique identity that Zarzar laments. *Yora* and *nafa* are not considered ontologically distinct from each other. It was always possible for *yora* to become *nafa* and for *nafa* to become *yora*[69].

[68] Also see Erikson (1996:66).
[69] This is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 3.

Fear to desire: The immediacy of contact

Perhaps the feature of this story that is most unusual is the speed with which the Nahua fear of *mestizos* was replaced with desire. No sooner had Tomas and Walter been given clothes than *Isonafa* rushed out of the forest demanding his fair share. No sooner had the first party returned from their trip to Sepahua than another group of Nahua decided that they too wanted these things. Juan describes how they did not postpone their adoption of *mestizo* clothing. They threw off their nose rings and aromatic plants and replaced them immediately with shorts and tee shirts.

One of the principal reasons why the Nahua adopted *mestizo* clothing was because, as Juan stated; "We wanted to be like the mestizos and have sex with their women"[70]. For young Nahua men, contact was experienced as much as a sexual opportunity as anything else[71]. Contact with white people was, for the Nahua, more a product of their desire for material goods, powerful knowledge and sexual relations overcoming their fear of the *nafa* than a process in which contact was imposed from the outside. Contact did not trigger a gradual process of 'acculturation' and erosion of 'culture' imposed on them by powerful outsiders as Tello (2004) describes. Instead, the Nahua seemed to throw away everything distinctive about themselves within minutes of 'falling out of the forest'. It is precisely the immediacy of this response that shows the Nahua were behaving in this way for their own reasons rather than responding to external pressures.

On that fateful day in May 1984 Nahua fear of *mestizos* suddenly gave way to desire, a desire for knowledge, material goods and new social and sexual relations. However, why was this new world so unsurprising for the Nahua and why was their fear replaced so quickly by desire?

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[70] Calavia Saez also describes how sexuality is often one of the codes that mark such temporal changes (2006:199).

[71] My young Nahua male friends would always ask me whether there were many *sisati* (women to have sex with) in Lima. As Gow describes for the Piro, it is young men who must always rove to find women while women hardly have to look at all (1991:132). Nahua women were like their male counterparts equally desirous of *mestizo* objects especially knives, beads and clothes and they undoubtedly played a crucial role in demanding that their husbands acquire these goods in the same way that they demand meat and fish. On the other hand, as far as I am aware, Nahua women did not see contact as a sexual opportunity. Instead, they were fearful of these strange men. They were often an object of desire for Yaminahua and *mestizo* men who took Nahua women as wives as part of a strategy to establish kin ties with the Nahua. I have not however discussed this sufficiently with women to know more about their own roles in these relationships.

Tello argues that we can only understand the Nahua situation today by appreciating the events of 1984. This thesis argues however, that we can only understand their response to these events by appreciating a much deeper historical perspective and their existing attitude towards the outside world. The following section begins to address this through an analysis of two Nahua myths that describe encounters with powerful outsiders. The comparison helps reveal that for the Nahua, the existence of powerful 'others' was inherently unsurprising. For them, 'the other' has always been the source of power.

Part 3: Stories of the *Xinipafo*: The ancient people.

In common with those of other Amerindian peoples (Gow 1991), Nahua myths are literally known as, 'the stories of the ancient people' (*Xinipafo*)[72]. The *Xinipafo* explain the world and its inhabitants. They explain everything from the origin of the moon to the origin of the smelly fart. As Calavia Saez describes, "they are mythical in the sense that animals speak but historical in the sense that they happened a long time ago. They are not linked to a particular space or place and are not used for moral or cosmological service. Ultimately, the *Xinipafo* are a source of information about the past" (2006:314-5).

Linguistically, the Nahua do not distinguish between what one might understand as oral histories of the long dead and what one might describe as myths, both are *Xinipafo*. Nevertheless, there are clear differences between these narrative forms. Although historical narratives are also called 'stories of the ancient people', this does not mean that the Nahua confuse the genres. As Stephen Hugh-Jones points out, "…in mythic time there was no separation of animals from humans, of light and dark, time and space. Nothing happens in historical narratives that could not happen today yet all sorts of impossible things happen in mythic time" (1988:141)[73].

[72] For the Piro, myths are the most unreliable source of knowledge and are frequently questioned. Ultimately however they are of interest as they are the only source of information about the past (1991:61).

[73] A further difference is that the characters in historical narratives were identifiable people while the myths proper were not (McCallum 2002:391).

Myth 1

Notishoniyamafani: The canoe that was left

One day, two brothers-in-law set off to look for special stones for making axe heads to fashion canoes and clear the forest to make their farms. During the journey, one of them cruelly abandons the other by the side of the river when he needs to defecate. The poor man finds himself alone by the edge of a deep pool and at the foot of a steep cliff. The water bubbled continuously and the man was afraid.

> *Suddenly, a female water spirit appears from underwater and asked the man his name, "My name is farisenako" he replies. The woman sniffs him and realises that he truly is farisenako*[74]*. Her husband was also called farisenako and she tells the man to wait until his brother arrives*[75]*. When her husband arrives he too asks the man his name and sniffs him. He starts to cry when he realises the man is his brother. The water spirit gives the man a fragrant plant (sako) to smell and takes him underwater where the man sees huge houses. The water spirits invite him to their house where they give him chapo (a mashed banana drink), wild boar meat and a basket of axes, machetes and knives.*

Later, a giant hawk lands on the roof of the house and is introduced to the man. They also shared the same name and are thus are also brothers. The hawk also gives the man *sako* to smell and rub in his eyes and takes him into the sky where there are also houses, people and gardens. Here, the man is given another huge basket with many machetes, axes and knives. The hero then returns to his village where he distributes the new tools to his people who immediately abandon their stone axes and start to clear huge gardens.

When the cruel brother-in-law finally returns from his long and arduous expedition he finds that his people have already made huge gardens with the new machetes and axes that his brother-in-law had brought and thus throws away all the axe heads he had collected. His charitable brother-in-law gives him some machetes and axes yet the cruel brother-in-law wanted more metal tools for himself and when he hears the story he goes

[74] The Nahua establish a strong connection between identity and smell (Chapter 3).
[75] Sharing a 'real name' establishes a relationship of brotherhood (Chapter 6).

off to the same stretch of the river to try his luck. He rubs *sako* in his eyes and goes into the river where he finds the house of *farisenako* the water spirit. The giant hawk, however, lands on top of the house and asks the man his name. The man says he is called *farisenako*. The hawk smells him and immediately realises he is lying. He spears the man in the eye with his beak and kills him instantly.

Myth 2

Iri: The immortal people

One day, a group of *Iri* passed the village of the *Xinipafo* and continued to float downstream. A group of men decided to follow. They travelled and travelled and travelled, the dry season ended and the rains came and finally the men arrived in the village of the *Iri*. Although the men had been travelling for two years, their wives could still see and hear them from their villages (in mythic time, space and time were not separate). The *Xinipafo* arrive and climb up from the river to the village where the *Iri* are waiting. The *Iri* are splendidly decorated; their eyelids are painted with achiote and their arms are adorned with feathers of the *ishpi* (giant vulture). The people are told not to look at the *Iri* and to rest their heads on the ground. One man tries to seduce an *Iri* lady but she laughs and says "I am old, why do you not have sex with my grandchildren?" The *Iri* woman only appeared to be young because the *Iri* are able to peel off their skin; they are immortal. The men stay for two more dry seasons, marry *Iri* women and are given axes, machetes and beads before they return after another long and difficult journey to their own village.

Myth and history: Blurring the boundaries

Despite the clear differences between mythic and historic narratives, some striking similarities can also be seen. This comparison is important because, as Vilaça (2006) describes for the Wari[76], the structural similarities between their stories of 'first contact' and their myths help understand their motivations for making contact with white people.

[76] A Chapakuran speaking people of central Brazil.

The following section examines three striking similarities between these two myths and the Nahua story of how they 'fell out of the forest'.

Finding kin in distant places

Just as the Nahua meet their Yaminahua namesakes in Sepahua, so *farisenako* meets his namesake in the guise of a water spirit (Myth 1). This is inherently unsurprising because of the constantly shifting nature of Nahua local groups and explains why, despite their isolation after their migration from the Purús, the Nahua never lost their awareness that other 'people like us' existed.

These kin, however, are often not immediately recognisable but appear as water spirits or in the case of the Yaminahua as *mestizos*. In both Myth 1 and the first encounters of the Nahua with the Yaminahua, it was the sharing of 'real names' that enabled the establishment of kinship connections between apparent strangers[77].

Power

After these long and arduous journeys to distant places the Nahua acquired powerful tools and knowledge[78]. Just as the *Xinipafo* acquired metal tools after visiting the world of the *Iri* and the water spirits so the Nahua obtained similar bounty after their long journey to the town of Sepahua that resulted in encounters with the Yaminahua: the providers of metal tools, clothes and beads[79].

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[77] Vilaca also describes how, before their 'first contact', the OroWaram grabbed some Oro Nao do Branco women who were walking in the forest. The women cried out explaining they were Wari, and not enemies, by citing the names of their common ancestors (2006:420).

[78] The importance of these long journeys is a continuous theme in Nahua mythology and is explored in more detail below.

[79] Calavia Saez takes the parallels further. He argues that Myth 1 may even refer to a real journey to look for axe heads. The water spirits could refer to people living on the banks of large rivers, perhaps the Conibo, a riverine Panoan group. He asks whether this myth can therefore be considered as an "anatomy of the establishment of commercial and political relations in the region" as it involves the sharing of names and an internal conflict within a group, both of which are typical ingredients of a Panoan story (2006:273).

A journey to the land of the dead

The third point of comparison is that for the Nahua it came as no surprise when José Chorro told them to avoid eye contact with dolls and white people in Sepahua because they were *feroyoshinafa.* The same advice was given by the *Iri* to the *Xinipafo* in Myth 2[80]. For the Nahua, the *Iri* are strongly linked to the *feroyoshinafa* and to places far downriver; the land of the *Iri* is the point where the earth meets the sky and thus the passageway along which the souls of the recently deceased travel to reach the land of the dead[81]. This explains why the Yaminahua refer to the land of the dead as *mai iri*, literally land of the *Iri* (Townsley 1988:109) while the Nahua word for downriver is *mai kiri*, literally the land of the *Iri*.

Today, the Nahua laugh about how they were deceived by José Chorro. However, the existence of the *Iri*, like that of other mythic beings, is not confined to mythology. Today, the Nahua say that the *Iri* live further downstream from Puerto Maldonado beyond a series of powerful rapids[82]. In 2000, some Nahua travelled to Puerto Maldonado where they met an old couple who told them that two days downstream lived a people like them but who dressed in fine clothes and lived in cement houses. The Curaca decided that these were the *Iri*. This is an exciting prospect but not one that is particularly surprising. Just as in the story of the *Iri*, the story of how they fell out of the forest describes how the Nahua arrived in the land of the immortals, a place further downstream than they had ever gone before.

Such structural similarities between myth and historical narratives are not peculiar to the Nahua. The Wari myth of *Nananana* describes an apocalyptic flood which left only two survivors. This couple began to travel in order to look for new people and transformed many animals into people whom they married (Vilaça 2006: 310). One of the survivors, *Nanananana,* meets these new people and explains that he is not an enemy and starts to refer to them using kinship terms (Ibid: 300). Ultimately, it is a

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[80] This ties in with typically Amerindian ideas concerning the dangers of exchanging perspectives (Chapter 3).
[81] See Chapter 6.
[82] The Matis also locate the immortals, the *Mariwin* by the banks of the river Itui, downstream of their current villages (Erikson 1996:266). Some Cashinahua also told McCallum that the root of the sky is Ceara, a Brazilian city (1999:452).

story of the isolation of people and subsequent reconstitution through the incorporation of enemies (Ibid: 314).

A similar theme is apparent in the events surrounding Wari contact in the 1950s, prior to which Wari local groups had become isolated from each other in their efforts to escape the raids of Brazilians. The motives of the Wari who eventually established contact not only stemmed from their desire for metal tools but to reconstitute a society that had been disrupted by constant invasions and periods of isolation (Ibid: 30). In this sense, white people were seen as just another subgroup to be incorporated (Ibid: 234). The OroNao do Brancos were the first of the Wari local groups to establish contact probably because of their longer history of isolation. They said, "We did not want to live alone any more, we wanted to be many" (Ibid: 484). This desire for 'people like us', also explains why the first Wari group to establish contact, the Oro Nao do Brancos (Ibid: 391), were so keen to work as intermediaries facilitating contact with other Wari local groups.

History and myth in Amazonia

In his edited volume 'Rethinking History and Myth', Jonathan Hill calls for a shift in the analysis of history from something defined as 'what really happened' to 'people's experience of it' (1988:2). He argues that the popular notion of myth as unchanging and fictitious compared with history as a sequence of factual events is a false separation. Both narrative genres are ways by which people construct shared interpretive frameworks. Historical consciousness is always a selective rather than an objective rendering of facts and the choice of what events to record is always an interpretive activity (Ibid: 5).

Lévi-Strauss stresses that Amazonian myths are not ahistorical. Instead, as we have seen from Nahua examples, they are defined by their historicity. As Gow (2001) shows, the incorporation into myths of relatively recent historical phenomena such as the acquisition of metal tools, introduced diseases and encounters with white people is a common Amerindian practice. Myths are not static but must be made relevant to the present and to the context of the listener whereby "the creative analogical matching between myth and life is constantly employed to make myth relevant to new experience

and daily issues" (S Hugh-Jones 1988:148). Thus, for the Tukanoan speaking Barasana, white and black people, as well as submarines, are all incorporated into their mythological corpus[83]. The appearance of Indians, whites and blacks is related to the order in which they were vomited out of the anaconda's belly and the thoroughness with which they washed in the river. The present poverty of Indians is also explained by a myth in which the Indians chose not to accept a gun and not to eat beeswax as this would explain the current socio-economic inequalities between whites and Indians.

The key point is that the Barasana, in common with many other indigenous Amazonians, see themselves as agents of their own history rather than victims of exploitation. They made a mistake by not choosing the gun and not eating the beeswax and thus assume responsibility for their own fate[84]. "Myths are not simply memories of past, they are a store of ideas and actions with relevance to the present…myth and history are not mutually incompatible but coexist as two separate but complementary modes of reproducing the past" (S Hugh-Jones 1988:151).

Gow argues that Lévi-Strauss' distinction between hot and cold societies has been consistently misunderstood as arguing that 'cold societies' are ones without history whereas 'hot societies' are those that have progressed beyond myth (2001:15). Instead, Lévi-Strauss was arguing that 'cold societies' annul the effects of history while 'hot societies' make history into the moving power of their development. In other words, myths are used by indigenous peoples to come to terms with their history. Myths, like historical narratives, are how people at the time made sense of what they saw and experienced in the world (McCallum 2002:377). This is the reason why we find so many transformations in Amerindian myths. The myths, by means of their ceaseless transformation, "generate an illusion of timelessness that cannot be affected by changes in the world…they are an instrument for the obliteration of time" (Lévi-Strauss cited in Gow 2001:11).

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[83] A Barasana shaman told a myth involving a submarine just a day after he had heard about their existence for the first time (1988:144).

[84] The Wari also say that if, in the past, they had welcomed the "good whites", and today they would be "like whites" and know how to make aeroplanes. Instead, their attacks on white people made these white people angry and hostile (Vilaca 2006:45).

Ireland's (1988) study of the Waura response to the post-contact epidemics of measles that decimated the Kustenau, their traditional enemies, is a brilliant illustration of the way that myths transform to deal with new situations and the active historical role played by indigenous peoples. A Waura myth describes how the Kustenau killed themselves off with sorcery because they used the body parts of a strange spirit creature that resembled a whiteman as sorcery fetishes to kill each other (Ibid: 168). Ireland argues that the myth needed to make sense of events that were incomprehensible to a people who do not believe in a germ concept of epidemics but instead think about it as a moral breakdown that resulted in sorcery. "The Waura have taken a terrible tragedy and transformed it into an affirmation of their own moral values" (Ibid: 172). Once again this story reflects a common idea amongst Amazonian indigenous peoples that they have triggered their own destruction through an inability to control their own desire.

Indigenous peoples and history

The historical dimension of mythic narrative permits the deconstruction of the common assumptions about the nature of history for indigenous Amazonian peoples that underlie most studies of 'first contact' situations: first, the idea that they are 'cold societies' with no historical consciousness, second, that they are victims of history and third, that history only started after the arrival of whites (S Hugh-Jones 1988:140). As Gow describes, "history does not begin with documentary evidence or the arrival of Europeans. Amazonians were doing things for their own reasons before Europeans arrived and they continued to do so afterwards" (1991:16).

Gow provides another example of how indigenous people make rather than suffer history by contrasting his initial view of Piro history with that of the Piro themselves. Gow's version was one of a dying tradition that was tragically enslaved, while the Piro version was one of gradual improvement. The Piro say that today they are civilised people who used to be forest Indians but were enslaved because of their own desire for manufactured things. It was this slavery that marked the difference between 'now' and 'then' (1991:64). "The Piro are neither passive victims nor active agents; they have been victims of exploitation but they have no choice but to constitute the world around them according to the pre existing ways they understand their world and thus in ways that are meaningful to them" (Ibid: 17).

The transformation of myths

The boundary between myth and history it seems is not so clear. Nahua *Xinipafo* explain recent historical phenomena such as the acquisition of metal tools and beads as a result of encounters with water spirits and the immortal people while the story of 'first contact' bears uncanny similarities to the myths of *notishoniyamafani* and the *Iri*.

Nevertheless, the Nahua do not confuse mythic characters with 'real' ones. Instead, it seems that "myth and event are related as a series of logical transformations of each other" (Vilaça 2006:420). Just as Wari pacification was like a new version of the *nananana* myth (Ibid: 342) so the Nahua version of 'first contact' was a transformation of the myth of *notishoniyamafani*. "Myths are clues to a pre existing state not because they have been preserved unchanged over time but because they are historical products and carry with them the traces that they seek to erase from their former states" (Gow 2001:303).

The key point about the relationship between myth and history that is relevant for this thesis is that it can help understand the complex motivations of the Nahua for 'falling out of the forest' and their responses to it which resulted from an existing attitude towards the world rather than an imposition of external values by a prejudiced national society[85]. The final part of this chapter argues that what informed Nahua views of 'first contact' was related to their view that while the source of power is always shifting, it is always located in distant lands in the hands of powerful 'others'.

[85] Such processes are neither unique to the Nahua or Amerindians. "New knowledge and information is always absorbed and accounted for in ways that are least likely to shake our existing cognitive and cultural assumptions" (Turton 2004:272). Nevertheless, the existing cognitive and cultural assumptions described here were peculiar to the Nahua.

Part 4: Warriors to travellers: The power of the 'other'

A restless people

My initial fieldwork experience was frustrating. I had implicitly inherited an idea from classic ethnographies[86] that any serious investigation takes place in the 'village'; to understand the Nahua I needed to stay in Serjali. Unfortunately, the Nahua did not seem to agree. During my first two month stay in Serjali, my host Juan only slept in the house for five nights. The rest of the time he was logging in the forest, hunting upriver or travelling downriver to Sepahua. One night he arrived, grumbling, after spending three days shivering on a boat during a rainy trip upriver from Sepahua. I woke at dawn the next day however to find him heading straight back. Participant observation was a challenging task when people never stayed still to be observed or even to be engaged in conversation.

Just as I was getting to know somebody, I would wake one morning to find they had gone hunting or logging for a month, enlisted in the army or disappeared off to a distant town to look for work. Sometimes I found myself entirely alone in the village with only a couple of old ladies for company. The restlessness of the Nahua became infectious, and like them, I too began to dream about trips from the village.

In part, this restlessness is about food. The supply of meat and fish in Serjali is often abundant but often it is scarce. Trips away from the village represent excellent hunting and fishing opportunities (because of reduced hunting pressure) and a chance for a feast away from their large families. *E pipaikai*, 'I am going, wanting to eat', said Maria, an elderly lady as she spontaneously jumped into our boat that was heading upriver.

The frequent visits of the Nahua to Sepahua seemed to make less sense. Sepahua's merchants wait eagerly to sell cheap alcohol, herbal remedies and sweet smelling perfumes to the insatiably curious Nahua, and its loggers attempt to bribe their access to the valuable timber in Nahua territory. With little or no money, the Nahua survive on bananas, manioc and credit and live in a small concrete house adjoining the Catholic

[86] Described in Dawson and Rapport 1998.

mission. On each trip there is almost always one person with an 'urgent' reason for travelling, be it medical, to pick up an identity card, to meet returning relatives or to collect a wage packet. Inevitably however, the small canoe with a seating capacity of anything up to eight rarely travels with less than fifteen or twenty passengers. One can frequently see up to thirty Nahua crowded into these tiny boats. Most of them will be standing up with their arms folded, shivering in the rain and biting wind but grinning broadly as the boat, flush with the water level, splutters along. The Dominican nuns, who have a permanent post in Serjali, wring their hands in exasperation, mystified at why the Nahua should want to endure the apparently miserable experience of travelling on the river, the indignity of their time in Sepahua, as well as the inevitable transmission of diseases resulting from these trips. One confessed to me that she would be unsurprised to wake one day to find that everyone had disappeared. The Nahua, like the Waiwai, seemed to be "reluctant communities" (Campbell 1995:147).

By attempting to stay in the village and ignore Nahua mobility I was simply erasing a troublesome and misleading detail from what I imagined to be the centre of their universe, the village[87]. Instead, as the oral histories show, their mobility was not a recent phenomena but an enduring feature of what it means to be Nahua. Doing fieldwork with the Nahua was less about living with them and more about travelling.

Rival (2002) critiques the work of some anthropologists who have reduced mobile modes of life to ecological or historical circumstances such as those who describe foraging modes of production as an historical regression due to colonisation. In such views, history only starts with the arrival of the Spanish. Rival argues instead that we must attempt to understand subsistence activities in the terms of indigenous peoples (Ibid: 14). In this light, the following section addresses the meaning of mobility for the Nahua.

[87] Dawson and Rapport (1998) describe how anthropology has often managed to exclude such mobility from its theoretical analysis. Mobility was represented by anthropology as something that enabled a state of fixity in which "travel was mistrusted" (Auge cited in Ibid: 22). Rapport and Dawson cite Lévi-Strauss as one of the key culprits in the propagation of such ideas. In fact, Lévi-Strauss identified this problem long ago as a methodological issue whereby anthropologists were limited to the intimate studies of tiny groups of people. However, this should not be confused with the object of anthropology, human society at large and the relations between these peoples (Cited in Gow 2003).

Mobility

The importance of Nahua journeys is illustrated by their recurrence in the *Xinipafo*. Calavia Saez has brilliantly shown through his analysis of Yaminawa mythology that a consistent feature of these stories is that while "the hero kills, dies or transforms, above all they wander" (2004:124-125). The telling of any myth is peppered with apparently superfluous detail that emphasises the length of the journey: "they walked one hour more - they walked for an entire day - they spent days, weeks or months travelling" (Ibid: 125).

Calavia Saez' point is well illustrated by the story of the *Iri* and also by a mythic character called *Chaikoshififani* ('he who collected from far away very quickly') who could cover vast distances very quickly. *Chaikoshififani* would accompany his companions when they travelled for several days from their villages yet when they ran out of supplies he would set off at dawn to go back to the village and would return with the extra supplies before midday! The recurring theme of all these stories is that the central characters encounter strange spirits in the forest, other worlds beneath the water or in the sky and gain access to prized tools or knowledge after long and arduous journeys.

The epic journeys of these mythic heroes are paralleled by those of living individuals. Without travelling far the Nahua say they have no means of acquiring meat or fish. Animals that are close to the community are difficult to catch because they are *enaia* ('with knowledge') and wary of hunters. However, in more distant corners of Nahua territory the same animals are *enoma* ('without knowledge').

The relationship between an individual's personal travel experience and the acquisition of knowledge and political authority is also clear. Individuals within the community who have been to distant towns and neighbouring countries will frequently reel off a list of the places they have visited to demonstrate their knowledge and that

they can speak with authority. Through long journeys, people encounter powerful beings and acquire powerful knowledge[88].

Many (but not all) illnesses are caused by contact with powerful 'others' including human sorcerers and non-humans[89]. Their cures are found not only in the pharmacies of Sepahua but also in the domain of shamanism, where it is not even necessary to physically leave the community in order to engage with such beings. The *feroyoshi,* or animating life force of the person, is conceived as a spiritual element only very loosely attached to the body; it wanders constantly and its encounters with the *feroyoshi* of other animals, people or spirits, produces the visions seen when taking *ayahuasca* or dreaming[90].

The Nahua also represent these *ayahuasca* sessions as a journey. When experiencing its initial sensations they sing *rami* (non-curative songs) that describe an upward journey into the world of the 'owners' of *ayahuasca*. Each person's *rami* is distinct but they often include repetitive phrases such as 'I am climbing a beautiful hill', 'I am climbing to sing' or 'I am arriving amongst the owners of *ayahuasca'*. Below is an excerpt from one man's *rami*.

> *Ifo mishti feiato* – The little owners (of *xori*) are coming
> *Aya rami ifofi* – I will sing with this
> *Moka ene xori* – The bitter water of *xori*
> *Fari isafo yasho* – With the parrot of the sun I sing
> *Afo yari iniki* – With this one I have sung before
> *Naife tanane* – The great wind is coming from the hill
> *Efe yora dasoma* – I almost faint
> *Naso maki keyofoi* – With the great wind I almost faint
> *Ifo fafe faifo* – I follow in the path of the owner
> *Tanofo ramimi* – I follow this path until its end
> *Yaro mana fenene* – I am climbing a beautiful hill
> *Kamifo kanike* – I go there to sing

[88] Travelling is strongly gendered. Nahua women travel to Sepahua frequently and will jump at trips going upriver to fish but tend to avoid longer hunting trips that penetrate deeper into the forest.
[89] See Chapter 4.
[90] See Chapter 2.

Manafai ramini – I climb up to sing
Eke no manoori – Above our heads I am passing
Nai rono mishtiwo – Little snakes are coming from the sky
Feshatao feyasho – The hawk is coming
Na huime unani – I know this hawk too
Chanafake nuyaya nuyafere naino – The weaver bird is coming to talk
Eya ifo rifisho – I am the owner of *xori*
Na hume uha – This is what I have drunk
Rofafo manane – In this same hill
Kaefafi ramino – In this clear hill I am going to sing
Ni ofa sharafo – In the forest are beautiful flowers
Pena fera naino – It seems like the day is coming
Yama shefa keneya – The hammock with designs of the *feroyoshi* is tied up above our heads
fena fachi nakesho – We are going to eat the eggs of wasps
Tzoa ari kanima – No one has gone there
Kanima mi arisho – I am going there
Efe yama shanofo – The *feroyoshi* of the mother
Shinai amai fekani – Coming to blow on me
Mia rifi unano – I will know you

Journeys are thus critical elements in processes of personal transformation, especially for contemporary Nahua shamans who are particularly keen to travel to different cities and meet different peoples. Carneiro da Cunha compares these physical journeys to alterations in states of the soul, mechanisms of experiencing another social reality through living alongside 'others' (cited in Vilaça 2006:508). The following chapters explore how, many of Nahua personal transformations are better understood as shifts in points of view. Their mobility can be understood as yet another mechanism that enables the Nahua to appreciate the world from a different point of view, the point of view of the 'other'.

The Amerindian 'other'

Nahua journeys to distant lands in their myths and daily lives are thus conceived of as opportunities to engage with potent and unfamiliar 'others' who can provide them with the powerful tools and knowledge they need to be socially productive. This is by no means peculiar to the Nahua but is a recurring indigenous Amazonian theme (Alexiades and Peluso 2009). Nahua restlessness, however, is not shared by all such peoples. The Airopai on the Columbia/Peru border value a stillness of posture. They stress that, to live peacefully, individuals must "sit still like a bird and not move from branch to branch" (Belaunde 2000:213)[91].

Ever since Lévi-Strauss (1995) identified the strong dualistic theme in Amerindian thought, Amazonian anthropologists have documented how, engaging with 'others' and difference is a pan-Amazonian concern. "Contact, interaction and the mixing of things that are dissimilar…although dangerous are necessary for social existence" (Overing 1985:157). Vilaça points out that this strong dualist logic in Amerindian societies means they are inherently open to difference and that an exclusivist idea of identity is always alien to Amerindian societies (2007:177).

Despite this universal significance of the 'other', different Amerindian peoples have adopted distinctive strategies towards the outside world (Overing 1981). The Piaroa, for example, mask otherness on the inside of society while projecting otherness onto the outside (Ibid: 193). Alterity is a mixed blessing for the Piaroa. In mythic time, the cosmic powers caused interminable conflicts and were eventually locked up in crystal boxes. This loss of alterity is a loss of productivity; without difference there would be no cooking and no marriage. These came into being after the Piraoa's encounters with mythic beings. Today, the Piaroa continue to mistrust the 'other' and in-laws are effectively considered strangers who may be cannibals (Overing 1981:162).

The Wari provide an interesting counterpoint. Unlike the Piraoa, "the incorporation of enemies though marriage, physical proximity and food sharing is inherent in Wari

[91] This 'stillness of posture' does not mean that the Airo Pai do not travel but rather reflects a moral concern for personal tranquility and a desire to do things for a reason (L.E. Belaunde pers comm).

culture" (Vilaça 2007:181). Wari warfare was valued as the killer incorporated the capacities of their victim, thereby acquiring their vitality and skills (Conklin 2001).

Overing compares the inward looking Piaroa with the Gê and other Amazonian indigenous groups who have a strong dualistic dimension to their society and divide people, animals and other beings into moieties, a dual order in which every being in the universe is classified as one or the other. She argues that these groups avoid the dangers of difference through elaborate exchanges between the moieties that cultivates their mutual interdependence. For example, the Gê groups make each moiety responsible for critical processes in the other moiety including the selection of chiefs and funerary practices (1981:164). She concludes that, while some Amazonian groups emphasise difference, others engage in its suppression. The different approaches can be understood as a variation on a theme in which the power of the 'other' is paramount (Ibid: 161).

The Panoan variation

For Panoan speakers, the importance of engaging with exteriority in order to constitute their own identity is a recurring theme in the literature (Erikson 1986:190). This obsession with the 'other' (Lagrou 1998:10) has already been elaborated in great detail by many Panoan specialists (Calavia Saez 2006, McCallum 2001, Roe 1982, Lagrou 1998 *et al*). Thus, it is necessary to provide only a few examples to illustrate this point.

For the Cashinahua, their origin myths of *nete* and *yukan* describe a time before a great flood when there was no engagement with difference and everyone was incestuous. The flood was caused by the rejection of water spirits as affines. The only survivor, a blind woman, created people from a gourd. These myths describe the origin of the moieties, *dua* and *inu.* In effect, these are appropriate outsiders with whom one can marry (McCallum 2001:147). McCallum summarises the Cashinahua project as one of "dynamic dualism…whereby life comes from death and kinship from affinity. The inside is the outside incorporated and reproduction is only possible when the outside is brought in to the inside and properly combined". A living body is made of these dualisms, the immortal and the mortal and *yuxin* mixed with the material *yuda (*Ibid*:* 152). This tension, she argues, is expressed by the different and complementary

gender roles. Men learn through mobility as they bring knowledge and game from far away: they deal with dangerous animals, foreigners and spirits in the spheres of hunting, travelling and shamanism (Ibid: 48). Women transform these potentially dangerous products into safe and nourishing elements (Ibid: 65).

For the Shipibo, the more geographically distant the people the more powerful a role they play in myth. In other words, "godliness is far away", (Roe: 1982:75). This explains why the distant and forest dwelling Ashaninka are considered fierce and dangerous and play heroic roles in Shipibo myths whereas the Cashibo, neighbours of the Shipibo, are discriminated against (Ibid: 82). Roe argues that this is why the immortal *Inca* play such a powerful role in Panoan cosmologies.

The tension with difference is well expressed by this Panoan archetypal 'other'. In Conibo and Shipibo mythology the Inca either appear as extremely generous or extremely mean. The black *Inca* provides things of great social usefulness (drinks/houses/food) to the Shipibo but these also result in anti social behaviour such as killing, cannibalism and the division of groups (Calavia Saez 2006:291). Townsley points out that in Purús-Panoan mythology there is a recurring theme of stealing and incorporating power (fire, agriculture etc.) from the outside (1987:372).

The mean *Inca* corresponds to the figure of *Yoaxi* in Nahua mythology. *Yoaxi* possesses powerful agricultural knowledge but refuses to share this knowledge with the *Xinipafo* who are thereby forced to cook with the heat of the sun and to eat wild potatoes from the forest. The myth relates a series of adventures in which the *Xinipafo* steal fire, corn and chili from the stingy *Yoaxi*. The Nahua explained that if the *Xinipafo* had not raided *Yoaxi* they would be living like the Mashco Piro (Macquarrie 1991:124), a nomadic people who practice no agriculture and currently inhabit the headwaters of the Manu, Piedras and Purús rivers and avoid all contact with outsiders (Shinai 2004). The Nahua are disparaging about Mashco Piro nomadism and their lack of agriculture (Photo 5).

Calavia Saez argues that the power attributed to the exterior by Purús-Panoans explains the importance of foreign and white goods in Yaminawa festivals and parties (2006:130) and compares it to the apparently more 'traditional' initiation rites of the

Cashinahua who use songs to invoke foreign powers and thereby enable the initiates to incorporate these other worldly powers (Ibid: 135). "Exteriority is the basis of Yaminawa sociality" (Ibid: 345).

For the Nahua, mixing is articulated as essential in all spheres of social life. They say that meat or fish cannot be eaten without combining it with manioc or bananas. However, the significance of the 'other' is most explicitly dramatised within the moiety system, the dualistic ordering principle in which all beings in the universe are either classified as *Roanifo* or ***Nafa***[92]. ***Nafa*** is associated with outsiders and all that is black, hard and brilliant while *Roanifo* (king vulture people) is associated with insiders and all that is white, dull and soft.

The mixing of moieties was considered necessary in many different contexts. Townsley reports that in an ideal Yaminahua village, *roanifo* houses were always constructed at the core of the village with ***nafa*** houses on the periphery (1987:371)[93]. A shaman could only be initiated by shamans from both moieties while men and women were supposed to find spouses from the other moiety. Townsley argues that the moiety system is "as if they had taken an opposition that in reality existed at the boundary of their social world and metaphorically reproduced it in the heart of their society" (Ibid: 372). Nevertheless, he shows that this dualistic principle is never the complete structure of the society but always coexists with other organising principles such as the naming system and kinship terminology (Ibid: 363-4). This helps understand the post-contact 'collapse' of the moiety system for the Yaminahua and the Nahua. Townsley describes how the use of moiety affiliation to structure relationships was abandoned when the Yaminahua discovered they could maintain peaceful relations with these very real '*nafa'*, Peruvians. The moiety principle was rapidly replaced by the opposition with *mestizos* but the kinship and naming systems are still being used.

Thus, it seems that the secret of Purús-Panoan flexibility lies in the various options for social organisation which can be selected for according to historical circumstances. Thus, for example, when the Nahua were living in isolation with no peaceful relations

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[92] The Nahua description of these moieties closely resembles Townsley's (1989) description of Yaminahua moieties.

[93] This can be seen in Macquarrie's diagrams that reconstruct Nahua villages in the Manu (1991).

with outsiders, a dualistic model served to internally differentiate groups. However, once peaceful relations had been established with *nafa* (Peruvians) the moiety system lost its relevance. Today, the groups who have established contact use a more simplistic principle that simply distinguishes *yora* from *nafa*[94].

It was not only the moiety system that the Nahua abandoned after 1984. Up until this point, Nahua relations with *nafa* were characterised by violence and warfare that was immediately replaced by peaceful relations. The following section discusses how the power attributed to the outside world can help explain this shift in Nahua relations with the outside world. It demonstrates how the changes in Nahua way of life reflected their existing world view rather than an imposition of alien perspectives.

Warfare

Before they 'fell out of the forest', the Nahua achieved a legendary status in the region because of their fierce attacks on loggers, oil workers and other indigenous peoples. Their raiding however has to be understood within the context from which it emerged. At the time they were hemmed in by loggers and oil workers with whom they were engaging in frequent bouts of violence. From the Nahua point of view it was kill or be killed. Some of these raids were acts of self-defence while others were inspired by the inconsolable rage and desire for revenge (*kupi*[95]) they felt when a relative had been killed. Nevertheless, they explain that much of their raiding was due to their uncontrollable desire for the *nafa's* things and especially their machetes and axes, cooking pots, glass beads and clothing.

There is a great deal of historical evidence to suggest that the Purús-Panoan groups had, for a long time, been raiding in order to gain access to metal tools (Calvia Saez 2006:268)[96]. The presence of bronze and copper axe heads in the Manu (Macquarrie 1991:55) suggests that the exposure of Amazonian peoples to metal predated the arrival of Europeans. In fact, Lathrap famously argued that the appearance of the *Inca* in

[94] Also see Calavia Saez (2006:116).
[95] See Chapter 2.
[96] Yaminawa hunger for metal tools was one of the reasons they never isolated themselves definitively (Calavia Saez 2006:267).

Amazonian mythology indicates the historical existence of an Incan kingdom in the jungle (cited in Calavia Saez 2006:285)[97].

Nahua raids were predominantly about gaining access to desired material goods as these ended once peaceful contact was established and they could get these 'things' through less risky measures. For many indigenous Amazonians, the act of homicide is a vital part of the production of people and society. Taylor describes how Achuar killing and head shrinking was about the capture of souls to regenerate society (1993) while the Yanomami consider the spilling of blood to be the source of all fecundity (Ales 2008:69). But for the Nahua, it seems to have been the 'things' of their victims, rather than their 'souls', that drove them to raid and, if necessary, to kill.

This is supported by the Nahua myth of *Kokoshnafaretemateni* ('killing the *Kokoshnafa* people') in which a young man is trained to kill by his namesake, a shaman, who at death transformed into a large snake, a boa. The boa takes the young man to visit various different villages. At each one the man asks the boa if he should kill these people but the boa replied, "No, they have nothing". The boa eventually tells the man to kill the *Kokoshnafa* because they had many good things.

Desire

In this context it is vital to understand the significance and meaning the Nahua attached to such 'things', a meaning that goes far beyond their use values including the obvious benefits of metal tools over stone axes[98]. Apart from this functional value, metal tools had tremendous social value because they enabled the Nahua to clear much larger gardens for cultivating greater volumes of manioc. Large gardens support big drinking parties and big drinking parties are important for demonstrating chiefliness and generating sociability. Machetes and axes continue to wield tremendous social value as they enable the Nahua to be generous, a key aspect of what it means to live well.

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[97] Calavia Saez suggests that, while the Paititi myth was certainly a Spanish dream, it may also have reflected an Amazonian fantasy and perhaps a historical reality. The archaeological and historical record shows that there were large chieftainships in the Amazon and many connections with the Andes that are not visible today (2006:279-80).

[98] The non-utilitarian values that Amazonian people attribute to consumer goods have been well documented. For example, see S Hugh-Jones 1992.

Nahua conflict with loggers in the Manu would almost certainly have increased the pressure to acquire metal tools because constant insecurity increases the need to make gardens quickly. Calavia Saez also points out that the pre-contact raids by the Yaminawa on rubber tappers were probably a result of their war with whites; given the insecurity created by a state of war, the food stuffs, guns and cartridges were a source of defense and security "…war just as peace enslaved the Yaminawa to the goods they did not produce" (2006:230).

It is also important to examine what the Nahua did and did not desire. Their acquisitional drive focused mainly on metal tools but also on glass beads and clothing. Zarzar points out that, immediately after contact, the Nahua valued anything that lasted longer (1987:110) reflecting the association they draw between potency and durability. This is best illustrated by the fact that both the *Iri* and white people are associated with everything that is durable including metal tools and glass beads[99].

Fausto describes how indigenous Amazonian warfare has often been attributed to external pressures but this does little justice to what indigenous peoples say and do (1999:933). In a similar vein, Tello explains Nahua dependence on manufactured goods as an imposition of external values (2004:130) but neglects to listen to a Nahua explanation. For the Nahua, it was about desire rather than necessity; at the time, raiding was the only means of acquiring desired goods without taking the risk of establishing contact with strange and dangerous *nafa*.

Rather than an inevitable response to external pressures, raiding was only one of a series of possible responses to conflict. Interestingly, the Mashco Piro, who currently avoid all contact with outsiders, continue to use stone tools rather than initiate raids for metal tools like the Nahua (Gow 2005). It is possible that Mashco Piro itinerance is a strategy that enables them to avoid dependence on metal tools and thus maintain their isolation[100]. Clearly, the decisions that the Nahua, and the contemporary Mashco Piro, were making and continue to make are just as much a response to their own values as to external pressures.

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[99] This may also explain why the *Iri* often appear in myths as trees. This issue is explored more fully in Chapter 3.

[100] Instead they often make holes in metal pots they find (Gow 2005).

Hunting for watches

On a Saturday night in the small town of Sepahua the Nahua prepare to go hunting. Their targets however are not a juicy agouti or a tasty tapir. Instead, they go to '*sacar reloj y zapato'* (Sp), 'to collect watches and shoes'. The ever watchful Nahua know that the early hours of Sunday morning offer rich pickings as they can gently remove watches and trainers from the young men who lie in drunken stupors on the unlit streets.

The Nahua are no longer dedicating as much time to gathering nuts and fruits from the forest as they did before they 'fell out of the forest'. A friend, who visited me in the field, commented that the Nahua seem to be the only hunter-gatherers who no longer do any gathering! (N.Bard pers comm). Nevertheless, the gathering mode of production is still very much alive except that today they are gathering watches and shoes in Sepahua rather than nuts and berries in the forest. In fact, they use the same verb, *fi*, 'to collect', to describe these expeditions. I experienced the continuing importance that the Nahua attribute to 'collecting things' from the outside world during frequent trips with the Nahua to Lima for advocacy purposes. While I wanted to prepare for our important meetings the Nahua wanted to shop[101].

Further evidence can be found in the analogy the Nahua make between logging activities and hunting practices (Feather 2000). The Nahua describe logging as a process of killing (*rete*) trees just as they would describe a hunting expedition. For the Nahua, logging and shopping like hunting and raiding are all forms of engaging with a powerful outside world (Feather 2000).

This focus on the power of the 'other' reveals connections between their warfare, dreams[102] and hallucinogenic visions, the journeys of their mythic heroes and their logging and shopping trips that might otherwise seem disconnected. As Viveiros de Castro (1996) points out, Amazonian peoples employ a variety of strategies as diverse as warfare and cannibalism to engage with and incorporate this 'otherness'. As Lévi-Strauss (1976) famously noted, war and trade are two sides of the same coin…they are

[101] Also see Ewart for a similar experience amongst the Panara (2000: 46-7).
[102] The Cashinahua understand their dreams as the journeys of souls to engage with alterity just as 'normal' journeys are also a means of engaging with alterity (McCallum 2002:387).

both means of establishing a relationship with the 'other'. Just as the Nahua have replaced the moiety system with a simpler *yora/nafa* division they have replaced warfare and hunting with travelling, shopping and logging.

These transformations should not be surprising. "In Amerindian thought, nothing in any sector of cosmos or society remains in its initial state, one unstable dualism always yields another unstable dualism (Lévi-Strauss 1995:231). For the Nahua, their hallucinations, dreams, shopping trips, watch gathering expeditions and warring parties are all voyages of discovery to distant and unknown worlds. They are means of relating with otherness, an obsession that lies at the heart of their society.

Nevertheless, not all indigenous Amazonians share this attitude. Their Machiguenga neighbours prefer to keep such risks to a minimum, they minimise their travel and even dislike dreaming (Shepard 2002). The Nahua, on the other hand, embrace these engagements as a risky but potentially lucrative opportunity.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to deconstruct the typical narratives of 'first contact' situations that depict it as a displacement in time and focus instead on Nahua narratives that describe the events of May 1984 as a displacement in space and social relationships. For the Nahua, the events of 1984 and its aftermath were less a result of a dominant national society, but rather a product of their uncontrolled and overwhelming desire for *mestizo* things and women, the acquisition of which would entail cosmological acts that go far beyond their material significance[103].

Clearly, the concept of an 'uncontacted Indian' or 'first contact' is a subtle misnomer. It assumes that inter-cultural contact began with such moments, ignores the long history between indigenous peoples and those of European descent and rests on a linear sense of time in which history is seen as a movement from tradition to modernity. Instead, Nahua oral histories show how, for at least the last 100 years, the various

[103] I am grateful to Luisa Elvira Belaunde who articulated this so clearly.

Purús-Panoan groups have been oscillating in and out of contact with white people. Just because the history is undocumented it does not mean that one should assume that this was the first instance of contact.

The other problem with the term 'first contact' is that it implies that inter-cultural contact is necessarily something alien to indigenous peoples or only began with the arrival of Europeans. The existence of Inca axe heads in the Manu and the place that the Inca occupy in many Panoan myths, suggests at least some level of contact between Andean and Amazonian societies. The critical role that the Yaminahua played in the contact of the Nahua is another excellent example of the role played by indigenous intermediaries in 'first contact' situations and one that is so often left out of such accounts[104]. The expertise of indigenous peoples as intermediaries in contact situations suggests that they have been doing this for a lot longer than one might think.

This chapter has attempted to show that the Nahua, like many Amerindian peoples, see themselves as actors in history rather than its victims and that the choices they make are informed by their own view of the world. The Nahua do not describe their contact as 'forced' on them by the outside world; they wanted metal tools and to have sex with *mestizo* women for their own reasons. In Ireland's words, "we should not put ourselves at the centre stage of everything of which we happen to play a part" (1988:170). 'Contact' is neither forced nor chosen. It is both.

The critique of concepts such as 'first contact' is not one of interest only to academics. Having been involved in the struggle of the indigenous movement in Peru I have seen at first hand how the concept of 'first contact', 'uncontacted Indians' and a host of other misleading terms can actually undermine advocacy efforts. On one side of the debate sit missionaries, oil companies and state officials who depict 'contact' as a positive force for change. On the other side, sit indigenous leaders, indigenous rights activists and environmental NGOs who view 'contact' as a source of negative changes[105]. While they disagree on the value of contact both sides of the debate share the same assumption that indigenous peoples are passive victims in these processes and that 'contact' is the definitive moment in their history. Neither seeks to understand how

[104] Also see Vilaca (2006).
[105] This is a slightly crude generalisation but nonetheless one that broadly reflects the panorama.

indigenous peoples might think about such processes or that their responses might not be what they seem.

Despite this, the task of anthropologists should not be to deconstruct the practices of advocacy organisations to show that terms such as 'first contact' are a misnomer. This is too easy and is ignorant of the power relations in which the 'knowledge' of anthropology is produced and used. Such academic critiques could be convenient pretexts for those with powerful vested interests who seek to establish or promote 'contact'. Instead, anthropologists should be looking at their own societies to challenge the stereotypical representations of indigenous people that ultimately do them very few favours. Just because people like the Nahua assume responsibility for their own actions, it does not mean that the national societies, in which they live, should relinquish theirs.

This chapter has attempted to deconstruct the view expressed by Zarzar that the Nahua 'lost something essential to their selves' after the 3rd of May 1984. It has also shown that the subsequent changes in their lives that seemed so radical to observers were unsurprising for the Nahua. This chapter has also sought to illustrate that the instability of Nahua local groups is a chronic rather than a recent phenomenon. The fluidity of the Nahua local group however rests on an understanding that the barriers between *yora* and *nafa* are blurry rather than impassable. The following chapters address how this fluidity not only concerns collective identities but those of each individual who must constantly negotiate a precarious tightrope that divides humans from non-humans, self from 'other' and the dead from the living. The next chapter begins with the relationship between humans and animals that is mediated by the consumption of food.

Chapter 2

‘Soft bodies’

Fussy eaters

I was in Lima with six Nahua friends. We were sitting in the conference room of a five star hotel listening to a seminar about a major natural gas project in the jungle. During one seemingly interminable PowerPoint presentation, Lucco turned to me and groaned, “I’m so hungry”. When the presentation finished we were herded out to a series of long tables where rump steaks were served to all the participants. They were large, tender and medium rare. Lucco and I plunged in. “What meat is this?” Lucco asked. “Beef” I said. Lucco’s fork remained suspended in mid-air. He giggled, “I cannot eat cow, I will go bald” and put down his fork.

Half an hour later we rose from the table. It was obvious where the Nahua had been sitting. A sea of empty plates encircled a tiny island of six dishes with their steaks intact. Fortunately, I did not share my friends’ scruples. When they were not looking I wrapped a couple up in some paper napkins and swept them into my bag.

The time and content of the next meal is always a mystery in Serjali. Manioc and bananas are always plentiful but hunting and fishing are more unpredictable. Sometimes meat and fish are abundant but at other times one might spend two or three days eating only boiled manioc. This unpredictability had a remarkable effect on any initial qualms I felt about eating cuddly monkeys. It seemed that there was no space for pickiness in such a world. The food was fresh and delicious and within a few weeks my stomach at least had gone native, or so I thought.

It was the rainy season and we had not eaten any meat for two or three days when Lucco, my host, returned from the forest with a tapir. Everyone became very excited; a tapir could feed practically the entire village and, as normal, Curaca arrived to butcher and distribute the meat. Maria Luisa, Lucco's wife, made a delicious soup and I was chewing away with relish before I noticed she was not eating. "Christian (her child who had been born a few weeks previously) will get thin and die" she said in response to my query. "Why will he get thin?" I asked. "Because I am eating tapir," she replied with the patience one would normally reserve for a young child. It seemed paradoxical: surely a breastfeeding mother should be eating as much as possible. I muttered something non-committal as if it all made sense. Anthropological fieldwork I realised was less about finding out the answers and more about learning how to ask the right kind of questions.

Over time, I learnt that large animals and fish such as deer, tapir and the large catfish (*huacahua Sp*[106]) are particularly dangerous to consume because they have powerful spirits that attack people's souls. Young women and children are particularly vulnerable and the attack results in weight loss and even death on certain occasions. These restrictions become even more serious immediately after a woman gives birth when the mother is not only concerned with her own well-being but with the fragile life of her newborn child. During this time she must not even eat from a used pot as this has been impregnated with the meat of various animals and fish whose strong spirits could attack the spirit of the newborn baby. As a general rule, large animals seemed to have stronger spirits, yet some smaller animals such as the *rookafa* (saki monkey) and the *xino* (capuchin monkey) were considered particularly dangerous. Birds, with a few exceptions such as the *seika* were deemed weaker and incapable of causing much harm.

Once I could see the world beyond my own stomach it was clear that the Nahua were pickier with their food than I first imagined. Even more strangely, it was precisely the people who I considered most in need of nourishment who were the fussiest: pregnant mothers like Maria Luisa, small children and the sick. Curaca explained, "Maria Luisa is young, her body is soft (*pachi*) but an old woman's body is hard (*keresh*), they can eat anything!"

[106] The giant catfish, *Zungaro zungaro*.

This chapter explores the elaborate dietary controls of the Nahua and the principle that underlies these restrictions: the possibility of becoming what they eat. The Nahua explain this process with a physical idiom, their 'soft bodies'. However, the dietary restrictions only make sense if *yora,* the word the Nahua translate as body, is understood as 'embodied self'; a complex mixture of material and spiritual elements (*yoshi*). These elements are connected by blood (*imi*) which explains Nahua antipathy to both the consumption of uncooked meat and the shedding of blood.

This intimate connection between matter and spirit explains why, in common with many other indigenous Amazonian peoples, the Nahua understand that persons are made and fashioned gradually through bodily interventions. It explains how through sharing food and bodily substances they become similar to each other over time. The corollary of this is that strangers who live alongside them can become *yora* while *yora* can become 'other' by living apart from their kin. This explains the ease with which *yora* can become *nafa* that was described in the previous chapter.

However, Nahua personhood is not just processual (generated over time). It is also relational as it depends on the encounters that people have with the multiple beings in the universe that includes animals and spirits. Like humans, these beings are considered 'subjects', they too are capable of a point of view and encounters with them can be understood as battles of perspective that can result in a loss of sense of self.

Food consumption is only one of several mechanisms for adopting the point of view of others. Others include hunting and warfare, both processes that can be considered as 'battles of points of view'. A 'soft body' reflects the inherent instability of the Nahua, a fragile sense of self that unites those people whose sense of self is particularly vulnerable and ranges from pregnant mothers and children to assassins and the sick.

Chapter outline

The first part introduces the concept of 'you are what you eat' and describes the different circumstances in which the Nahua are vulnerable to acquiring the characteristics of the animals and fish they consume. In order to explain the mechanism behind this process the following section addresses three key concepts: *yora* (body), *yoshi* (spirit) and blood (*imi*) and explores their complex interrelationship. The next section uses this context to explore how a person grows and develops from 'soft' to 'hard' during their lifetime. The fourth section compares killers with those receiving shamanic treatment; it argues that they are both sets of individuals whose 'bodies' are highly unstable and liable to radical transformation. The final part takes the argument one stage further; it argues that Nahua instability only makes sense if it is understood that they are living in a relational universe in which the animals and humans they engage with are considered 'subjects' rather than 'objects'.

Part 1: You are what you eat

It is not only young Nahua women who are fussy about food. To greater or lesser degree, all the Nahua must take care of what they eat. This was made evident during one boat journey with the Nahua. Having travelled all day on the river without any food, we stopped to spend the night on a beach. There were 14 of us including wrinkled grandmothers, strapping young men, breastfeeding young women and a scattering of children. When the moon rose, two young men went upriver to hunt alligators. They were eagerly awaited as the children were especially hungry. The hunters returned in the middle of the night having caught two small alligators, barely enough to feed us all but a tasty morsel for hungry travellers. The milky light of dawn was just appearing as everyone was served a bowl of soup, everyone except for the children. It was confusing as they had been complaining about their hunger all day. Between mouthfuls, Muriateh, a middle-aged Nahua man, explained to me, "Children cannot eat baby animals: when they are older they will become weak and faint *(piki)*".

It later became clear that this restriction was not related to the juvenile status of the animal but to the characteristics of each animal. Young deer and tapir make children *piki* because they take a long time to develop and stand upright while juvenile peccary are standing and walking almost immediately after birth and are edible. All varieties of baby monkey are restricted as they are highly dependent on their mothers and suckle for two years. Young agouti and armadillo are forbidden foods because they sleep inside holes in the forest during the day. "If children eat them they will sleep in the middle of our journey" I was told. Spider monkeys and capybaras, that can often be seen scratching themselves, cause skin diseases while the *huanto* fish (*lisa Sp*) swim sluggishly near the bottom of the river and can make children lazy.

Pablo is an old man, he hobbles around the village, his left foot swathed in bandages made out of old tee shirts that partly conceal the putrefying flesh from view. When he was a young man Pablo raided a Machiguenga village looking for pots and machetes, axes and knives. During the raid, Pablo killed a Machiguenga woman with his arrows[107]. His nephew Pedro told me that, "After he killed her he ate peanuts and capybara, this is when his flesh began to rot. He did not diet, he should never have eaten peanuts or capybara, both of them have itchiness (*shofa*)". Later, Curaca elaborated further.

> *It was his own fault. After we have killed a person, we cannot eat capybara, spider monkey or even pituca* (taro). *All of these have itchiness. The spider monkey has a worm called shena in its legs, it is always scratching. We too get this itchiness in our legs. We cannot eat potato because this will give us a hernia* (it resembles a hernia). *We can eat fish but must not suck their eyes or head because this is very oily and gives us diarrhoea. If we eat the tapir banana* (the largest plantain which is prone to bursting) *our feet may swell and burst.*

Some clarity was emerging from these disparate examples. An eclectic set of people—mothers, babies, young children and killers—were all vulnerable to consuming certain foods. Some of this vulnerability was framed in terms of soul attack but another dimension was the acquisition of the physical features and behaviours of the animals themselves. For example, five days after Christian was born, Maria Luisa began to eat

[107] Pablo himself claims that others killed her and he just pierced her body with his arrows.

some fish, though not the *doncella* and *conchi* because of the elaborate designs on their skin. Curaca explained that these designs, which resembled little balls, could give her a hernia. The Nahua translated both these processes in the regional Spanish as *nos cutipa*, 'it makes us pay'[108].

Although there was broad consensus about what could and could not be eaten, some disagreement existed. Some people told me that children cannot eat either agouti or capybara because they sleep during the day in their holes while others said, 'no one has seen this, we do not know'. The difference in opinions, which seemed contradictory at first, was based on the knowledge that any one person had of animal behaviour. The Nahua are constantly subjecting the information they have about the world to rigorous evaluation[109]. However, at the heart of this variation there is a consistent principle: for the Nahua, 'you are what you eat'.

The myth of the transformation of humans into peccary (*yafanifo*) describes this phenomenon in dramatic fashion. The story tells of a group of *Xinipafo* who embarked on a hunting trip. They made a camp and the chief sent his hunters into the forest while he stayed in the camp with his wife awaiting their return. While they were away the chief found a nest of strange duck eggs on the beach. He had never eaten them before but he collected them and gave them to his wife who prepared them in a large pot. When the hunters return, they were given the eggs to eat and that night they were all transformed into white-lipped peccary. The unknown egg was the food of the peccary.

The consequences seemed clear enough but the mechanism was just as muddy. What were these 'soft bodies' the Nahua were talking about and how did animals, or even vegetables 'make them pay'? It soon became clear that my attempts to understand this mechanism were limited by my own assumptions concerning bodies and souls[110]. The following section addresses the meaning of bodies and souls from the Nahua point of view.

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[108] The word *cutipa* derives from a Quechua word meaning 'to pay' and is used throughout the Peruvian Amazon to refer to the settling of scores between humans and animals.
[109] Explored further in Chapter 6.
[110] As Viveiros de Castro has pointed out, the reason why "many anthropologists do not bother to translate the word body is that it is simply assumed that everyone has the same body" (1998a:16).

Part 2: Key concepts: *Yora* and *yoshi*

Yora

To understand what the Nahua mean when they say they have 'soft bodies' it is first necessary to unravel the concept of *yora*. Apart from the sociological use of the term *yora* (kin), it also refers to a material concept that the Nahua translate as 'body' (*cuerpo* Sp). Thus, when the Nahua refer to 'our community' as *noko yora*, they are also saying, 'our body'. However, the Nahua, like other indigenous Amazonian peoples, do not conceive of their bodies as bounded entities that are independent from other beings or as natural 'givens'. Instead, they are seen as being fabricated through interactions with their kin and other beings in the cosmos (McCallum 1996a, Conklin and Morgan 1996). *Yora* however is not exclusively a material concept. The Nahua distinguish it from flesh (*nami*) and it has an intimate relationship with the *yoshi* (body spirit) and *feroyoshi* (eye spirit).

Yoshi and *feroyoshi*: Body and eye spirits

As Townsley points out, one of the difficulties in providing systematic and coherent ideas of the invisible world of the Yaminahua is that it is inherently mysterious to the Yaminahua themselves (1989:127). Nevertheless, for the Nahua, like their Yaminahua neighbours, the constitution of the person can be seen at death where the person separates into three parts: the flesh (*nami*), the body spirit (*yoshi* or *faka*) and the eye spirit (*feroyoshi*)[111].

Death is conceived of as the flight of the *feroyoshi* to the land of the dead (*naimera,* 'inside the sky') either by seduction on the part of its former relatives or attack or capture by human sorcerers or spirits. It is this *feroyoshi* that gives vitality to the physical body because in its absence it dies and rots. The *feroyoshi* can be seen in the eye but during life it has an unfixed relationship with the body. Dreams are dangerous activities because they are the result of the *feroyoshi* leaving the body when people

[111] The Yanesha make a similar tripartite separation (Santos Granero 2006:59).

sleep. This is also why the Nahua dislike being photographed[112]. The flash makes the person blink, a sign that their *feroyoshi* has left the body.

The flight of the *feroyoshi* means that the *yoshi* separates from the body and thus the sighting of a person's *yoshi* is evidence of death. The *yoshi* only appears to its kin because of the physiological connections between relatives who live alongside each other and share bodily substances[113]. The *yoshi* does not go to the land of the dead but stays on earth and inhabits the former haunts of its deceased body. Unlike the *feroyoshi,* the *yoshi* is indelibly associated with not only a person's body but also their houses, gardens, possessions and even photos that the Nahua, along with a person's reflection or shadow, refer to as *yoshi*[114].

When a child is born, neither its *feroyoshi* nor *yoshi* are sufficiently attached to the flesh. The *yoshi* become more attached the longer a person lives. Thus, the Nahua say that the *yoshi* of a child is much 'weaker' (referring to its connection to the flesh) than that of an older person, especially older women, who have the strongest *yoshi* and are therefore most dangerous for their kin when they die[115]. The *yoshi* of older people travels widely to look for their family and their birthplace. The *yoshi* of a little child cannot travel far at death and the *feroyoshi*s of young children do not even arrive in the land of the dead as they get lost on the way.

The distinction between the immaterial *feroyoshi* and the material *yoshi* mirrors a recurring theme in the ethnographic literature; a distinction that indigenous Amazonian peoples make between body spirits and eye spirits[116]. The *feroyoshi* is visible in the pupil of the eye while the *yoshi* is visible as its shadow. The *feroyoshi* can exist without the body whilst the *yoshi* grows with the body and is as inseparable as its shadow

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[112] Nevertheless, photos are also conceived as problematic because, like any other object, they are considered to be aspects of the person.
[113] This theme is addressed later in the chapter.
[114] This partially explains the post mortem practices that seek to separate the living from the dead (See Chapter 5).
[115] If it abandons the body then the child will die. This indicates that vital forces are not just a property of the *feroyoshi*.
116 See Kensinger's work on the Cashinahua (1995:209-211). The association between the body spirit and an image or shadow is a connection made by many indigenous Amazonian peoples (Keifenheim 2002:102).

(Townsley 1989:99). The *feroyoshi* is the seat of perception while the *yoshi* is the seat of consciousness (Townsley 1993:455-456).

A Nahua myth, *poiyafenifo* ('they went with their shit') emphasises the immateriality of the *feroyoshi*. T he story recounts how a man died and his distraught relatives followed him to the land of the dead. The *feroyoshinafa* (the *feroyoshi* people) were disgusted at their arrival and exclaimed, "Ech, they have come here with all their shit". Even the *feroyoshinafa's* hammocks and benches deftly moved away when the people tried to sit down[117]. While the *feroyoshi* are only loosely associated with matter, the *yoshi* is lost without its body. Matter and spirit are clearly intimately associated but the question is how. This is the subject of the following section.

Blood

One afternoon I was startled from a brief doze by a tumult outside the house. I peered out to see people running from all directions towards the riverbank and heard the unmistakeable sound of a funereal lament. "Curaca is dying, Curaca is dying" Delia told me breathlessly as she rushed past. I jumped out of my hammock and joined the throng. A pallid Curaca was being borne on the shoulders of six men. As he was laid in a hammock, almost half the village gathered around crying and wailing. *Imi ichapa*, *imi ichapa, ma nai*, 'so much blood, so much blood, he is dying', Dora whispered to me. A loose branch had fallen on Curaca's head while he was working in his garden and had given him a significant head wound but surely nothing to warrant such a morbid response…

The reaction remained a mystery until sometime later when, one night, while brushing my teeth, I saw Elena's cat skulk into view with a rabbit dangling between its jaws. It was three days since we had last eaten meat so I quickly appropriated the rabbit from its disgruntled owner and took it to our house where I gave it to Aliya and we began to salivate over the prospect of tender and juicy rabbit steaks. Aliya took charge

[117] The intimacy of this relationship between *yoshi* and flesh is perfectly expressed by the Cashinahua who explain that the *yuxin* of animals can only attack people once they have lost the connection with their bodies (Lagrou 1998:38).

of cooking and seasoned the rabbit with coriander and a source of secret herbs. Edith, our hostess, looked on curiously and giggled at our culinary efforts. After a few minutes on the grill, Aliya was just about to taste a juicy morsel when Edith grabbed it out of her hand in alarm and proceeded to examine it with her torch, "Ech, blood" she exclaimed and shoved it back onto the barbecue. 15 minutes later, when the rabbit was a charred piece of flesh, Edith was happy. Unfortunately, Aliya had lost her appetite.

Sometime later, Juan explained to me the reason why they are so concerned about blood: "Our *yoshi* is in our heart and in our blood, if we are wounded and spill dark blood (*ita*[118]) we become thin and shaken and our *yoshi* can pester our family".

This association between blood (*imi*) and *yoshi* is why the Nahua abhor the consumption of raw or bloody meat and thus why the consumption of vultures (*kezko/xete*) is completely taboo because they eat raw flesh. Several Nahua ancestors were even called *Kezkopini* ('ate vulture') because they died after eating vulture. As we will see below, it also explains why homicide is considered so dangerous,

It also explains the rationale behind the healing therapy of *kokofi* (sucking) whereby the Nahua literally suck the '*imi chaka*' (bad blood) from the stomachs of their patients. Its importance to the Nahua was revealed when, accompanied by two Nahua friends, I visited a well-known healer in Atalaya. The shaman sucked my stomach but did not spit out the globules of blood that Nahua healers commonly extract. My Nahua friends looked on scornfully and compared him unfavourably with their own healers, "Look he is sucking no blood, he does not know how to suck".

Nevertheless, the exact nature of the relationship between the body and *yoshi* was difficult to establish. When I asked the Nahua whether the *yoshi* was within their bodies, most of them were very clear when they said, "No, it is with us, standing up with us". Lagrou describes a similar conception for the Cashinahua for whom "*yuxin* is not inside the body but a projection of the body, a capacity for action, an ability to transform rather than a substance" (1998:38).

[118] 'Dark blood' refers to a distinctively dark coloured semi congealed liquid.

If we see *yoshi* as a capacity rather than as an entity or a substance, the danger of blood is not that the *yoshi* is contained within it but that *yoshi* as a capacity is released from the body as a result of its loss. As Lagrou describes for the Cashinahua, it is not that urine or sweat is either *yuxin* or matter but that *yuxin* only come into being when separated from the body (1998:53). *Yoshi*, like the equivalent concept of *vani* for the Candoshi, is a "condition rather than a substance" (Surrallés 2003:46)[119] and one that gives intentionality, self awareness (reflexivity) and communication. For the Nahua, their *yoshi*, like *jam* for the Wari, "is a capacity and not a thing, it is the potential to adopt an indefinite number of bodily forms" (Vilaça 2005:453). Regardless of the exact nature of this relationship, the intimate association between blood and *yoshi* explains why the Nahua lost their appetite in Lima. Not only do cows have a great deal of blood but the Nahua prefer their steaks well cooked rather than medium rare.

The power of blood in Amazonia

Nahua antipathy towards bloody meat and to loss of blood is a concern they share with many indigenous Amazonian peoples for whom the bigger the animal, the more blood it has and the more dangerous it is considered for consumers (Belaunde 2005:275)[120]. Throughout Amazonia, the thorough cooking of food and the management of people experiencing changes in states of blood such as during menstruation, and after homicide, is a cause for concern[121]. These practices reflect the significance of blood as something intimately associated with a person's capacity and thus its power as a transformative force (S Hugh-Jones 1996; Belaunde 2005, 2006).

Belaunde describes how, many Amazonian peoples consider blood to be the principle vehicle that controls difference and similarity between beings. The circulatory

[119] The Candoshi associate *vani* with intentionality and predatory capacity as well as a big heart. To be a predator is to have all the highly valued qualities of a person such as courage, fierceness, determination, independence and decision making capacities (Surrallés 2003:44-45). Someone with a small heart cannot take decisions even to avenge the death of relative. Normally this is the easiest decision for the Candoshi and such inaction puts their own children in danger from enemy reprisals.

[120] Tapirs, the largest Amazonian mammal, are almost universally considered more dangerous to eat by indigenous Amazonian peoples, while birds and monkeys are generally favoured (S Hugh-Jones 1996:10).

[121] Stephen Hugh-Jones describes the general indigenous Amazonian antipathy to the consumption of meat especially red meat which has more blood and is more dangerous than white. This is why Tukanoan peoples wash their meat thoroughly to get rid of its blood.

capacity of blood is the source of its power but it must be treated with care; if too much is stored it can rot or overflow but if too much is released it can dry up. It is the flow of blood that transports thoughts around the body thereby making an individual into a conscious person; blood and its movement turns thought into flesh (Belaunde 2005:39).

This association between blood and capacity explains why states of blood are considered to be indicative of an individual's health and why its management is so critical. This is why many indigenous Amazonian peoples take great pains to seclude menstruating women, and to ensure that they remain still and that their diet is restricted to the consumption of bland foods with little blood (Belaunde 2005:132-134). Amongst the Makuna for example, some girls are given special body paint to cover the stench of blood and women must inform others when they are menstruating so they can avoid contamination. Their first menstruation is seen as a change of skin that gives them their capacities for fertility (Arhem cited in Belaunde 2005:140). They are painted with achiote to disguise them from predators and spirits and avoid eating foods that could contaminate their *je*, their animating capacity. Thus, they can grow strong and resistant to diseases in later life (Ibid: 132-135)[122].

The recurring theme throughout the literature is that blood triggers transformative processes (Belaunde 2005:160). Blood is the source of fertility; it cannot be destroyed but can only be removed and transformed[123]. This is why blood that is released from a body is considered dangerous and must not be eaten or touched. In other words, *yoshi* is what gives beings in the Nahua universe their transformative capacities and blood is the vehicle for this capacity.

This concept is reflected in many Nahua myths. In the myth of the acquisition of fire, chili and corn, the miserly figure of *Yoaxi* is eventually killed but the people that paint themselves with his blood and entrails are irreversibly transformed into animals. One person was touched by some of his blood and became a scarlet macaw, while another accidentally sat on the ashes of *Yoaxi's* fire and became the trumpeter bird that

[122] Amongst the Yanomami, too little blood is considered to make them weak, (the old and babies) while too much is considered dangerous (menstruating women and assassins). They regulate this balance through sexual abstinence and avoidance of certain foods (Albert cited in Belaunde 2005:162-3).
[123] The Piaroa say that, if shamans do not convert meat to vegetables before it is eaten, it can make women pregnant (Overing Kaplan cited in S Hugh-Jones 1996:12).

has a short white tail. In short, "blood is vital force and therefore dangerous to eat" (McCallum 2001:16)[124].

Embodied Selves

This inseparability of matter and spirit is taken for granted by the Nahua. At one level, the flesh and the blood is considered a protective cloak for the *feroyoshi* which enters and leaves the body through the eyes and the crown of the head. This is why they paint the body of newborns and assassins with *nane (huito Sp[125])* in order to protect them from spirit attack[126].

At another level, material things are considered an extension of the person's spirit. This is why sorcery can be perpetrated using a person's bodily fluids as well as their names[127]. "Because of the intimate connection between these substances (mucus, excreta, toenails etc.) and a person, they carry with them part of one's spirit when separated from the body" (Kensinger 1995:209). Similarly, this is why the consumption of foreign flesh in the form of meat, fish or even vegetables can result in a form of spirit possession.

Thus, it is only at death that matter and spirit can be separated. For the Cashinahua, a person without a body is pure *yuxin* (image, energy) yet "without *yuxin* everything is powder…dry and inanimate" (Lagrou 1998:19). Similarly, the Yaminahua say that without a *feroyoshi* "this body is just meat" (Townsley 1989:107). Thus, *yora* cannot be simply understood as flesh or body, it is flesh impregnated with capacities, the sense of 'embodied selfhood' that Lagrou describes for the Cashinahua (1998:2). Thus, the condition of life is *yora*, the inseparability of flesh and *yoshi*.

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[124] For the Cashinahua, blood is very dangerous as it is considered a vehicle of pure *yuxin*; if they eat a lot of blood they acquire a lot of *yuxin* and approach a state of *yuxibo* (Lagrou 1998). This is why the Cashinahua refer to the consumption of *ayahuasca* as the consumption of the blood of the boa and the subsequent assimilation of the boa's point of view on the world as manifested by the *ayahuasca* visions. As Lagrou summarises, to absorb blood is to "expose oneself to an excess of *yuxin* activity inside the body and thus feel a violent transformation of perception of the world" (Ibid:122).

[125] Black body paint made from the fruit of a small tree, *Genipa americana*.

[126] The Arawete focus on closing and sealing the body as a form of spiritual protection (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 209). Similarly for the Machiguenga, the crown of the head is the place where the soul leaves and enters the body (Rosengren 2006:95).

[127] Explored further in Chapter 6.

These embodied selves however are not just made at birth but are fashioned through a constant process of fabrication by contact with their relatives and external forces in the universe. This process is the subject of the following section.

Part 3: Making people

Birth and conception

To make a child the Nahua say that a man must have sex with a woman just after she has her period when she has *imi shiro* (hard blood) in her stomach. It is the mixing of women's blood with *uko* (male semen) that makes her pregnant and a child is considered the product of both male and female substances. In common with indigenous Amazonian ideas of parallel conception (Belaunde 2005:17) a girl is made from a woman's substances while a boy comes from the man's semen although the Nahua represent this as a choice on the part of the fetus; "if it wants to be a man then a little boy is born and if it wants to be a woman then it is a little girl". A newborn baby has a *feroyoshi* which comes from their father while its *yoshi* only develops after birth[128].

In common with other indigenous Amazonians, the Nahua scoff at the idea that pregnancy can result from a single sexual encounter; conception is considered a cumulative process. As a result, fathers and mothers control what they eat during pregnancy because their fluids and substances are continually being used to contribute to the new baby. The Nahua say that twins are born when a pregnant woman eats fruit with an emerging bud[129].

A person is thus considered to be a bundle of material substances infused with intentionality and consciousness, the capacities of men and women, the qualities of the

[128]Some Nahua explained that the *feroyoshi* forms in the mother's stomach while others said that it forms after birth. Either way, as it is associated with the father, it explainins why moiety affiliation is inherited paternally (Chapter 6).

[129] Amongst the Piro, the parents must not only observe strict diets but the father must remain still while his wife is giving birth. Sudden movements could make the baby jump in the womb. They must also not wring out wet clothes as this could result in twisting and contorting the baby (Gow 1991:154).

moieties and any other forces of the cosmos that may penetrate the person during pregnancy. The person is thus neither fixed at birth nor considered a bounded entity impervious to contamination from others. Instead, a person is constantly subject to a continual process of shaping through the exchange of vital substances with people, animals, plants and other cosmic forces to which it is exposed.

Growth and development: From soft to hard

The Nahua explained that babies, young children and young women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the *cutipa* because their bodies are *pachi* (soft). They contrasted this with men and old women whose bodies are hard (*keresh*). Amongst the Nahua, women and one of the moieties (***roanifo***) are seen as soft and mutable and associated with the 'inside' while hardness is associated with men, the other moiety (***nafa***), all that is imperishable and of the 'outside'. Similarly for the Cashinahua, women are soft, liquid and fertile and involved in an internal world of raising children (Lagrou 1998:89). Women provide the blood while men provide the hardness (bone) to give form to and fix this softness and produce the child (Ibid: 123). For the Cashinahua and the Nahua, an ideal person should be a balanced mix of these hard and soft characteristics. The contributions of men and women to produce children means that all people combine qualities of hardness and softness, but some have more or less than others.

Softness is thus associated with two qualities: vulnerability and strength. Mutability is a characteristic of powerful skin changers such as snakes and the immortal people (*Iri*) but also of women and children who are vulnerable to losing their sense of self. I addition, many indigenous Amazonian peoples attribute women's greater longevity to their capacity to menstruate which is perceived as an act of changing skin. To protect newborns from external forces of predation, the Nahua paint the bodies of children with *huito* to render them invisible to predatory *yoshi*.

Hardness (*keresh*) and bitterness, in opposition to softness and sweetness, is associated with men and the old; these qualities help them engage with the outside world (of *yoshi*) through hunting and shamanism. In these encounters, men are often

exposed to attack by powerful 'others'[130]. As the Nahua age, the attachment of the *yoshi* to the flesh gets stronger, and thus more powerful, and the vulnerability to other spirits diminishes. This is why the *yoshi* of old women are considered most dangerous for their living relatives. The opposite is also true. The younger and softer a person, the weaker their *yoshi* and the more fragile its association with their flesh and thus the greater their susceptibility to the *cutipa*. Roe describes this softness amongst Shipibo women as an "excessive openness" which is why menstruating women are so easily seduced by river dolphins and must seclude themselves and avoid bathing in rivers (1982:120)[131].

Thus, softness for the Nahua refers to at least two qualities of the person. The first is a heightened vulnerability to penetration; this is the case of babies and killers. This is why they are both painted with protective *huito*. The second refers to a malleability of self and to the ability of the body to acquire the characteristics of the being whose flesh is being consumed. This is made possible because of the intimate association between flesh and *yoshi*.

It is this softness that enables a woman to create life yet at the same time makes her vulnerable to a loss of self: hence the menstrual seclusion amongst the Shipibo or the dietary restrictions in the case of the Nahua. The hardness of men, on the other hand, is a positive attribute that enables the man to hunt animals and kill people without undue risk to their sense of self, yet it also means that they lack the fertility of women. The individual, like society at large, should be a balanced mixture of softness and hardness.

Ingesting identities

The progression of bodies from soft (*pachi*) to hard (*keresh*) is not only a natural process. The Nahua, in common with many other indigenous Amazonians, deliberately fashion and sculpt their bodies as part of the process of making persons. The

[130] Erikson describes a similar phenomenon for the Matis except that they focus on qualities of bitter and sweet rather than hard and soft. Women are considered sweet while men are bitter and life is understood as a process in which people gradually become more bitter (1996).
[131] The Airo Pai not only used to seclude menstruating women but also encouraged them to stay as still as possible out of fear that the *Huati* (spiritual forces) could inhabit women's bodies (Belaunde 2000:215).

Cashinahua, for example, invest considerable effort in the fixing of fluidity and thus in the control of superhuman powers. The initiation of adolescents, the *Nixpopima* ritual, involves the consumption of *nixpo* (a forest plant that blackens teeth) and the invocation of the *Inca* and harpy eagles to incorporate the hard attributes of these cosmic powers in the adolescent's bodies (McCallum 2001)[132]. Another means by which they achieve the fixing of their mutable bodies is through the extensive use of designs (*kene*) that they paint on their bodies (Lagrou 1998:79). The Cashinahua explain both these practices a as efforts to reshape their malleable bodies. In this sense, they are comparable with the piercings and ornamentations of the Mayoruna groups, such as the Matis, that give a person their bitterness and the mystical power of *sho* (Erikson 1996).

The Nahua do not practice the elaborate initiation rites and bodily designs of the Cashinahua nor the piercings of the Mayoruna. Nevertheless, their dietary restrictions reflect a similar principle whereby persons are considered to be created by bodily interventions. This role of the body in the constitution of personhood is a recurring theme in indigenous Amazonian societies (Seeger *et al* 1979) whereby people are understood to be constituted by the substances they ingest[133].

For the Nahua, this principle is most clearly demonstrated during shamanic initiation in which initiates must observe a series of dietary rules. They must consume bitter substances and avoid sweet foods and are subjected to a series of painful stings by ants and wasps through which they receive their *pae* (force).

Throughout the Panoan world, the acquisition of bitterness is understood as an absorption of power[134]. "Bitterness kills" (Erikson 1996:205)[135]. This is why purgatives, such as the emetic frog poison used so widely by Panoan groups (although

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[132] The Cashinahua translate the *Nixpopima* initiation ritual as a baptism, a ritual fixation of the child's name and *bedoyuxin* (eye spirit) as well as the modeling of a new body. The Cashinahua body is conceived as the most beautiful of all artifacts and is produced by cooking and sculpting as if it were some food or a stool. They say that the skin around the bone is woven like hammocks and cloths (Lagrou 1998: 299-300). This is why Cashinahua initiates are wrapped up in leaves, swung in hammocks and symbolically cooked (Lagrou1998:307).

[133] A Muinane man who suffered from outbursts of anger attributed it to his father's consumption of alcohol. Alcohol, like any other meat, fish or plant, is conceived of as a substance with agency (Londono cited in Belaunde:109-111).

[134] Keifenheim describes how bitterness multiplies the Cashinahua perceptive senses so that they can perceive and communicate with spirits and animals (2002:97).

[135] Discussed by Erikson (1996) and Calavia Saez *et al* (2003) amongst others.

not by the Nahua) are considered so powerful because they not only impart bitterness but expel sweetness. Calavia Saez describes how, amongst the Yaminawa, both the processes of becoming an effective hunter and shamanic training involve the ingestion of bitter substances that results in vomiting and a purging of sweetness (2006:66) [136]. Bitter plants are applied to the eyes so that bad luck (*yupa*) comes out in tears. Even the barrel of a shotgun is rubbed with the lance of a sting ray while arrows are coated in frog poison to provide this bitterness (Ibid: 67)[137]. Too much bitterness is considered dangerous however. The Matis interpreted the epidemics that accompanied contact with white people as a result of too much bitterness (the accumulation of too much *sho)* and subsequently abandoned their elaborate ornamentation and piercings (Erikson 1996)[138].

Given this association between personhood and bodies it is no surprise that the longer I lived with them the Nahua would jokingly comment that I was *yora cescara*, like *yora*[139]. A true person, *yora* (unlike a *yoshi)* does not have a fixed identity, but one that is shaped through physiological processes. Through co-residence with their kin the Nahua become similar to each other and literally begin to share bodies.

Shared bodies

I was swinging in the hammock on the veranda of Dora's house when Curaca came over for a chat and I offered him the hammock. A little later he left and I reclaimed my seat.

[136] The association made between hunting and bitterness is a recurring Panoan phenomenon. Tastevin reports that the Cashinahua would drink the juice of a bitter plant before hunting. Meanwhile, the Amahuaca choose bamboo for making arrow tips by tasting them to see which is more bitter (Erikson 1996:204).

[137] The Yaminawa attribute their recent loss of shamanic knowledge to their increasing consumption of sweeter foods. Today, shamans capture and eat or suck boa's substances in order to acquire this knowledge and to become more embittered (Perez Gil 2004). The effectiveness attributed to stings as a means of transferring power, partly explains Nahua enthusiasm for injections immediately after contact and their continued preference for injections over oral medicines; a preference that reflects the broader significance that indigenous Amazonian people attach to piercings (Erikson 1996:254).

[138] This bitterness made them into good hunters but also exposed them to disease which is why men were considered much more vulnerable to white man's diseases than women whose sweetness gave them more protection. This explains why it was often Matis women, rather than men, who were sent to meet white people (Erikson 2002:181-2). Tattooing was abandoned as this resulted in too much *sho* for young initiates who were already vulnerable (2002:186). Some men even abandoned hunting because the use of *curare* (hunting poison) also resulted in the accumulation of *sho*.

[139] Similarly, the Cashinahua use the term *yudaya*, 'to make bodies' to refer to the process of becoming accustomed to something (Lagrou 1998: 299). The Candoshi also describe the process of integration of orphaned animals and captured women as a corporeal process (Surrallés 2003:67-68).

Shortly after, Teresa wandered past. She was cradling Silvana, Maria's new baby. I offered her the hammock and she was practically sitting down when she jumped up in fright. "Curaca has been here, I cannot sit down, he has killed many people and has lots of blood, Silvana will get thin and die."

This incident remained a mystery to me until it became clear that, for the Nahua, their bodies are not bounded entities that are separate from each other. This principle explains why newborn babies are affected by what their mothers eat because a mother breastfeeds her baby and lies with it in her hammock. Through such physical contact, a baby can be attacked by the spirit of the animal that its mother consumes.

It is not only mothers who must exercise caution with their children. Initially, it seemed jarring to me that, when their children were born, Nahua fathers were often absent from the village or displayed a distinct lack of interest for their wives during birth. It later became clear that this was not because of any lack of compassion but because of the fear that the man will otherwise become thin and tainted with bad luck (*yupa*) when hunting[140] because the hot smoky characteristics of birth blood are considered to make a person lazy[141]. Additionally, while his wife is pregnant, a man is unlikely to be successful in a tapir or wild boar hunt as the animals can hear the baby crying in the mother's stomach. This explains why Nahua men sleep apart from their wives and newborn babies. Too much close contact would result in similar restrictions on their diet.

This connection is not just confined to the relationship between parents and babies. n A middle aged lady called Juana was receiving shamanic treatment for an illness and her children observed a series of dietary prohibitions fearing that Juana could be affected. During this time I was travelling with Julio, one of her sons. We were hungry and ate a sting ray. He commented morbidly that his mother would probably die as a result of his inability to control his desire.

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[140] According to the Cashinahua, *yupa* is a substance that enters a person and changes their personality and sense of perception so they cannot hunt properly (Keifenheim 2002:97).

[141] Menstrual blood is considered to have a different effect; its stench is considered offensive to animals. Nevertheless, the Nahua, unlike many other indigenous Amazonians did not demonstrate any obsessive concern with restricting the activities of menstruating women.

At the heart of these ideas about the making of persons is the sharing of food. Food consumption for the Nahua, as for many other indigenous Amazonians, (McCallum 2001, Gow 1991) is central to the processes that make people similar[142]. For the Nahua, illness is reflected in dreams when they are offered food by other beings. To eat the food of the dead is to become like them. In other words, "to give food is to create kinship" (McCallum 1996:75).

These diverse examples illustrate that the sharing of substances between people generates shared bodies and kin relationships, a phenomenon well documented in Amazonia where personhood is considered processual[143]. It is processual because it is accumulated over time rather then being defined at birth, but this means that just as it can be accrued it can also be lost. This is why bodily substances can be shared and transmitted by people, transcending what might be seen as boundaries or discrete physical forms[144]. It should be no surprise that the Nahua use the term *noko yora* not only to refer to the body of an individual but to the entire community with whom one shares substances. Indigenous Amazonians are less corporate groups and more corporeal groups (Seeger *et al* 1979).

Part 4: Unstable people

Thus far it has been demonstrated that the body, and by extension the person, is inherently unstable. It is *yoshi* that underlies this instability, an ability that must be controlled to prevent processes of becoming 'other' such as illness or death. The mutability of bodies however is an essential part of the production of persons and is made possible by the very nature of *yora*, that complex mix of spirit and matter. The processual nature of the production of persons means that, just as different individuals

[142] This principle of consubstantiality explains why when the Wari practiced endocannibalism they did not eat their own kin but only their affines. To eat ones own kin would be like eating their own flesh and they would die (Conklin 2001:122).
[143] This explains why Bororo spouses over time become more similar to each other than their own siblings (Crocker cited in Overing 1981:154).
[144] Leclerc describes how Shipibo women deal with errant husbands by slipping the urine of their children into their morning coffee or even some shavings from the skin off their own feet. The mixing of these substances reinforces the bonds between people by making them similar to each other (Leclerc 2004:168-9).

become similar to each other over time through co-residence and shared substances, so do they become different through separation. This is why it was possible for me to become *yora cescara*, like *yora* yet equally possible for the Nahua to become *nafa* if they abandoned their kin and went to live in towns 'amongst the *nafa*', the fate of Luisa's group after their migration to the Manu and that of several individuals in the immediate and chaotic aftermath of 'falling out of the forest'[145]. The inherent possibility of transformation means that a person can become unstable in potentially destructive and unproductive ways. This process is explored below through a detailed description of two classes of people who are particularly vulnerable: killers and the sick.

Killers

Old *Raya* welcomes me into his house with characteristic gentleness and offers me a choice piece of mouldy manioc hidden away in the rafters of his roof. He speaks shakily in a high pitched tone as his tiny puppies play between his feet. *Raya* never raises a voice or a hand in anger and it is almost impossible to believe that, in his youth, he killed a Machiguenga woman. Afterwards he observed a strict diet.

> *I did not eat animals, I just drank corn beer. After a while I ate fish. It's (his victim's) yoshi tried to make me eat agouti in my dreams and in another dream it offered me alligator. Then everyone told me. You must eat now, if not its yoshi will continue to pester you in your dreams. So I ate alligator, boquechico (Sp) and carachama (Sp)[146]. I wanted to get rid of its blood; I did not want to smell the blood of the dead anymore. I ate from a new clay pot. In my dreams it wanted to make me drink manioc beer but I did not drink. In my dreams I said, I will not drink because I have just killed a nafashafo (enemy woman).*

The association between *yoshi* and blood explains *Raya*'s dietary restrictions. A killer is impregnated by the victim's *yoshi* after he spills their blood and thus risks acquiring their characteristics. In the myth of *kokoshnafaretemateni* a man attacks and kills one of the *kokoshnafa* people whose distinguishing characteristic was that they slept during the day but were awake at night. The man was immediately infected with a

[145] Also see Chapter 5.
[146] Boquechico (*Prochilodus nigricans*) and carachama (*Pseudorinelepis genibarbis)* are both species of fish.

great desire to sleep. He was warned against indulging his desire because he would become perpetually sleepy.

Killers are not only vulnerable to acquiring the characteristics of their victims but can also acquire the capacities of any animals they eat in the immediate aftermath of homicide. Thus, they occupy a similar position to pregnant mothers, small children and other people with 'soft bodies'.

The consequences of not observing these restrictions are severe. Curaca told me about his *koka* (mother's brother) who killed a person during the summer months. The man dieted but had a weakness for howler monkey meat which he ate despite the warnings of his relatives. His body soon began to mimic that of a howler monkey; during summer he would be thin but in winter he would become fat[147].

Juan described this process in more detail:

> *Their yoshi passes to us when we kill them. Your head hurts, you are on fire. We diet when we kill, we go crazy otherwise. Their yoshi wants to kill you. You need to put on trousers and go to the forest and chew nixpo[148]. In your dreams they want to eat you, they try to make you bathe in naifimi (achiote), this is their blood. Achiote is like blood, it smells like blood. You must paint yourself with huito, it erases the blood. You cannot have sex after killing, their blood mixes with our blood and boils in our body.*

The dietary restrictions of killers cannot continue indefinitely. They must dilute the blood of their victim that has penetrated their flesh otherwise they risk acquiring the characteristics of their victim. They eat whatever their victim liked to eat and, if their victim was sleepy or thirsty they too adopt these qualities[149]. This is why the Nahua do

[147] Summer (dry season) is a lean time to be a howler monkey; fruit is in short supply and the howlers are cold. This is why they go to the top branches of trees to soak up the sun. In the winter (rainy season), food is abundant and they become fat.

[148] A wild plant the Nahua used to collect from the forest and chew on to protect their teeth which it turned black.

[149] Similar ideas of possession are shared by other Amerindian peoples such as the Yanomami (Ales 2008). The Yanomami killer incorporates the vital principle (*pufi*) of the victim. Initially, he is identified with the cadaver of his victim before experiencing a long ritual that enables him to incorporate the enemy's qualities without succumbing completely. Nevertheless, he remains haunted by his enemy and sooner or later he will die from attack by this spectre (Ales 2008: 67).

not paint themselves with *naifimi* (*achiote Sp*), a red paint that attracts blood. Instead, they paint themselves with black *nane (huito Sp*) to prevent penetration.

Juan's reference to chewing *nixpo* is enlightening given that it also plays a central role for the Cashinahua in their initiation ritual (*nixpopima)* where *nixpo* is considered a means of hardening the soft and fluid bodies of initiates. Thus, the act of killing places the Nahua assassin in a similar state of flux and potential mutability as Cashinahua adolescents. Killers, like adolescents, are soft and must be hardened.

The mystery of why Teresa did not want to sit in the hammock that Curaca had vacated can now be understood. She was fearful that the blood of his victims could impregnate Silvana, thereby making her thin because babies are soft and weak. Over time this blood gradually diminishes and some Nahua told me that, "Curaca does not have any blood anymore". If homicide is a process whereby the self is impregnated by the 'other' then every time the Nahua eat an animal it is akin to a mild form of homicide.

As *Raya* and Juan described, killers are in an extreme state of vulnerability as their body is possessed by the spectre of their victim. At the same time, changes in the killer's own behaviour can also be fixed[150]. Killers must not eat out of the same pot as everybody else because this means they will rush their food and become perpetually hungry. Also, they must not scratch themselves otherwise they will develop long fingers like a spider monkey. "If you get angry after killing then it can stick to you for the rest of your life but if you eat and laugh you will be fine" explained Juan.

During the Cashinahua *Nixpopima* initiation, children are not supposed to move at night. They are in a state of extreme mutability where any changes could become permanent features (McCallum 2001:44). The Kuna also say that women who are about to give birth must stay still as they are in a process of transforming and cooking fluids (M.Margiotti pers comm). Like Cashinahua initiates, Shipibo women who are menstruating and Kuna women on the verge of giving birth, Nahua killers must stay still. Softness therefore refers to a heightened capacity to become 'other'. This is why

[150] Macquarrie reports that if they broke these food restrictions Nahua killers had to eat mud (1991:222). I have not had the opportunity to ask why mud would be considered to have such cleansing properties.

Nahua assassins not only risk assuming the characteristics of their victims but also of getting stuck with their own behaviours. There are times when even the perennially restless Nahua must also stay still.

The Nahua killed in self-defence, in vengeance or, if it was deemed necessary, to acquire valuable tools. Unlike other indigenous Amazonian peoples such as the Wari, their homicide was never deemed to be a positive force for the constitution of the person[151]. The blood of Wari victims entered their body and made them stronger and gave them protection from disease. This made them desirable spouses as they would pass this vitality to their wife and children. Unlike the Nahua, who strove to eliminate their victim's blood from the body, the Wari sought to retain it through the seclusion and dietary taboos of the assassin who could only lie in hammocks and drink *chicha* (Conklin and Morgan 1996:675).

Similarly, Arawete killers had to observe sexual abstinence, diets and seclusion until the blood of their victim had dissipated and they had ceased to be molested by the spectre. Afterwards, the killer and the spectre became partners and the killer was simultaneously both self and 'other'. This meant that the children of the killer were also the children of his victim. Homicide also changed a man's post mortem destiny. At death, all Arawete men and women are eaten by gods and, in the process, become gods themselves; Arawete killers however became gods without being consumed (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 239). Like gods they could already see from multiple points of view.

This ability to see from multiple points of view was what made Arawete killers so dangerously temperamental (Ibid: 242) and what made Teresa so jumpy about Curaca. The Nahua say that killers are always angry and that anger is both the cause and effect of killing. This is how they explained their warfare before they 'fell out of the forest'[152]. Anger is considered a dangerous emotion because it triggers transformations in point of view and specifically the capacity to see one's kin as 'other'. This is also why the Nahua view shamans with so much suspicion; shamans are, by definition,

[151] Nevertheless, Perez Gil points out that Yaminawa killers also acquire the 'hunting luck' of their victim. She argues that post-homicide practices were not just about total elimination of the victim as some of their positive qualities are incorporated. The Yaminawa also used to put feathers in their noses to indicate the number of their victims, an indication of the value attributed to warlikeness and power. However, this practice seems to have been abandoned a generation before contact (2009:7).

[152] Explored further in Chapter 4.

people who can simultaneously hold multiple points of view. This is how they can become boas or jaguars at death[153].

Blood and other bodily substances are thus interpenetrated with *yoshi*, spiritual forces denoting the behaviours, affects and dispositions of each being. This explains how the Nahua can acquire the characteristics of people they kill or even the characteristics of animals they eat. Eating animals and killing people are structural equivalents of each other that are different only in degree rather than kind. The following section examines the sick, another class of people who are also considered extremely unstable.

Starving, dirty and bored

For several years I had suffered from continuous headaches and digestive problems and had received sporadic treatment from Nahua shamans. However, after a particularly bad episode, Curaca decided it was time for a comprehensive treatment. For ten days I ate nothing except boiled manioc and the odd banana, I did not wash in the river and during the day I did not leave the house. Every second night I would take my hammock and tie it up in Juan's house, where everyone was taking *ayahuasca*. My healers, Curaca and *Auxini,* would spend hours singing *xoiti* (healing songs, literally 'blowers') into a cup of *mama* (corn beer) which I would drink when they had finished. The next day I was forbidden from washing, exposing myself to the sun and from eating anything that, as far as I could see, was remotely nutritious or tasty.

Cheating was not an option. Serjali's network of spies ensured that everyone knew about my diet. No one offered me *masato* and I could not even eat manioc that had not been cooked in a separate pot. Salt, of course, was out of the question. Curaca explained:

> *I have helped you with tobacco (the song of tobacco[154]), its dizziness, its headache, its power (pae). After a few days you can eat something*

[153] See Chapter 5.
[154] See Chapter 6 for transcript.

with blood but for now you must eat nothing with blood like deer or tapir, they have powerful yoshi and can take you away and kill you. They only want people who are thin and ill, they are scared by those who are strong and heavy.

To be thin is to be without blood, to lack identity and therefore to be vulnerable to capture. All animals, birds or fish were off limits for the first few days, even those with weak spirits. The smell of the meat, fish or even salt would contaminate the *mama* impregnated with *xoiti* that was working in my stomach and prevent it from working effectively.

The consumption of male spider monkeys, woolly monkeys, capuchin and white monkeys was also forbidden for the foreseeable future. According to the Nahua, these monkeys spend their days in the tops of the trees chewing tobacco ('leaves' from a human's point of view) and thus have associated headaches and dizziness. Female spider monkeys and howler monkeys who do not chew tobacco can be eaten safely.

The *huacahua,* one of the largest fish in the Mishagua, was also forbidden. It has strong smelling fat which can contaminate the *xoiti* and also makes waves in the water. Thus, after drinking *mama,* the consumption of *huacahua* makes the patient dizzy and unstable. Large parrots and macaws were forbidden fruits. They too have headaches because they eat 'dirtiness' (*chaka*) from clay licks. Other birds that eat only fruit and seeds do not suffer headaches and were edible. The tapir was not only dangerous because of its powerful spirit that could capture my soul but because it feeds on leaves of *toé* (Sp)[155] which make it overheat.

Finally, even when I was allowed to eat a small fowl (cooked in my own pot of course) I was warned to burn the bones to prevent them from being eaten by dogs. Dogs (unlike chickens for example) also have headaches. If they ate my discarded bones I could also acquire their headaches. Manioc beer was also forbidden because the Nahua notice that the agouti who have 'bad headaches' are always chewing their manioc in their gardens[156]. The connections between animals, vegetable matter and

[155] *Brugmansia sp*. Also known as Datura, a powerful hallucinogenic plant.
[156] To explain thisthe Nahua told me the myth of a man who gets lost in the forest (*nafamixtifo*). Eventually he meets the agouti (*mari*) people who point him in the right direction and offer him some manioc beer.

people were even more complex than it first appeared. It is not only 'you are what you eat'. You could also become like a creature that eats what you have eaten.

One lady called Maco described how she observed similar restrictions when she was stung by a stingray and subsequently healed with *mama*. For two months she ate no fish or animals. "I ate small birds and I have never seen a ray since. If we eat fish we smell of fish and they can sting us again." Treatment for snakebite results in similar dietary prohibitions. Shamans heal the people with the *xoiti* that sing of the poison (*pae*) of the stingray or snake.

The Nahua refer to the power or force of a substance as its *pae*, be it tobacco, *ayahuasca* or stingray poison. *Pae* is a neutral force, one that has the 'capacity', to both harm and heal[157]. This is why people take care not to offend the owners of these forces through contamination with certain smells. As Curaca explained, 'they will recognise us and be angry and sting us again'.

Sex and smoking tobacco were also off limits to me. The smell and heat of sex would contaminate the *xoiti* while the potent smell of the tobacco could cause a headache by angering the owners of tobacco whose power was being used for my treatment. Similarly, when people take *ayahuasca* or use tobacco, even if they are not ill, they should avoid having sex immediately afterwards. Ideally, a man should not even get close to a woman; the owner of *ayahuasca* is a healer and is offended by the smell of heat and sex. Unless they are being healed, the Nahua, unlike many indigenous Amazonians, impose few, if any, dietary restrictions on those taking *ayahuasca*. This was not the case however with its predecessor, *tsimo* (literally bitterness), a vine which the Nahua used before they 'fell out of the forest' and whose use was subject to a whole series of strict food taboos both before and after consumption[158].

This principle of contamination also explains why I was prevented from exposure to the sun or washing in the river. The water would dilute and weaken the *xoiti* while in

[157] The same principle is applied by the Shipibo in the use of plants as love medicine (*noirao*) whereby the characteristics of the plants impregnate the victim (Leclerc 2004). Leclerc describes a contemporary form of Shipibo love medicine whereby they attach a photo of themselves to that of the object of their desire and connect the two with a piece of onion. The onion makes the person cry thereby eliciting their compassion and love for the other (2004:171).
[158] The comparison between *tsimo* and *ayahuasca* is explored further in Chapter 6.

my vulnerable state I would acquire the heat of the sun, it would '*cutiparme*'[159]. The capacity to *cutipar* is not only limited to animals, fish and plants. Nahua women assiduously avoid standing on a puddle with rainwater that looks like gasoline. It resembles a rainbow and can cause a haemorrhage as her stomach overheats. The stars and the moon have a 'coldness' that, like the heat of the rainbow or the sun, causes illness by heating up a woman's stomach and making her bleed[160].

The same principle of dilution and contamination applied to people learning *xoiti*. Initiates are helped by a shaman who sings the songs they wish to learn into a bowl of *mama* that the trainee shaman drinks. A person wanting to learn (literally collect) *xoiti* can only eat bitter things. "Sweet things make our stomachs dirty, we collect them by listening and then our mouths speak them. *Xoiti* come from the stomach, this is where they stay" explained Curaca[161]. When Curaca learned *xoiti*, he fasted for five days drinking only mashed manioc with chili and vomiting regularly to clean out his stomach. He avoided meat soup which rots the lining of the stomach and fish soup that contaminates the stomach with its oil (*sari*).

The process of becoming a shaman is thus just as much about transforming the body as listening to the songs[162]. Shamanic initiates, like those who are being healed, are in a vulnerable and transformative state. Perez Gil describes how a Yawanawa shaman who was trying to learn a specific song did not observe the food taboos. He became ill and since this time has never been able to learn this song (2001:339). Just as the passing of trials enhances their abilities, so do their failures make them ill.

For many indigenous Amazonians, illness has been described as a loss of sense of self where the "modification of selfhood is experienced as pathology" (Taylor 2007:21). "Illness is a loss of clear sense of identity where self perception is clouded by uncertainty and the patient is in a state of self confusion. In this context, curing is a means of reasserting self awareness" (Taylor 1996:207). Nevertheless, for the Nahua it

[159] Similarly, Airo Pai men taking *yage* could not smell menstrual blood or eat greasy food as this would offend good spirits who would normally give them powers (Belaunde 2005:142).
[160] The revenge of the moon is a recurring theme amongst Amazonian peoples (Belaunde 2005).
[161] The Yaminawa explain that all the preparations and restrictions are ways of learning to remember, "you do not remember on a full stomach" (Naveira Carid and Perez Gil 2002:175). Townsley also describes how Yaminahua shamans eat songbirds to give them voice (1993:453).
[162] Naveira Carid and Perez Gil describe how Yaminawa shamans are given songs in their dreams by the boa after they eat boa excrement (2002:176).

is not illness *per se* that results in the array of dietary and behavioural restrictions but the healing process itself. It is precisely those who have taken *mama* and have incorporated these external powers through the consumption of the songs that are so vulnerable.

Part 5: Softness is relational

The *cutipa*

Throughout Peruvian Amazonia, the Quechua word *cutipa* refers to an act of revenge. The Nahua use it as a gloss to describe various phenomena that include straightforward spirit attack, contagion and impregnation. The Nahua translate *cutipar* as *kupi* which they translate into Spanish as *recuperar* (recover) and use it to describe their vengeance warfare[163].

The meaning of *kupi* is more subtle than simple revenge. The sense of *kupi* is of giving back what one has been given or an "attaching of the features or behaviours of the animal on their consumer" (Gow 1991:154). As Fausto describes, "the Amerindian word for revenge is almost always to pay back or give back reflecting the idea of giving exactly what you got rather than reciprocity" (1999:936).

Thus, *cutipa* is used by the Nahua to describe a range of cosmic consequences. When a young woman has eaten a fruit or a plant with an outgrowth, twins are born. Cows cause baldness because they are bald; capybaras cause skin infections because they live in long grass, while male monkeys cause dizziness because they are constantly chewing tobacco. Plants get angry too; the smell of sex can anger the owners of tobacco and *ayahuasca* causing them to give their victims their *pae*. As Perez Gil reports, the Yaminawa say that they can also be *cutipado* by inappropriate contact with *yoshi* by urinating too close to a house, wandering around at night or, for example, if a killer gets too close to the fire and touches the ashes then his legs may turn white

[163] The Yaminawa also use it to refer to commercial exchanges (Perez Gil 2008:5).

(2008:5). These forms of *cutipa* go beyond spirit attack; they are forms of impregnation whereby the person acquires the characteristics of the animals they eat or cosmic agents they come into contact with especially at times of vulnerability such as after homicide or during adolescence.

I have also described other forms of *cutipa* that include drinking water and taking a bath after being healed, or eating the oily meat of the *conchi* that results in diarroheah. The Nahua scoff at the idea that the *conchi* is capable of an attack on the person's spirit. Instead, they are explicit that such forms of the *cutipa* are forms of contamination. Like the Yaminawa (Perez Gil 2008), the Nahua use the word *cutipa* to refer to spirit attack and illnesses caused by contagion and impregnation but they only use *kupi* very specifically to describe the effects of impregnation.

For the Wari, according to Vilaça, this distinction between contamination and impregnation does not exist. Vilaça argues that, "all apparent forms of contagion are forms of attack on the subjectivity of the individual" (2002:358). I would hesitate in going this far with my ethnographic material as it seems that the Nahua do make a distinction between contamination (contagion) and impregnation (attack). Drinking water, for example, simply dilutes the effectiveness of the *xoiti* but does not cause any impregnation of the person. Some meat, such as that of the tiny catfish, are similarly contaminating because of their greasiness or smell whilst others trigger a form of possession or impregnation[164].

The possibility of impregnation reflects the Nahua point of view that they live in a universe of subjects. That is, they share their world with non-humans (animals, plants, forest spirits) who are conceived of as humans; subjects with intentionality and agency capable of 'giving a person' their characteristics. This is why the Piro describe the blisters one receives from using an axe as a process of *cutipa*; the axe is making the person work just as the person made the axe work (P.Gow pers comm). These non-

[164] This difference with the Wari may be because the Wari, unlike the Nahua, do not seem to conceive of a liminal category of soul that is equivalent to the *yoshi*. Nevertheless, the distinction is made implicitly by the Wari in the arena of endocannibalism. The flesh of the dead is eaten by affines for whom it was a potentially dangerous contaminant which could cause sickness. Nevertheless, it could not impregnate them and cause a loss of self which is what occurs if they eat their deceased kin (Conklin 2001:124). This may reflect the difference the Wari make between eating flesh and blood; "while enemy blood gave the Wari vitality, enemy flesh was an inert substance" (Ibid: 153).

humans should not be seen as predatory species malevolently inclined towards human beings. They are indifferent to people but their powers, their *pae*, can be used both to harm and heal.

The 'soft bodies' of women, children, assassins and those who are receiving shamanic treatment refers to a moment when one's selfhood is in doubt and when the subjectivity of other cosmic agents can be acquired. The Kuna describe the condition of people receiving shamanic treatment as a state of 'rubberness' (Fortis 2008:138) while Lagrou argues that illness is the other side of the coin of shamanic initiation; "the shaman is a warrior who conquered the enemy on a battlefield represented by his own body" (1998:60).

Nevertheless, Nahua 'softness', like Kuna 'rubberness', is not an absolute state but a relative one *vis a vis* their relationship with others. Just as personhood is processual and fashioned over time so is it relational, existing only in relationship with others. *Yoshi* is therefore best understood not only as capacity but subjectivity. This relational dimension began to emerge when I was struggling to understand the difference between warfare and hunting.

Hunting and warfare: Battles of point of view

For the Nahua, the assassin is a person who is highly vulnerable to a loss of self. The spilling of their enemies' blood results in impregnation by their *yoshi*. Hunters however seem to be at no risk to such impregnation from their prey. This raised the question as to why men should be vulnerable to the effects of the *cutipa* after killing other people, yet immune to the effects after killing animals[165]?

Part of the answer clearly lies in the difference between the bodies of men and women. Most hunters are men and men's bodies (unlike women's) are fashioned to be hard and immutable which enables them to resist the effects of impregnation by the

[165] I am grateful to Peter Gow for drawing my attention to this question and Cecilia McCallum who helped me reflect upon this point.

yoshi of their prey. This is why women are considered more vulnerable than men because their bodies are made to be creative and transformative. Women need to be able to absorb external powers (male) and 'cook' these into children in order to make proper Cashinahua persons (McCallum 2001).

However, not all animals are equally benign for hunters. Tello was told by his Nahua informants that killing jaguars and eagles results in *cutipa* (2002:134) while the Yaminahua say this is why one should not eat jaguars or anacondas as they have strong *yoshi* (Townsley 1993:452)[166]. Perhaps the distinction I am drawing between contamination and impregnation reflects not a difference in kind but in degree and relates to the differing strengths of *yoshi* of different beings. In other words, while all beings have subjectivity, some (especially people) have more subjectivity than others[167]. The concept of *cutipa* cannot be appreciated without this intersubjective component. In the words of Alfred Gell, "taboos (food) show that ego is not apart from the world but part of its intersubjective realities" (1977:118).

This principle of intersubjectivity is most often seen in the way indigenous Amazonian peoples think about the difference between animals and humans, which is often a notoriously blurry divide (S Hugh-Jones 1996:128). As Viveiros de Castro describes, animals are conscious subjects and are fully able to reciprocate human actions (2004:469)[168]. He contrasts a western fear of solipsism (being unable to appreciate the 'other's' point of view) with that of indigenous Amazonians whose problem is the reverse; how can they separate themselves from other beings and thus avoid 'exchanging perspectives' and becoming 'the other' (Ibid: 476). In other words, animals are not just like people, they are people.

This capacity to 'exchange perspectives' has some advantages: Wari warriors kill their enemies specifically to adopt their point of view while Nahua shamans try to

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[166] Perez Gil reports that the Yaminawa must diet and drink an emetic if they kill a boa to avoid effects of the *cutipa* (2001:168). Personally, I have come across no examples where hunters are at risk of the *cutipa,* even in cases where they have killed animals with powerful *yoshi* such as jaguars. Nevertheless, I never asked the Nahua this question.

[167] Surrallés describes for the Candoshi. Those beings (notably larger animals and humans) with stronger *vani* (subjectivity/soul) are more able to make these communications with other beings (2003:54).

[168] However, according to Rival (2002) the Huaorani see prey simply as food, they consume animals only to eat rather than the 'productive consumption' emphasised by Fausto (1999). This is a perpetual and unchanging situation, species have been fixed and they cannot change their status as predators or prey.

incorporate the powers of plants and animals to help them heal the sick. However, the effect of 'exchanging perspectives' is potentially devastating as the subject can lose their point of view on the world. Nahua warriors, like their Wari counterparts, are also subject to the forces of impregnation by their victims but avoid, rather than seek this possession. Similarly, the consumption of food is risky as it can also lead to a loss of self. Throughout Amazonia, it is shamans that help deal with these problems by desubjectifying slain animals before they are eaten[169].

Throughout Amazonia, it is only shamans who are capable of adeptly managing the ability to have multiple points of view without losing their own sense of self. Yet, as many ethnographies confirm, this ability also means that shamans are often poor hunters as they tend to see all animals as humans (Viveiros de Castro 1998a:47). Viveiros de Castro describes these encounters with non-humans as "battles of points of view". When a person sees an animal as a person that means they have lost their own point of view, the animals are humans and see the person as an animal. The Amazonian adage that appearances can be deceiving reflects the fact that one can never be sure which point of view is dominant (Ibid: 89).

Roe describes the risks of such processes for Shipibo women who are vulnerable to the seductive powers of river dolphins during menstruation because of their excessive openness. In perspectival terms, this openness reflects the fact that they no longer see the dolphin as 'other' but instead, as a viable sexual partner and have assumed its point of view (1982:120). Many Nahua myths describe how people lose this sense of difference with animals. One of these stories (*isofini,* 'captured by spider monkey') describes how a young boy is captured by a spider monkey. The monkey gave him a bitter herb to put in his eyes and he begins to see the world through the eyes of a spider monkey and see small forest birds as howler monkeys which he hunts. One day, he finds his human family again but by this time he has a wife and family amongst the spider monkeys and although his father comes to visit, the boy no longer wishes to return.

[169] For example, Tukanoan shamans transform animals into fish (S Hugh-Jones 1996:127).

Viveiros de Castro and others argue that for indigenous Amazonians, a point of view depends on the nature of one's body (Viveiros de Castro 1998)[170]. Thus, over time, in a community where substances are continually being shared and exchanged, bodies become similar and its residents see the world in a similar fashion. This is why a Nahua person who lives apart from their kin can become *nafa*.

Hunting

Viveiros de Castro focuses on the body, those 'observable differences', as the origin of specific perspectives, the means by which each subject sees itself as human (1998a:44). For the Nahua however, it is not just through these 'observable differences' but through the control of one's emotional relationship with these 'others' that permits identification with, or desubjectification of an 'other'. This was most evident in the attitude of Nahua hunters to their prey.

On many occasions, animals that the Nahua hunted did not die immediately and my caring hosts seemed perfectly happy to let them bleed to a messy and very painful death at the bottom of the boat. Their racked gasps and tortured writhing was a bitter pill to swallow for someone brought up on a diet of David Attenborough programmes and in a country where the RSPCA was established 60 years before the NSPCC. When I pleaded for them to put the animals out of their misery they simply laughed and said, "It's dead". "No, it's most definitely alive" I countered, gesturing towards its mouth that was opening and shutting with agonising gasps. "It's dying" they said. "I know, but it's suffering" I argued. I did not feel competent enough with a machete to do the business myself; I was sure I would only increase the poor creature's pain. The Nahua countered. "If we kill it they will suffer, they will be sad and tears will fall from their eyes". To appease me they would occasionally bang the poor thing halfheartedly over the head with a pole but this would simply enrage the dying animal and incur raucous laughter from the Nahua.

[170] See Chapter 3.

Nahua hunters thus avoid acting 'humanely' towards an animal they kill. They avoid making eye contact so they will not see the animal crying and feel pity[171]. Compassion is a marker of identification with others; it is precisely the quality that defines relationships with kin[172]. In order to maintain the animals 'otherness' the Nahua establish a relationship of aggressive nonchalance towards their prey. By 'othering' their prey they avoid becoming subject to the animal's own sense of self, in other words they desubjectify their prey, retaining their hardness and avoiding a crisis of perspective[173].

Nahua attitudes to their pets are similarly callous. Unlike the Waiwai who breastfeed their dogs, treating them as members of their family (Howard 1991a), Nahua treatment of their scrawny hunting dogs often pricked my English conscience. Some men even shot their own dogs in fits of anger. Nevertheless, where pets did come to be treated as part of the family, people's attitudes towards them changed. In 2003, the death of *pishki*, Elena's pet parrot, prompted a mini funeral equivalent to those held for a person. However, the grief was only felt by Elena, the only person who had established a social relationship with *pishki*; everyone else felt as distant as if it were a wild parrot. The identity of animals, just like people, is relational. To Elena, *pishki* was her 'beautiful child' but to everyone else he was just one more anonymous and irritable parrot[174].

This relational sense of identity means that many indigenous Amazonian peoples are similarly conscious of the dangers of establishing relationships with their prey. This often influences the choices of hunting technology. The Huaorani (Rival 1996) and Matis (Erikson 2001) for example, prefer the use of blowguns tipped with *curare* that result in minimal bloodshed and shift the responsibility for killing to the *curare* poison rather than the hunter[175]. Stephen Hugh-Jones argues that, part of the reason for the

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[171] This reflects the power of mutual gaze in Amazonia and the risk of exchanging perspectives. The Huaorani's occasional compassion for animals is also triggered by eye contact (Rival cited in S Hugh-Jones 1996:19).

[172] This issue is discussed further in Chapter 4.

[173] Stephen Hugh-Jones notes that, unsurprisingly there are few examples of compassion for animals in the literature. A notable exception includes Erikson's description of Chacobo pets; he suggests that making pets of orphaned animals whose parents they have killed might be a way of mollifying animals they kill (Cited in S Hugh-Jones 1996:17).

[174] Also see Chapter 6 for further analysis of this incident.

[175] The use of *curare* tipped blowpipe darts is considered to be the ideal form of hunting by the Matis as it kills gently without bloodshed (Erikson 2001:108). It is a non-aggressive form of hunting, like seduction, and also explains their identification with jaguars because they hunt by stealth rather than bloodshed.

general preference for killing smaller animals over larger ones is that large animals have to be killed with spears and from very close range and thus force the hunter to act like a killer and a predator (1996:131). This could also partly explain the current preference that the Nahua have for guns (over bows and arrows) which enable them to kill large prey at a much greater distance.

Stephen Hugh-Jones argues that this is why the ideal form of game for most indigenous Amazonians are those animals who resemble humans, that are different but not too different from people and why social animals, that are peaceful and gregarious, are preferred over a solitary predator such as the jaguar[176]. To eat such animals would be to become angry and solitary oneself (Ibid: 130).

For many indigenous Amazonian and hunting peoples in general, predation is therefore not a subject preying on an object but about two subjects relating to each other (Fausto 1999:937). Willerslev (2007) describes how the Yugakahir in Siberia deceive their prey into believing they are 'like them' through a process that he terms 'genuine impersonation' in which in order to attract them the hunters temporarily identify with their prey[177]. The danger of this strategy is that the hunters can lose their sense of self entirely and literally become their prey. In a similar fashion, Umeda hunters in Papua New Guinea identify with their prey so strongly that they cannot eat what they kill as this would be equivalent to incest (Gell 1977:123). This is perhaps the risk of displaying too much compassion which the Nahua are so keen to avoid[178]. The ideal relationship with game animals for the Nahua is no relationship whatsoever.

Warfare

The dangers of hunting and killing thus lie in the possibility of 'exchanging perspectives'. While the Nahua are very adept at avoiding such 'crises of perspective'

[176] Conklin describes the preferred game for the Wari as those animals that possess human capacities, "cannibalism is the most proper form of consumption" (2001:194) only spider monkeys are not considered to have human spirits yet are good to eat. This is because in a myth they were affines of people (Ibid: 195).
[177] See Chapter 3 for further discussion.
[178] The dangers of displaying compassion for game animals are shared by the Yugakahir. Willerslev (2007) recounts a myth in which the compassion felt for a moose resulted in a severe shortage of game.

when they hunt, this is much more difficult during homicide. After homicide they identify with their victim; their sense of self becomes vulnerable as they are unable to establish a relationship of otherness.

On the other hand, the radically observable differences between humans and animals combined with the nonchalant attitudes of the Nahua towards their prey, enables hunters to avoid entering into any kind of relationship with their food. Human victims, on the other hand, have similar bodies and so, the likelihood of adopting their perspective is much greater. It is much more dangerous to kill those who are like you (humans) than those who are radically different (animals)[179].

However, these shifts in perspective are not simply related to observable bodily differences but are linked to emotional states. If the Nahua were to adopt an attitude of compassion towards an animal, this would constitute the adoption of a relationship of similarity. Effectively this is what happens to the Nahua assassin. Faced with a loss of their victim's otherness they lose their sense of self and assume that of their victim.

Eating, on the other hand is the incorporation of the 'other' and even more difficult to prevent the subsequent change in point of view. For the Nahua, this is more dangerous for women than men. Women are designed to be soft in order to transform external forces into the production of children and food. This means they are more vulnerable to a loss of sense of self through encounters with 'others', thus explaining their greater reticence in engaging with 'others' in the realms of shamanism, hunting and travelling. Men are less vulnerable through the consumption of food because they are trained to be hard while women's vulnerability reflects the fact they must be soft in order to be fertile. As they age, women become harder. In effect they become like men and they smoke tobacco and take *ayahuasca*.

[179] This may be part of the explanation why the Matis describe killing Korubo and white people as very different processes. If they killed a Korubo they vomited blood but if they killed a white person they only vomited water (Erikson 2002:189). The blood indicates that this was a much more serious process of impregnation, perhaps reflecting the closer association the Matis felt with the Korubo.

Fear and compassion

The Nahua do not have a list of codified rules about what they can and cannot eat. There are often disagreements about what is edible and what is not as well as differences between what people say and what people do. In many cases, they told me that one cannot eat predators because they eat raw flesh, yet on one occasion when we accidentally killed a puma it was eaten. Nonetheless, it was only eaten by old men presumably because of their greater hardness.

For the Piro, their dietary restrictions are not a question of rules but a question of fear (P.Gow pers comm) which in turn is considered a lack of knowledge. Piro children lack this knowledge which exposes them to risks of *cutipa* and soul loss (Gow 1991:232)[180]. Meanwhile, for the Nahua it is compassion that can incur the risk of *cutipa*. Both fear and compassion are about establishing a relationship with another being; one cannot feel pity or fear without some form of relationship. Compassion and fear are both emotions that shift their subject's perspective on the world. They result in the acceptance of another being's subjectivity and the associated loss of one's own, whether it be that of one's prey or the white man whom one is meeting for the first time.

Like the Piro, the Nahua also associate fear with ignorance. They explain their prior fear of white people and their things as a result of this ignorance. Fear can thus work in both directions. For the Piro, fear makes one more vulnerable to the effects of the *cutipa* but fear can also block the exchange of perspectives. Their instant loss of fear after the Nahua 'fell out of the forest' explains their rapid acquisition of white people's things, language and practices.

Conclusion

The Nahua live in a world where contact with difference represents an opportunity for acquiring powerful knowledge and establishing productive social relationships. Unlike their Machiguenga neighbours, travelling, dreaming, hallucinating and any other

[180] The Shipibo say that people can use medicinal plants to acquire their properties without losing their sense of self as long as they have no fear (Colpron cited in Belaunde 2005: 205-6).

activity that establishes contact with these powerful others is valued and sought after: an obsession with 'otherness' that makes them typically Panoan (Erikson 1990).

Nevertheless, the Nahua recognise the dangers and risks inherent in such encounters. Some of these risks concern contagion. Having sex after being healed with *mama* heats up and contaminates the healing songs in the patient's stomach, eating salt pollutes the songs and washing in the river simply dilutes their effectiveness. The more serious of these risks operate at the level of impregnation. From a Nahua point of view, they live in a universe full of threats. Forest demons, animals and sorcerers can attack and capture a person's spirit; even the spirits of dead relatives can seduce the living into joining them when they are ill. Even when asleep the Nahua are not safe. Their *feroyoshi* leave the body and wander as they dream but in so doing are prone to attacks from the spirit world. Much of the exposure to these dangers comes through the consumption of food. "Eating is not an intrinsically beneficiary act… but exposes the person to all of the hazards of the relationships of which he/she is composed" (Strathern 1992:294). Misuse of plants such as tobacco and *ayahuasca* can result in vengeance on the part of their owners. For the Nahua, even apparently inanimate phenomena such as the sun, moon, stars and rainbows have intentionality and power.

All people are subject to these cosmic threats but some are more vulnerable than others. It is this capacity for transformation and instability that connects babies and children, new mothers and pubescent girls to assassins and those receiving shamanic treatment. The inextricable connection between *yoshi* and *yora* explains the Nahua use of a physical idiom, the 'soft body' to express this vulnerability.

In addition, given the association between blood and *yoshi*, it is no surprise that larger animals are considered risky to eat and actions that result in the spilling of blood are treated with such concern. Those at risk must observe food and other social restrictions to avoid the risk of impregnation and body painting to prevent impregnation by marauding spirits. The Nahua are a variation on an Amazonian theme that emphasises the instability of the human condition. "Humanity is conceived of as a transitory position which is continuously produced out of a universe of subjectivities" (Vilaça 2002:349).

The key however is to maintain the balance. External powers are dangerous but must be incorporated for a man to be a good hunter or an effective shaman and for a woman to produce children. This inherent instability is countered by the forces of kinship and conviviality that constructs a stable sense of selfhood through memories of care and affection (Taylor 1996). However, for the Nahua, in common with other Amazonian indigenous peoples, "complete stability is never achieved…the latent possibility to transform always remains" (Vilaça 2005:458).

The Jivaroan speaking Achuar have an elaborate means for reasserting their selfhood. During their vision quests, the Achuar encounter the *arutam* (spirits) of their dead relatives that results in a form of enhanced selfhood as they become more similar to their ancestor. After these encounters they feel compelled to make plans to realise their visions (Taylor 1996:209). The Nahua may not have the elaborate designs or initiation rituals of the Cashinahua or Shipibo that fix people and make them heavy. They may not have the enhanced sense of selfhood and convictions about their future of the Achuar but because the Nahua eat souls rather than animals they are certainly picky with their food.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the unstable sense of self of the Nahua is related to their inherently mutable bodies. Their softness is perhaps better translated as a state of elasticity or rubberness that equips them with both an openness towards the outside world and yet a resilience to being overwhelmed. Sometimes the Nahua seek to incorporate the other while at others they seek to distance themselves. Nevertheless, these relations with others, whether through hunting, eating, warfare and shamanism depend not only on the ingestion of substances but by regulating the perception of difference. In this way, Nahua hunters achieve distance from their prey through their nonchalant indifference. The following chapter examines how the Nahua also use their senses to manage the perception of 'difference' and thus their unstable selves.

Chapter 3

Of aftershave and moisturising cream

Antonio had been staying with me in Lima for two weeks to assist with the transcription of myths. Before he returned to the jungle I gave him S/.350 (about $100), enough to buy the fuel for the three day boat journey from Sepahua to Serjali. I asked him to keep the receipts and dropped him off at the bus station. A month later I set off for Serjali. In Sepahua I found Antonio; he was penniless and hungry and surviving on boiled bananas. "What happened, why did you come back to Sepahua?" I asked. "I never made it in the first place, I ran out of money" he replied. From amongst his meagre possessions he plucked a crumpled piece of paper, his accounts.

1 pot of facial moisturiser – 30 soles
1 tube of hair gel – 35 soles
1 scented deodorant – 35 soles
1 bottle of aftershave – 30 soles
1 pair of shorts for his son Wilfredo – 4 soles
1 tee shirt for his daughter Daniela – 8 soles
1 pair of trousers for his son Heysel – 20 soles
1 blouse for his wife Eloisa – 25 soles
30 *juanes* (rice and chicken wrapped in banana leaves) and 20 chicken kebabs – street food snacks for his entire extended family – 110 soles

I groaned. Antonio had blown his entire budget on over priced cosmetics and snack food and had been forced to stay over a month in Sepahua going hungry. Deep into my fieldwork this came as no surprise. For the Nahua, money is *pei* (leaves or feathers, not only because of its physical resemblance but because it really does seem to grow on

trees. "What is money worth anyway?" shrugged a grinning Elmer, a young Nahua man who had just dropped his wallet containing three months wages in the river.

From a Nahua point of view they live in a world of infinite abundance. Their forest and rivers throb and burst with everything they need: hordes of wild boar, plump turkeys and gigantic fish, materials for houses and medicines. For everything else there is always mahogany as they live in one of the last areas of the Amazon where ancient mahogany trees still stand. A log or two, even at Sepahua prices, is enough to buy shotgun cartridges, clothes, salt and soap, fishing hooks and gasoline and to splash out on some moisturising cream. Despite their lack of material goods and their perpetual pennilessness, the Nahua do not see money as a scarce resource.

It is simply impossible for the Nahua, (or anyone living with them) to keep money for more than the most fleeting of instants. They must spend it immediately or it will vanish. They will be forced by the same pressures that oblige them to share food with kin to cater to the financial needs and whims of their relatives. It was unfortunate for Antonio that when he arrived in Sepahua from Lima he was faced by almost 50 of his relatives who had floated downriver from Serjali to meet him. They knew that his wallet would be full. From personal experience it is easy to imagine the scene. Surrounded by smiling relatives using his kin term to remind him of their relationships, they would have expressed how happy they were that he had arrived and how afraid they had been that he had been killed, chopped up and turned into tuna fish while in Lima[181]. With the niceties over they would have tenderly but directly informed him of their suffering and hunger and how they would love to eat a delicious *juane*. It would have been no contest. Antonio probably gave away most of his money before he had put down his bag.

So normal did I find this attitude to money that it was not until I was submitting expenses to my funders that I found Antonio's crumpled accounts and began to muse. The clothes for his immediate family and food for his extended family were clearly related to the values attributed to sharing and generosity that the Nahua value so highly but the cosmetics seemed more interesting. Why is a 25 year old man who lives in the

[181] The Nahua are often suspicious about the provenance of canned tuna fish and often commented, albeit ironically, that it might be human flesh.

jungle spending his hard earned cash on facial moisturising cream, hair gel, aftershave and deodorant over and above apparently much more useful items such as fish hooks and shotgun cartridges?

To answer this question we must return to Nahua experiences of 'falling out of the forest'. Antonio was only two in 1984 but Chapter 1 described how Juan, his father-in-law, experienced this first encounter.

> *We washed in the river and they gave us soap which smelled so nice we threw away our sweet smelling plants. We wanted to be like the mestizos and have sex with their women.*

This chapter argues that to understand Antonio's purchases one must first understand the critical role that smell and body decoration play in the lived and conceptual world of the Nahua. Antonio's purchases only make sense if moisturising cream and aftershave are seen as equivalents of apparently more 'traditional' forms of decoration such as feathers and body paint. However, neither moisturising cream nor feathers should be judged as things in themselves, but rather as tools that are valued for what they can achieve. This explains Nahua lack of nostalgia for the abandonment of their material culture that initially, I found so problematic. In this case, moisturising cream and aftershave had replaced aromatic plants in the game of seduction.

The senses

This chapter is an ethnography of two of the senses, smell and vision, and how, like other senses, they are channels of mediation between bodies and tools for communication between self and others. Using the concepts of cosmological perspectivism elaborated by Viveiros de Castro (1998), I argue that the senses play two broad communicative roles for the Nahua that were subtly different from my own understanding. The first lies in their ability to temporarily alter the point of view of the recipient of this sensory information while the second reflects their ability to affect the way the bearers of this sensory information perceive themselves.

Smell, at least for the Nahua, is the more powerful of these two senses as not only can it seduce and disguise (type 1) but it can also cause illness or death as well as heal (type 2). Similarly, body decoration can prevent spirit capture and spirit attack by disguising the wearer and seduce spirits and people (type 1). Nevertheless, the Nahua, unlike many other indigenous Amazonian peoples, attribute relatively less transformative capacities to changes in body decoration and clothing both today and in mythic time. This difference lies not in any fundamental difference in ontologies but because the Nahua see clothing as 'skin' (*fichi*) rather than *yora*, embodied self. Changes in skin are powerful tools for communication but have limited capacity to transform the self. Smell, on the other hand, is a sense much more intimately associated with the person's self (*yora*) and is more comparable to the consumption of food than the use of clothing. Like food, a smell has the power to impregnate the body and cause profound transformations.

The only way to appreciate the Nahua abandonment of their penis strings and sweet smelling plants in favour of tee shirts and aftershave immediately after they 'fell out of the forest' is by understanding that Nahua aesthetic and aromatic choices are about influencing the way they are perceived by 'others' whether they be game animals, potential lovers or Peruvians. Their 'fall from the forest' thrust them into a world of very different beings with different aesthetic and aromatic values and it is unsurprising that their perfumes and clothing should change accordingly.

In itself this is not particular to the Nahua. It is self evident that clothing is a universal means for influencing the perception of others. However, although the Nahua also understand clothing in this way, the mechanism with which they explain such processes is subtly different. Using the clothes of *mestizos* allows them to **imitate** rather than **impersonate** *mestizos*; clothing is more than a mask of the person as the concept of impersonation implies. Instead, clothing enables the wearer to adopt a different set of dispositions and affects, a '**genuine impersonation**' that, if uncontrolled, can lead to profound changes in identity.

In fact, the formulation of the question itself, 'why did the Nahua abandon their monkey teeth necklaces in favour of Manchester United shirts' says much more about my own interests than those of the Nahua for whom 'change' was not a problem that

required an explanation. The question reflected the tendency of my own society to objectify indigenous peoples, associating them with a specific form of material culture, a prejudice that has unfortunate political consequences for indigenous peoples' claims to 'authenticity' if they appear to have changed.

Chapter outline

This chapter is divided in two main parts. The first part explores the different contexts in which smell is powerfully transformative and the qualities of smell that lend itself to such processes.

The second part addresses the power of vision; it is more extensive and is structured in several sub-sections. The first describes the importance that the Nahua attribute to their appearance. The second sets this in the wider context of indigenous Amazonian body decoration and explores the role that body decoration plays in efforts to seduce or disguise by examining 'skin' as a tool for communication. A third section poses the question of whether changes in body decoration can enable more profound changes in identity. It briefly reviews the extensive literature on perspectival transformations in Amazonia and explores the nature of 'transformation' for the Nahua in their daily lives and mythic repertoire. Armed with this background the final section addresses the question of why the Nahua were so keen to adopt *mestizo* clothing immediately after they 'fell out of the forest'. It argues that although styles of body decoration have changed historically, an underlying principle has remained; clothing is a tool for influencing relationships with the 'other'. Nevertheless, clothing is more than a means of impersonating *mestizos* for the Nahua. Using *mestizo* clothing is a form of 'genuine impersonation' as it incurs a real risk of actually becoming *mestizo*.

A: Smell and scent

A smellscape

Walking in the forest with the Nahua is a journey into a world of scent and sound. Leaves and tree bark that are *ini* (sweet smelling) are picked and passed around to appreciate their perfume[182]. In the dense forest, animals are smelt and heard before they are seen. White-lipped peccaries, for example, have a particularly rank smell (*itsa*) and can be tracked by following their pungent odour. Many rivers are named after the putrefying smell (*pisi*) of animals killed by Nahua hunters but left to rot in the forest (eg *inopisiya*, 'with rotten jaguar'). There is even a river with stones that are pestilent (*rofefiya,* 'with smelly rocks'). Smelly farts are a daily preoccupation for the Nahua, they trigger a collective bellow, *keerrrrrrrr* and violent spitting; and the Nahua even have a myth that describes their origin.

> *The farts of the ancestors used to smell of flowers and perfume until one day a group of people migrating from their village stumbled across a strange creature hiding in a bush. The chief warned everyone to ignore him and they all listened obediently except one foolish man. The fool asked the creature his name. "I am poifake, the child of shit" he replied. The man laughed in disbelief but the tiny creature insisted that he was poifake. "Well, if you are the child of shit then jump into my arse!" The man thrust his open buttocks in poifake's face who heaved himself into the man's arse. The fool ran off screaming and attempted to force poifake out but to no avail. Eventually, poifake died, his bones fell out of the man's arse and his flesh rotted and released pungent smelling farts with which the Nahua have been afflicted ever since.*

Potent smells and sounds are not exclusive to the forest however. During visits to Lima, the Nahua are continually captivated by new sensory experiences. They wander around the crowded streets picking and smelling the fragrant flowers of jasmine and *toé* and endlessly imitate the street merchants calling for used batteries and bottles or selling ice creams and biscuits.

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[182] As Shepard observed, both the Nahua and the Machiguenga smell the tree or plant before examining other visible features (1999).

The importance of non visible senses for forest dwelling peoples for whom the forest is less a landscape and more a soundscape has been well documented (Gell 1995) [183]. For the Arawakan speaking Machiguenga and Yanesha, both Santos Granero (2006: 62) and Rosengren (2006:71) stress that hearing is more important than smell. For the Nahua however, the forest is firstly a smellscape and secondly a soundscape.

The power of smell

Smell seduces

On balmy evenings, old Macofene would often swing in his hammock singing haunting *yama yama*, a genre of love songs for his old lovers.

> *nofa fana fene onofa aonofa* – Over there on the other river.
> *yora afe camani camani* – I have been thinking since the people left
> *me ichakaiyofe yama* – This is what I said.
> *foni efe onofa onofa* – My tall woman who has gone to another place.
> *yora inifafe fafekaki* – Her body so fragrant.
> *ia nikafekani fekani*- She is coming to hear me.
> *yama yama yama yama* – My woman, my woman.
> *oni efe onofa onofa* – Over there on the other river
> *nai hooa inifo inifo* – Her fragrance like the flowers of the sugar cane.
> *onofa onofa ikife ikife* - This smell will come over there.
> *ato yoramaki maki* – It will come from her body.
> *inife famano famano* – I will get used to her sweet smell.
> *niriosho itafe yama* – Come over here woman.
> *nofafaka onofa onofa* – On this river.
> *yora ini shafona shafona* – The body of the sweet smelling woman.

[183] Gell (1995) argues that this is because forest peoples, such as the Umeda, live in dense, unbroken forest where auditory and olfactory senses are privileged over visual senses. They listen, rather than look for, game in the forest. The word for hidden implies not invisibility but being beyond smell, sound and perception.

Smell is the key to seduction. Nahua love songs focus on the sweet smell of their lovers, as aromatic as the flowers of sugar cane rather than the colour of their eyes or the firmness of their buttocks. Before they 'fell out of the forest' the Nahua tied aromatic plants (*pestafete*) to their arms to attract the opposite sex and some of the older individuals in Serjali continue this practice today. Although they may no longer use aromatic plants, their desire for sweet smelling fragrances is manifested by their obsession for buying any of the perfumes and potions they find in the pharmacies of Sepahua. One old lady liked the smell of shampoo so much that she used to rub it in her hair in the morning and leave it there the entire day (O.Reibedanz pers comm).

The seductive power of smell is a common theme throughout Peruvian Amazonia where strong smelling love potions (*posanga*) are highly sought after[184]. Jorge, a young Nahua friend once confided in me that he had seen one so powerful in a market in Pucallpa that each drop cost S/.100 ($30). "You just put one drop on your hand and greet the girl and she will not leave you alone, this *posanga* is not to be messed with, it is *yoshi"*. Unable to afford such extravagance, my Nahua friends bought S/.15 potions whenever they were in the provincial capital of Atalaya, but these had to be applied more frequently. More often than not their seductive strategies would fail. "Damn fakes" they grumbled but they never lost hope.

This helps understand the common association that indigenous Amazonians make between smell and hunting and fishing success (Calavia Saez 2006)[185]. For the Nahua, like the Cashinahua, hunting success is more to do with "attraction and seduction through imitation or disguise than with force or aggression" (Lagrou 2006: 40). Fish are attracted to the smell of sex and female smells whereas animals are averse to such smells. Just as the smell of post partum blood is considered dangerous for Nahua men, menstrual blood is dangerous for Cashinahua men. The blood gives Cashinahua men

[184] Leclerc shows how the Shipibo use *noi rao* (love medicines) to attract game and seduce lovers, to break up relationships and even protection from the police. The *noi rao* work when the recipient perceives their smell (2004:154).

[185] Yaminawa men use a mouth harp, to attract both game and lovers (Calavia Saez 2006: 67). For the Yaminawa, sex, like hunting, is about the establishment of alliances. For the Piro, most hunting magic is also equally effective in seduction (Gow 1991:125).

lots of *yupa* (bad luck in the hunt), contaminating him with a strong odour that scares away prey or even attracts dangerous forest spirits (Kensinger 1995:36)[186].

Smell kills

The Nahua, like many indigenous Amazonian peoples, also establish a close association between powerful beings and strong smells[187]. The *Iri* (the immortal beings) and the *feroyoshi* (the disembodied souls of the dead) are associated with powerfully seductive sweet smells.

Smells not only seduce, they also harm and kill. Invisible forest spirits have an intoxicating *ini* (sweet smell) with devastating capacities to cause illness and even death. The spirits of the dead are generally invisible to the human eye but are frequently heard rustling in the undergrowth or clattering pots and pans in the village. Hearing and smelling, rather than seeing, is believing. In several Nahua myths it is smell that kills; in the story of *anoyoshifo* (agouti spirit), the agouti is eventually killed by a man burning a pungent smelling chili into its hole in the forest[188].

This power is not confined to mythology. One morning during my fieldwork, Laura, a lady in her mid thirties, went off into the forest to harvest beans. I was told later how she suddenly noticed a very strong smell, 'stronger than perfume'. She knew that this was the smell of *nimeramapoa* ('forest spirit with giant head') and a sign that she had

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[186] Cashinahua men should be cool and not smell so as not to warn animals while women are considered hot and smelly. This is why men used emetics and diets as forms of hunting magic to cleanse their bodies (McCallum 2001:54). The stench of blood makes people more perceivable by vengeful spirits that are normally invisible (Belaunde 2006:144). For example, the blood shed by Ashaninka killers exposes them to attack from the *mironti* (tapir spirit). The stench of blood means they are perceived by *mironti* as women who try to seduce them in their sleep (Regan cited in Belaunde 2005:186).

[187] The Arawete describe a broad, shaded and perfumed path as the main route between earth and sky that enables a connection with the sweet smelling gods (Viveiros de Castro 1992:66). On the other hand, the ferocious forest spirits (*ani*) and spectres of the recently deceased have a foul stench (Ibid 1992: 68). Gell showed how the intimate association between scent and magical power extends far beyond Amazonia. Umeda pig hunting magic was a perfume and it was precisely smell that was considered to give a substance its efficacy (1977:26).

[188] The story relates how a man kills an agouti (*ano*) because it continually raids his garden to eat the squash he has planted. When the man goes on a fishing trip, the wife of the deceased agouti appears to the man's wife as a woman and exacts her revenge by killing his wife and children. When the man returns he eventually kills the agouti woman by burning chili in a hole into which she had escaped.

been attacked. She said nothing however and returned to the village but soon after she felt as if she were being chased by crowds of people and ran into the forest. Eventually, she was found unconscious with blood pouring out of her nose. She was saved by a shaman blowing over her with tobacco.

The power of smell holds even more contemporary resonance for the Nahua as they attribute the arrival of the epidemics to the burning of pungent smelling things.

> *After we left the forest the diseases came. They*[189] *had burnt plastic beads and mirrors and this is how the diseases caught us. Today the diseases come from the fires and smoke of the oil companies and factories in Lima and are blown on the wind to Sepahua. From Sepahua they come to Serjali.*

This focus on smoke as a vector of illness corresponds to Vilaça's observation that, for the Wari, smoke and respiratory channels, rather than contact between bodies is considered the vector for disease transmission (Vilaça 1997)[190]. Shepard also shows how the Machiguenga conceptualise illnesses as "foul smelling or brightly coloured vapours that rise from the bowels of the earth…evidence of the presence of demons and illnesses residing deep under ground" (1999: 156). Nevertheless, he observed that the Nahua were even more reluctant to smell or taste anything strange and unfamiliar than the Machiguenga, who were always willing to taste something in moderation. While often a joking matter, the Nahua consider farts and unpleasant smells such as rank smelling peccary (*itsa)* or rottenness (*pisi)* as pollutants which is why they spit and blow their nose when they perceive a nasty smell[191].

This was brought home to me forcefully after I travelled with four Nahua friends to visit the Achuar in Northern Peru whose lands, livelihoods and health had been devastated by over thirty years of oil exploitation. I was anxious that, after travelling this far and at such expense, the Nahua should get as visceral an experience as possible of the contamination. However, much to my frustration, two of the Nahua refused to take the long walks to see the spills and the two who reluctantly came with, did not

[189] I am unsure to whom 'they' refers.
[190] The Yanomami also attribute epidemics to the burning of the white man's rubbish (Albert cited in Erikson 1996:201).
[191] Shepard says this is also why the Nahua prefer to defecate in rivers as odours are carried away downstream (1999:158).

want to collect any samples. While they were impressed by the sight of oil spills in rivers, it was the smell of the spills and flares from the pipeline that convinced them that the widespread illness amongst the Achuar was related to this contamination. What I initially interpreted as 'laziness' was better understood as prudence[192].

Smell heals

Just as some smells cause illness or even death, others can heal. When taking the powerful hallucinogen *xori* (*ayahuasca*), the Nahua often get overwhelmed by their visions which they banish by smelling fragrant bunches of wild basil (*feroro)*. The plant is also known as *shinaifiti*, literally 'thought grabber' and the healing songs (*xoiti)* are literally 'blowers', thereby reflecting the potency attributed to breath, wind and vapour. The shaman dispels the illness with fragrant *xoiti* by blowing these songs into a cup of corn beer that the patient consumes. The fragrancy of these *xoiti* is emphasised in the tobacco song transcribed in Chapter 6 and receives similar stress in this excerpt provided by Shepard (1999:59).

Efa iska fanane – This is my song
Efa ini fanane – My fragrant song
Efe fana ranoi – They fear my song
Na nete yorafo – The people of the night
Ori kame ifaini – There they go
I kame aito – They run away from
Efe ini fanane – My fragrant song
Noko xoma chipifo – Our sisters the Xoma
Efe fana ini pae – Like them my song is strongly fragrant
Ato ini raoti – Their fragrant adornments
Ini raoti fafe – Their fragrant adornments come to me
Ato yame iniki – I am fragrant as they are
Ato yame rafeno – I walk among them
Noko xoma chipifo – our sisters the Xoma

[192] See conclusion.

According to Shepard's informants, *xoma* are "good spirits…humanlike in appearance whose skin and hair are permanently fragrant. In opposition to the fragrant *xoma* are the malevolent and foul smelling *yoshi*, demons that frighten people and make them ill with their unpleasant odor". Thus, the use of bracelets stuffed with fragrant plants is primarily to keep illnesses at bay (Ibid:159)[193].

My own recordings of Nahua healing songs coincide with Townsley's (1988) work amongst the Yaminahua. He describes how, novel technologies, such as guns, motors and potent smelling gasoline, are invoked in their *xoiti* because they are conceived as sources of heat and bad smells and their *pae* (power) is used to treat high fevers and introduced illnesses. The Nahua and Yaminahua have thus creatively appropriated smells of the white man's world to deal with the white man's illnesses.

Even smelly farts are not entirely redundant. Forest spirits can be frightened off by showing them one's bottom or better still by farting. *Amenafa*, an elderly Nahua man, wages a constant battle with forest spirits who pursue him relentlessly. On several occasions, almost paralyzed by their intoxicatingly sweet smell, he has managed to save himself at the last minute by farting in their general direction[194].

The significance of vapour, smell and breath in questions of healing and illness for many indigenous Amazonian peoples explains why smells and vapours are integral to many transformative processes. For example, the Ache say that the origin of the world was caused by the burning of fragrant smelling beeswax and its fragrant smoke which created the daylight out of the perpetual darkness that had enveloped the world (1998:111). This is why the smoke of beeswax is used to prevent people from being attacked by jaguars and sick people are painted with fragrant wax and resin to prevent them from being attacked by the spirits of the dead (Ibid:19).

Given this significance it is no wonder that Nahua healing songs are called *xoiti* (literally blowers) or that tobacco (*nafe*) plays such an important role in healing and other transformative processes. The myth of *sharaenifo* relates how a group of men

[193] The Nahua use the term *xoma* interchangeably with *nimeramapoa*, the spirit of the forest.
[194] For the Piaroa, farting is "shit smoke"(Overing 2006:24), a poison which is good for the farter to expel but contaminating for everyone else.

eventually succeeded in becoming jaguars by swallowing tobacco juice, sniffing its powder and then behaving like jaguars by roaming the forest at night alone or in pairs. After several days, they tried leaping onto the branches of a tree and found they had become jaguars.

Throughout indigenous Amazonian mythology, tobacco occupies a role as the transformative substance par excellence. It is not only widely used in healing practices but also invoked in many creation myths[195]. Thus, smell is not simply reflective of power or a sense that enables the temporary disguise of its bearer. It is also capable of causing profound transformations in states of being; to heal and to kill are but two sides of the same coin.

Smelling is eating

But what is it about smell that makes it so powerfully transformative? Gell argues that the apparently universal importance attributed to the power of perfumes derives from the nature of smell as something which both "alters the world as well as being a reference to it" (1977:27). He argues that the unique quality of smell and sound (unlike vision) is that both can escape from their sources. A smell however can never exist on its own. It is worthless to smell food; "smell is only ever vicarious" (Ibid: 28). To be a smell is the nearest an object can get to dematerialisation and it is this disembodied essence of the thing which explains the profound connection between smell and other worldliness and the source of its power (Ibid: 29). "Perfume is spirit, halfway between thing and idea" (Ibid: 31). Wearing perfume is thus a magical act to communicate between the thing and the spirit of the thing. For Gell, a perfume does not seduce but "sets up a context of seduction" (Ibid: 31). Wearing expensive perfume is not saying 'I am rich', but that 'I am wearing a perfume that rich people wear'.

[195] The Yawalapiti myth of origin describes how people were created by a god who blows tobacco on a piece of wood (Viveiros de Castro 2002:74). For the Arawete, tobacco is similarly powerful; they say it makes them flat, transparent and lightweight rather than swollen and heavy and is thus the only way that one can make contact with gods (1992:131). Tobacco is used to kill people, for reviving those who have fainted and for resuscitating the dead in the sky. "It is a two way converter between life and death and a commutator between domains" (Ibid: 220).

Gell's insights are profound but the Nahua, I think, would not agree. For Gell, the incompleteness of smell means that smelling can only ever be a vicarious experience. The Nahua, on the other hand, establish an equivalence between eating and smelling.

This equivalence is best illustrated by *yafanifo,* the origin myth of peccary[196]. After the people have transformed into white-lipped peccary (*yafa*) through eating the strange eggs, three men come to look for their lost relatives. They absentmindedly smell some of the discarded egg shells and are transformed into collared peccary (*isafo*)[197].

Perhaps the most telling evidence for this equivalence between smelling and eating is the moment of death. For the Nahua, death is a journey that their *feroyoshi* (eye spirits) make to the land of the sweet smelling *feroyoshinafa* (eye spirit people). "They give us something very strong to smell and we forget our relatives, we never come back" Juan explained. The potent perfumes of the spirits of the dead are the tools by which the dead seduce the living, they are not simply 'signs' for the context of this seduction.

Many other indigenous Amazonian peoples emphasise that the transformation of the dead into immortals is achieved through a process of consumption, either they are given a food to consume or are eaten themselves (McCallum 2001, Viveiros de Castro 1992). For the Nahua however, it is perfumes rather than food that enable the dead to forget the living. This capacity of smell to shift 'points of view' explains why the sweet smelling basil they use when taking *ayahuasca* is called the 'thought grabber'. As we have seen, illness and death are processes of no longer recognising one's kin; of becoming 'other' while healing restores the person's sense of self-possession.

Like the consumption of food, the power of smells lies in their capacity to generate identification with people, animals and spirits causing fundamental transformations in senses of self. This capacity of smell is a reflection of its intimate association with souls and is illustrated by the Nahua myth of *notishoniyamafani* described in Chapter 1 that encapsulates two aspects of this relationship. On the one hand, the pungent smelling *sako* transformed the man's perspective, enabling him to see the world from the point of view of water spirits. On the other hand, while the man was able to lie

[196] See Chapter 2.
[197] The Nahua also say that water spirits (*enifo*) eat by simply smelling their prey.

about his name, it was only through his smell that the water spirit was able to verify the man's identity. Smell does not lie[198]. Smell plays a crucial role in these processes and acquires this power because of its intimate connection with the person's self. As Laura found out in her encounters with *nimeramapoa*, smells are dangerously real.

[198] For the Candoshi, odours also reflect different soul types. Missionaries and *mestizos* for example all have different smells, and therefore different souls (Surrallés 2003: 44).

B: Vision

Part 1: Style gurus of the Amazon

Antonio comes to a village meeting sporting an elegant goatee, a tweed cloth cap, an unbuttoned white shirt revealing an impressive physique and a prominent white cross. His tiny pair of blue shorts, Converse shoes and white socks pulled up to his calves completes the picture of a 70's porn star. The Nahua may not have much to wear but what they do have, they wear with style.

Shopping for clothes with the Nahua is an exercise in patience. On numerous trips to Lima to address the problem of illegal logging in their territory and to further their claim for a land title, I seemed to spend most of the time accompanying their shopping expeditions. They would deliberate for hours over the colour, size, cut and texture of a tee shirt rather than preparing for the important meetings ahead[199]. When I was helping them to establish a guard post to prevent illegal logging operations, they spent most of their time discussing in great detail the exact design of the sleeveless rhino jackets with multiple pockets and an official looking logo that was deemed essential for each guard. It seemed it was enough to remain silent in a meeting with senior government officials or in negotiations with loggers as long as they looked the part (Photo 6).

On any journey to Serjali the final bends of the river are a scene of bustling activity as the Nahua comb and wet their hair, change into clean clothes and put on brightly coloured bead necklaces[200]. The Nahua seemed inordinately focused on their appearance and on adopting the latest local fashions[201]. They constantly expressed their amazement that the merchants in Sepahua who are predominantly migrants from the Andes should have so much money yet such shabby clothes. One merchant who had been living in Sepahua for almost 15 years was the object of great hilarity because he was still wearing the same jumper!

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[199] Also see Ewart (2007: 46-7).
[200] Also see McCallum (2001:105).
[201] Although this might also reflect a personal as well as cultural prejudice. Certainly, this seems to be a more general feature of Latin American society. As Lévi-Strauss was about to set off for Brazil, he was advised by Dumas that "the main thing is to be well dressed" (Lévi-Strauss 1974:9).

In 2002, my colleagues and I arranged for the Nahua to visit a Nanti village to discuss the future of the Reserve in which they all lived and to try to change the Nanti's opinion that the Nahua were 'thoughtless killers'[202]. Political discussions were notable by their absence and relations were strained as the Nanti complained the Nahua were thoughtless and unpredictable while the Nahua were disparaging about the Nanti's hospitality and their terrible dress sense and haircuts (G.MacLennan pers comm). Diplomatic relations improved dramatically however when the Nanti discovered the talent of the Nahua as hairdressers (Photo 7).

Wanting to look beautiful (*roa)* however is nothing new. Many Nahua myths begin with a man who wishes to visit his brothers-in-law. Before departure they ask their wives to 'make them beautiful' (*iroakaini*). They pluck their eyebrows, shave the top of their heads (leaving a cap of hair at the front) and paint their legs and haircap with achiote (*naifimi*) and their faces with designs in *nane* (*huito*). Women also painted each other's faces and legs with *huito* and *achiote* designs and their husbands plucked their eyebrows and pubic hair[203] (Photo 8). The men wore small skirts (*chipanati*) made of a soft bark (*atanafa*) whilst those of the women were made from a palm leaf. Men wore necklaces of spider monkey teeth (*isoxota*) and around the arms and legs of both men and women; they wore cotton (*yome*) bracelets (*nipi*, arms, *epi*, legs) into which they stuffed a sweet smelling forest plant (*feme*). Men wore the feathers of condor and trompetero birds in these arm and leg bands and both sexes wore great swathes of red seeds (*xikibakafai*) draped across their chests. This mythical *mode* was still in fashion until 1984 except they were also wearing arm bracelets (*poshoti*) and face bracelets made from brightly coloured plastic beads that they found in abandoned rubber camps and also from the 'gifts' left by missionaries when attempting to establish contact. Men and women made small nose rings from scraps of tin cans or batteries that they found in these sites. From the perspective of the residents of Sepahua, these 'wild Indians' were 'naked' yet from a Nahua perspective they were well dressed, to be naked or *chito* was to be without monkey teeth necklaces or bracelets.

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[202] The Nanti had suffered frequent raids at the hands of the Nahua before 1984 (Lev Michael pers comm).

[203] The Nahua are tireless pluckers of most body hair offering an interesting contrast with the Matis who regard the growth of beards as a sign of seniority and maturity (Erikson 1996:251).

Throwing away their clothes

Despite my anthropological background, or perhaps because of it, I found it hard to resist a certain romantic disappointment when I first visited the Nahua and discovered that they no longer used bows and arrows and wore shorts and tee shirts (Photo 10). Within minutes of 'falling out of the forest' the Nahua had ripped off their monkey teeth necklaces, aromatic plants and penis strings and replaced them with tee shirts and shorts[204]. As Juan explained, 'we wanted to be like the *mestizos* and have sex with their women'. The meaning of this enigmatic statement is the central question of the remainder of this chapter.

Marta elaborated further.

> *We used to paint ourselves in the forest, I would paint my husband and he painted me. We painted designs on our legs, faces and hands. We wanted to paint but we do not paint anymore, we want lipstick now, we do not even want plastic beads like before.*

When I asked the Nahua why they used to paint themselves, they said, "We thought it was beautiful" and when I asked why they no longer do so they shrugged their shoulders and said, "We can do, but we do not". When I asked why they wear *mestizo* clothes, they laughed and replied *no nafa pai*, 'we want to be *mestizos'*.

To many external observers the meaning of this statement, 'we want to be *mestizos'* was depressingly obvious. Nahua abandonment of their 'clothing' was a simple and obvious case of "acculturation". As Gow (2007a) points out, the abandonment of 'traditional clothing' by indigenous Amazonian peoples is often treated as part of a sad and seemingly inevitable process of acculturation and cultural degradation; the imposition of the discriminatory values of one society over another. Gow quotes Matthiesson, a travel writer who visited the Peruvian Amazon in the 1960s. "These people were not, alas, in tribal dress…it is very sad to see the individual characters of

[204] The Yaminawa in Brazil have abandoned their material culture in such wholesale fashion that Calavia Saez reports how a young teacher had to buy a generic indigenous outfit in a souvenir stall before going to a conference of indigenous leaders! (2006:75).

these Indians disappearing so rapidly into the great blender of the white man" (Matthiesson cited in Gow 2007a:284).

For some observers, these changes in clothing reflected a positive change; a shift from crude tradition to an enlightened modernity. Yet to those more sympathetic towards indigenous peoples, the adoption of clothing was a means of avoiding discrimination from a prejudiced national society. These representations are at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum but both are related to the long and complex intellectual tradition of modernism in which the adoption of white man's clothing is seen as an abandonment of identity and 'tradition'. Such ideas rest on concepts of culture as "a marble statue in a baroque garden" in which change and transformation are antithetical to 'culture' (Viveiros de Castro 2002:195). In short, "Indianness means living in a hut with no clothes, it is about opposition to change" (Conklin 2007: 23). Conklin comments that "visitors to Wari villages are frequently disappointed because they do not look like real Indians, yet the Wari themselves suffer little confusion about their own ethnicity" (Ibid: 24). The problem, of course, with this narrative of clothing as acculturation is that it does little justice to the meaning attributed to clothing by indigenous people like the Nahua. The statement 'we want to be *mestizos'* is less straightforward than it first appears. The question is what does it mean?

'We want to be *mestizos*'

One explanation that must first be discounted is that this is a statement of self devaluation *vis a vis* the *mestizo* world and that it reflects an imposition of external values on the Nahua. In common with many other indigenous Amazonians the Nahua associate white people with meanness, stingyness and anger[205], the qualities that characterise the anti social *yoshi*[206]. However, after they 'fell out of the forest' they immediately attempted to speak Spanish and instantly replaced their penis strings and monkey teeth necklaces with tee shirts and shorts. When I traveled to Brazil with

[205] See also Gow (2007a) and Ewart (2007).
[206] See Chapter 4.

Nahua friends I was amazed that, after hearing Portuguese spoken for the first time, they immediately began to imitate Brazilian accents and words[207].

Nahua abandonment of their own 'clothes' in favour of trousers and shorts was thus immediate rather than gradual. This immediacy suggests that they changed their clothes under pressure from their own cultural principles rather than those of a racist national society. The question is what were these principles? In order to begin to answer this question it is first important to situate Nahua concerns with body decoration within the broader context of its use amongst indigenous Amazonian peoples.

Part 2: Body decoration in Amazonia

Decorating the body is of course not peculiar to the Nahua and occupies a place of central importance for indigenous Amazonian peoples "whose bodies are painted and feathered in many different ways" (Vilaça 2005). For example, the Waiwai consider being naked as akin to being unsocialised and their elaborately feathered bodies are sites of political power as they convince, attract or persuade others; thus older and more powerful men tend to be the most splendidly dressed (Howard 1991). Turner argued that Amazonian bodies are symbolic mirrors of society whereby body decoration, including clothing, is a social skin that transforms the natural into something social (Turner cited in Vilaça 2007:172).

Many anthropologists have shown that body decoration is crucial to the construction of Amerindian persons. Suya ear decoration for example emphasises the importance of hearing while Kayapo lip plugs reflect the importance they attribute to aggressive speech (Conklin 2007:28). Amongst Panoan speakers, body decoration, especially tattoos plays a similarly crucial role in the construction of personhood. Tastevin reported in 1924 that the Katukina captured Yaminahua and decorated them with their Katukina tattoos, thus converting them into legitimate Katukina (Cited in Calavia Saez

[207] This flexibility is neither unique to the Nahua nor a recent phenomena. Lévi-Strauss documents how the Caduveo were already incorporating anchors and naval motifs into their body designs when they saw the first European sailors (1974: 212).

2006: 251). This represents a classic Panoan strategy of the incorporation of outsiders through body decoration (Erikson 1996:53)[208].

One of the most detailed investigations of Panoan body decoration is Philippe Erikson's study of the Matis. He describes how, their elaborate piercings, labrets, and facial tattoos are far from superficial. Amongst the Matis, "looks tell", and their "ornamentation is more eloquent than elegant" (Erikson 1996:19). The Matis never remove their adornments and, if they do so, they are in state of discomfort until they are reunited. In part, this is because of the value the Matis attribute to being highly visible. To be unadorned is to be invisible like the *maru,* forest spirits who represent the antithesis of humanity. The Matis only take off their ornaments when they wish to become invisible in warfare or the peccary hunt. In such circumstances they paint themselves black so that enemies will think they are being attacked by *maru* (Ibid: 231). Newborn Matis resemble invisible *maru* and must be given bracelets and monkey teeth necklaces to be made visible.

While Suya and Kayapo ear and lip ornaments seem to influence the functioning of their organs (Seeger cited in Erikson 1996: 246), Matis lip plugs and ear piercings have no effect on the capacity of their owners to speak or hear[209]. Instead, Erikson illustrates how they affect the transmission of *sho*, the mystical animating power and *chimu* (bitterness). For the Matis, life is considered to be a continual process of accumulation of this bitterness. Body decoration thus increases as the person ages and reaches its climax with the decorative appearance of the dead, the *mariwin,* whose mouths are surrounded by tiny projectiles. All projectiles are considered to embody bitterness and *mariwin* are thus bitterness incarnate (Ibid: 252).

[208] In an almost uncanny parallel the Matses insisted on tattooing a Norwegian friend of mine after he had been living with them for almost a year (Anders Krogh pers comm).
[209] Amongst Panoan speakers, joints are often subjected to ornamentation perhaps because they are means of articulation with bones that are considered to be sources of power (Erikson 1996:241).

Skin as communication

It was initially tempting to compare Nahua adoption of *mestizo* clothing with Matis tattoos or Kayapo lip plugs, a means of constructing the person. Ultimately however, this comparison proved unsatisfactory because of the subtle distinction the Nahua draw between *fichi* (skin) which is associated with clothing, and *yora* (embodied self).

The Nahua myth of *ishpifafo* ('giant vulture people') dramatises this difference. The story begins with a man who is chronically ill and is abandoned by his cruel wife. The man is visited by the giant vulture people (*ishpi*), powerful shamans who cure him by extracting bones and spines from his body (*tetso*). They peel off his skin and paint him with beautiful designs. The man becomes beautiful and luminous but covers himself with his old skin to appear frail and travels to the village of his wife. The people are happy to see him, yet upset he appears to be so sick. One of the shamans tries to heal him with tobacco but to no avail as underneath his skin he is healthy.

This story reflects a key principle for the Nahua; while the skin makes a statement about a person, appearances can also be deceiving.

For the Nahua, powerful beings such as the *Iri* are associated, not only with fragrant smells but with brilliance, elaborate designs and the ability to change skin[210]. Throughout Amazonia, the elaborate designs of jaguars and snakes and the ability to change skin are associated with power, fertility and immortality[211]. "The boa attracts and seduces people with their designs just as hunters attract game" (Lagrou 1998: 82). This is why snakes and other reptiles and creatures that shed their skins such as the crab (*xacho*) are potent forces for the Nahua and are invoked in healing songs. Thus, for many indigenous Amazonians, a woman's capacity to change skin (menstruation) is the source of their creativity in child bearing (Belaunde 2006:130). This capacity explains how the Barasana account for women's greater longevity compared to men (C Hugh-Jones 1977:189) and why the boa is considered immortal (S Hugh-Jones 1988:144). In

[210] For the Cashinahua, the *Incas*, the exemplary powerful 'others' are also shining and colourful. They have a visual energy that comes from their *dua* (aura) (Lagrou 1998:160).
[211] The Kuna too make a strong association between design and knowledge. The destiny of babies who are born with the imprint of the amniotic sac on their heads is to become shamans (Fortis 2010).

the same way, before they 'fell out of the forest' Nahua men and women used to paint designs in *huito* (*nane*) on their faces and sweet smelling achiote (*naifimi*) on their legs in order to seduce potential lovers.

The Nahua take extreme pride in their personal appearance; however, one lady always struck me as very different. Her hair was unkempt while her clothes were torn and dirty. The Nahua explained that her husband did not buy her new clothes or soap because he was jealous of the attention she might attract. A similar theme is articulated in the myth of *fenefafereteni* ('the husband who was killed') that describes how a man would beat his wife whenever she had her face painted by his other wife.

Thus, skin can seduce and attract but can also disguise and protect. *Huito* designs are drawn on the body to make them beautiful but, when painted on the body, *huito* protects killers and babies from malevolent *yoshi*[212]. Sometimes however, the disguise does not work. In the myth of the origin of moon (*oxe*), a man who slept with his sister paints himself in bat shit to avoid being killed in warfare. Ultimately he fails, he is killed and decapitated. After a series of adventures his severed head becomes the moon. Inappropriate bodypaint thus resulted in recognition by his enemies rather than invisibility. Skin is thus a tool for communication with others; it can be covered with designs or clothes either to reflect the 'true' identity of the person or to deceive. One must thus be careful with clothes and designs as these reveal power and can incite envy and revenge (Lagrou 1998:162)[213].

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[212] Many Amerindian peoples use skin decoration as a form of protection. See Clastres regarding the Ache (1998:58) and Kensinger on the Cashinahua (1999:255).

[213] The Cashinahua described *kene* (design) as the language of the *yuxin* (Lagrou 2007). *Kene,* they explained, hints at the presence of *yuxin* as it links the inside of the body to the outside thereby bridging the gap between image (*dami*) and body (Lagrou 1998:148). For the Piaroa, skin is also considered to make statements as it replicates and represents the powers and mastery of the interior (Overing 1997:10). Yanomami warriors paint themselves in black otherwise their victims will see them glowing brightly in their dreams before they attack. In contrast, red body paint reflects their vitality and joy and attracts others (Ales 2009).

The politics of clothing: Engaging with otherness

This communicative capacity of skin helps to understand a key aspect of Nahua adoption of *mestizo* clothes: that is its political dimension. The adoption of particular forms of body decoration and clothing is always partially a political choice or "a self conscious reflection on how best to manage external pressures of and pressures on one's own self image" (Ewart 2007:45)[214]. After 1984, the peaceful engagement of the Nahua with these owners of powerful tools, knowledge and sexual delights meant they needed to influence how they were perceived by *mestizos*. This political dimension is perfectly illustrated by the following story.

The boy who wore no clothes

Not all the Nahua have adopted the clothes of the white man. Until 2007, a 15 year old boy who was affectionately referred to as *chito* (naked) refused to wear clothes despite the pressure of school teachers, Catholic missionaries and insensitive visitors. When he was given clothes he burnt them or threw them away. His only concession was the sleeve of an old tee shirt that he wore as a bandana. *Chito* did not go to school and never went to Sepahua, unlike his family who visited at every opportunity.

One day, *Chito* was floating downriver on a raft of timber he had helped his cousins fell in the headwaters of the Mishagua; they were going downriver to Sepahua to sell the timber. *Chito* was supposed to disembark at Serjali but fell asleep. When he finally woke they were far downriver with no means of return. They told him, "Quick quick, Sepahua is round the next bend, put on some clothes otherwise the *mestizos* will see you" and they threw him a pair of shorts which he put on hurriedly and soon they arrived in Sepahua. They sold the timber and *Chito* bought himself a pair of jeans and a tee shirt, some shoes and a comb. He stayed in Sepahua for five days but instead of returning to Serjali he visited Atalaya, the provincial capital. After a few days he returned to Serjali but the next day he jumped into a boat heading back to Sepahua.

[214] As Conklin summarises, "the social conditions of modernity itself, the intensified mixings of people, ideas and images and the influence of global communications, especially visual media make definitions of identities and boundaries a concern and make body parts prime channels to construct and communicate group identities" (2007:33).

Chito's extraordinary story is a microcosm of their collective and sudden uptake of clothing after the Nahua 'fell out of the forest'. After 15 years of refusing clothes and engagement with the *nafa,* one might expect a more gradual approach to the adoption of clothing. *Chito* however, embraced the world of the *nafa* as immediately and completely as his relatives did collectively in May 1984. To be surprised at this wholesale abandonment of a way of dressing is to miscomprehend the purpose of clothing.

Nahua aromatic plants and monkey teeth necklaces did not reflect an 'authentic' Nahua identity any more than tee shirts and shorts reflect an 'inauthentic' identity. Instead, clothing choices were a means of engaging with 'the other'. 'Falling out of the forest' and *Chito's* trip to Sepahua resulted in an abrupt and sudden exposure to a very different and very powerful kind of 'other'. This 'other' wore different clothes and the Nahua wanted their machetes and axes, guns, motors and women. *Chito* was not pressured into putting on clothes by the teasing of insensitive visitors; he did not want to put on clothes because he did not see what they could do. He was only confronted with their utility when he arrived in Sepahua for the first time.

Thus, for the Nahua, the events of May 1984 thrust them abruptly into a world inhabited by *mestizos*, a very different kind of 'other' with very different definitions of beauty. Nose rings and monkey teeth necklaces no longer served their seductive purpose and they were abandoned with little nostalgia. The Nahua had always been using their appearance to engage with the 'other' but now the 'other' had changed. While the rules had changed, the game had remained the same.

As Willerslev describes, "the power of seduction lies in the ability to show the seduced the perfect image of themselves" (2007:108). The Nahua therefore, dress like *mestizos* to impress *mestizos*. The problem is that Nahua strategies are not quite up to speed on the stereotypes of Peruvian national society and when they travel to Lima they dress like the small time loggers of Sepahua rather than as sophisticated Limeños or feathered and painted Indians.

Clothing is, of course, also used politically by the Nahua to express or communicate an identity. By wearing the clothes of *mestizos* the Nahua can go some way to being

perceived and treated as *mestizos*. Nevertheless, because of their distinctive physical features, the Nahua, like many indigenous people of the region, are well aware that they would never be confused with a *mestizo* by the resident *mestizo* population.

The Nahua describe this process of using *mestizo* clothes as wanting 'to be *mestizos'*. One of the difficulties I encountered when attempting to understand this statement was that I understood clothing as something that could only ever mask a reality. Clothing was something that could enable the impersonation of white people but nothing deeper.

The question to be addressed in the remainder of this chapter is whether for the Nahua, body decoration and clothing are only tools for communication that simply reflect or conceal a person's identity, or whether their use can engender more profound transformations in their sense of self.

Part 3: Body decoration and points of view

The various means of the Nahua for decorating the body can be understood as tools for communication which influence the way they are perceived by others. At another level however, body decoration seems to play a much more fundamental role in transforming how the bearer themselves see the world. The argument that follows is inspired by Viveiros de Castro's (1998) model of multi-natural perspectivism which it is necessary to summarise briefly before returning to the Nahua.

The starting point of Viveiros de Castro's perspectival approach is that humanity is a condition shared by all visible and invisible beings including animals and spirits (1998). In this inter-subjective world, all humans and non-humans have houses, drink corn beer and chew tobacco. The Nahua explained this by pointing at some spider monkeys eating the leaves of a *lupuna* tree[215]; from the point of view of the spider monkey it was chewing tobacco not leaves. For indigenous Amazonians, these different perspectives on the world arise from their different 'bodies' rather than different 'cultures'; the body is at the heart of Amerindian identity.

[215] *Ceiba pentandra.*

Viveiros de Castro argues that clothing should not be understood simply as something that masks a 'real' identity. Instead, like a 'diving suit' (1998: 482) it allows a person to act and behave as a fish while simultaneously retaining their humanity.

In the language of perspectivism, body decoration, that includes clothing and paint, permit the wearer to adopt the dispositions and affects of another being and thus assume a different point of view. Vilaça shows how such perspectival oscillation work in the context of contemporary Wari shamans. One shaman, who uses peccary spirits for healing purposes, dons the magic palm oil and body paint of a peccary in order to transform his body and thus adopt the point of view of the peccary. Sometimes however a short circuit occurs and the shaman's wife cannot sleep because her husband grunts and grinds his teeth like a peccary in his sleep (Vilaça 2007:179). In another case, a jaguar shaman tried to kill his own relatives having temporarily become a jaguar and lost his grip on humanity (Ibid: 179). Thus, a Wari shaman has both an animal and a Wari body that exist simultaneously in different worlds.

For the Nahua, just as for the Wari, kinship and common identity is forged through the sharing of substances. The unique capacity of Wari shamans to communicate with animals is because shamans possess a human body and that of their animal familiar at the same time. Becoming a shaman is conceived as a gradual transformation into this animal through wearing their clothes and consumption of the animal's food. The death of the shaman is the completion of this process of transformation as they marry their animal familiars (Vilaça 2007:178). This sharing of animal bodies means that Wari shamans can see animals in human form, a common indigenous Amazonian phenomenon and perhaps what explains why shamans are often considered to be poor hunters (Calavia Saez 2006:137).

Amerindian transformations

Viveiros de Castro and his students, thus argue that, for indigenous Amazonians, body decorations including clothing are not only tools for communication (masks) but also a tool for transforming the self (diving suits). They are "instruments, not costumes" (Vilaça 2007:175). Several questions immediately arise from this position. First, what are the nature of these transformations; are they permanent or temporary, complete or partial and how do they work? Most importantly, how much does this perspectival approach help to understand the rapid adoption of *mestizo* clothes by the Nahua immediately after they 'fell out of the forest'? To examine these questions it is first necessary to explore a world which was characterised by such transformations, the world of the really ancient people, the *Xinipafo*.

Mythic transformations

One rainy day Juan told three stories which I summarise here.

Myth 1: *Fapayoshifo* (owl spirit)

An unmarried woman is walking alone in the forest and hears an owl (*fapa*) hooting. She sighs, "Why cannot the owl be a man who I can marry?" Suddenly, a handsome man appears and says, "Here I am". The woman says, "No, I was talking to owl". "But that is me" he responds and they return to the village and become a couple. They are happy together except that the owl spirit man (*fapayoshifo*) refuses to eat meat with the rest of the people. One day, his wife grows suspicious and follows him when he says he is going to shit. She watches him visit his mother and eat white butterflies, owl food! She confronts him but he is ashamed and returns to the forest as an owl. Afterwards, she is sad and tries to find him again but without success.

Myth 2: *Maporofafani* (formed from clay)

One night, a man with no wife is lying in his hammock and sees his mother making pots out of clay (*mapo*). The man says, "Why cannot you form a woman and become my wife?" In the morning, the man wakes in his hammock in the arms of clay woman (*mapoyoshifo*). The woman is an excellent wife but cannot wash in the river because she will dissolve. One day, she accompanies her husband on a fishing trip but the man does not heed her warning that it is going to rain and tells her to shelter under a palm leaf. When he returns she has melted.

Myth 3: *Yafafini* (collected by white-lipped peccary)

A man who is angry that he has not been given any peccary meat (*yafa*) by his relatives goes off to hunt peccaries. However, none of his arrows penetrate his prey and the peccary appear to him as people. The peccary people give him some bitter herbs (*nisa*[216]) to put in his eyes so he continues to see them as people. He lives amongst the peccary and becomes their chief; he even has a wife and children. He begins to walk hunched over like a peccary and grow hair on his back[217]. Eventually he is rescued by his human relatives and they give him chili to eat so that he would no longer feel he was a peccary. Finally he returns to human behaviour and even took his own people to hunt peccary but refused to eat any of his former relatives. Eventually he succumbed to desire and ate the meat of some unrelated peccary. He immediately vomited and cried out, "I have eaten people". He died shortly afterwards.

These three stories illustrate a recurring feature of Nahua mythology: the incredible transformative capacities of people, animals and *yoshifo* (spirit beings). During this mythic time the current distinctions between animals and humans were blurred. Many

[216] Generic name for all plants with medicinal properties, *sako* is one kind of *nisa*.
[217] On lazy afternoons or on long journeys, Edith would often busy herself plucking stray hairs from her husband Juan's back, and would often do the same to me. *Kerrrr* she would exclaim, "You too want to be a peccary!"

of these *yoshifo* not only assumed different forms but transformed the world around them with their miraculous powers[218].

Yoshifo beings are neither benevolent nor malevolent; they simply have the possibility of assuming multiple forms and dispositions that are not true expressions of their selves. Thus, the owl man does not eat 'real food' while the clay woman dissolves when her husband leaves her in the rain. The behaviour and perspectives of these *yoshifo* defied their apparent humanity. It was the inappropriate behaviour of *fapayoshifo*, eating butterflies instead of meat, which raised suspicions and allowed him to be perceived in terms of his primary specification, an owl[219]. Thus, while *yoshifo* may appear to be human, they never really lose their primary specification.

On the other hand, the story of *yafafini* describes how a man is captured by peccaries. Over time, he literally becomes a peccary and only makes an incomplete return to his former human status. Thus, for human beings, apparently superficial transformations can become more profound over time. It seems that this capacity marks the difference between humans and *yoshifo*. Even in mythic time, real humans, unlike *yoshifo* could not transform at will; yet I have found no example where the instant transformations of *yoshifo* were anything other than superficial. The human condition on the other hand, is defined by their unstable *yora*, the ability to really lose one's sense of self and become other[220].

This ability to assume multiple appearances in the eyes of 'the other' is thus the quality that distinguishes mythic beings and spirits from people today (Viveiros de Castro 2007). Mythic time was thus a state of non differentiation between all beings but this did not imply homogeneity. Each being had the specific capacities of their species and acted accordingly but there was a universal form of communication so that

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[218] Thus for example, *kapayoshifo* (squirrel spirit) resuscitated his younger brother-in-law from the charred remains of his body while *oakariyoshifo* was a boy who grew into a man almost overnight and created fish from forest leaves.

[219] Roe summarises a Shipibo myth where the anteater steals the jaguar's clothing. The Shipibo say that when we see a jaguar we are really looking at an anteater while an anteater is really a jaguar (1982:190).

[220] According to the Cashinahua, for *yuxibo* (equivalent of *yoshifo*) the body is like a skin or cloth that can simply be put on or taken off while normal *yuxin* are planted in only one kind of body (Lagrou 1998:181).

everyone could see things from everybody else's point of view and "exchange perspectives" (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

For contemporary Nahua, the forms of most animals and people have been fixed. Nevertheless, the possibility of 'exchanging perspectives' with other beings is still possible. Nevertheless, those with shamanic capacities are distinguished from others precisely by their continued ability to transform; when Nahua shamans die they can become snakes or jaguar-men[221].

This transformative principle lies at the heart of Nahua dietary restrictions and their nonchalant attitude towards their prey which, if not observed, can lead to an adoption of the animal's point of view and the simultaneous loss of their own. The differences between contemporary Nahua, mythic beings and forest spirits should be thought of as different in degree rather than kind.

Mechanisms of transformation

It is thus clear that the Nahua, in common with other indigenous Amazonian peoples, conceive of themselves as living in a transformational universe but for myself at least, the mechanism of these transformative processes remained mysterious. As Calavia Saez describes, "one moment there is an animal the next there is a human" (2006: 323)[222]. Even in mythic time, the transformative capacities of different beings were not the same. The *yoshifo* (like forest spirits today) had an inherent ability to assume different forms but this ability was rarely shared by people who resorted to the use of potent substances such as in the stories of *yafafini* and *notishoniyamafani*.

On their own, bitter substances are not always sufficient. In the Nahua myth of *sharaenifo* ('formed jaguars') a group of men decide that they wish to become jaguars. They chew and sniff tobacco and spend many days in the forest acting like jaguars; they

[221] See Chapter 5.
[222] Transformations also appear in other myths less as a central episode and more as something taken for granted. For example, in the myth of *anoyoshifo* (agouti spirit) it only makes sense if the agouti woman is constantly shifting between being an agouti and a woman (Calavia Saez 2006:329).

hunt alone without spears and they eat raw meat. Eventually, they are able to appear either as jaguars or as men in the eyes of their wives.

The mechanism of Nahua mythic transformations appears to fit well with Viveiros de Castro's model of multi-natural perspectivism where it is the body that is the site for transformations in points of view. For the Nahua, actions on the body such as the incorporation of bitter substances results in a transformation of self by which the person begins to act like an 'other'. The same principle explains the contemporary dietary restrictions and the risk of becoming similar to those people with whom the Nahua share food and bodily substances. It is the body that produces a point of view on the world. This explains why the man in the myth of *yafafini* died after eating peccary. After prolonged co-residence with peccary he became a peccary. His return to humanity was incomplete and he had eaten his own kin.

However, as Viveiros de Castro emphasises, the term 'body' is not limited to a narrow anatomical definition but includes the affects and dispositions of the being (1998:478). This is why the transformations in Nahua mythology are often the consequences of altering the sensory perceptions of the individual, hence the *nisa* is applied to the eyes and the man sees the world through the eyes of a peccary but reverts when he eats chili. In other words, "points of view are hinges between many beings" (Calavia Saez 2006: 334). The myth of *sharaenifo* is an excellent example that illustrates how behavioural changes can also trigger transformations. If one acts like a jaguar, one can become a jaguar. In the Yaminawa version of this myth, the men paint their skins like that of a jaguar but the vast majority of transformations for the Nahua, just as for the Yaminawa, are "primarily about transformations in points of view rather than changes in skin" (Ibid: 335).

The significance of rubbing *nisa*, the strong smelling plant in the eyes thus highlights the power attributed to vision, smell and hearing to alter perspectives. The smell of the *nisa* and its application to the eyes enables Nahua mythic characters to adopt the perspective of the 'other'; and illustrates why the Nahua consider the *feroyoshi* (the eye spirit) to be the locus of perception; "vision is the key to mediation between different universes and conditions" (Calavia Saez 2006:328).

In fact, the power of vision is stressed by many Panoan peoples not only in myth but in their daily lives[223]. Bitter eyewashes continue to play an important role in constructing personhood for the Cashinahua who use them in order to be able to make good pottery (Lagrou cited in Calavia Saez 2006:327). For the Matis and Matses, vision is a supremely powerful sense; it is a mediator for *sho* which is why they avoid eye contact with jaguars and tobacco to avoid contamination (Erikson 1996:201)[224].

For the Nahua, changes in sensory modes of perception that are linked to changes in the 'body' are thus considered more powerful than changes in skin. As McCallum explains, "alterity lies in the perception of other bodies as different, when you see things as the same then difference breaks down" (2001:165).

The importance of perception in these shifts in identity is exemplified in the myth of *yafanifo* that links the origin of peccary to the consumption of some strange eggs. As dawn was breaking, one of the children began to cry but instead of crying like a child, it squealed like a peccary. When its mother tried to scold her child she grunted like a peccary. Startled by these noises, many other people woke and wanted to ask what was happening but all they could do was grunt. They had all become white-lipped peccary!

This story is important because it reflects the Nahua consciousness that identity is not simply self generated but constituted by the way they are perceived by others. When the people were **heard** as peccary they became peccary. The Shipibo articulated this idea explicitly to Peter Roe. In one Shipibo myth, a woman marries a jaguar who assumes a man's form. In common with any self-respecting jaguar, the jaguar/man ate raw meat, but as a person, he did not want to be seen to be eating raw meat. Roe's Shipibo informants told him explicitly that if he was **seen** to be eating raw meat then he would be a jaguar (1982:55).

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[223] Erikson reports that the Matis associate joints with the eyes which may also explain their use in body ornamentation (1996:240-41). Their importance seems to derive from their role as articulators. Like the eyes, joints and the crown of the head are considered to be entry points to the body.

[224] Matses and Matis men cannot even look at their newly born child before it is three months old because of the dangers of contaminating them with excess *sho* (Erikson 1996:201). The dangers of eye contact can even rebound on the men themselves. Matis men returning from *curare* hunting expeditions must not make eye contact with children or women as this can lead to their own death (Ibid: 201-2).

For Viveiros de Castro, these transformations in which "nothing happens…yet everything has changed" (1998a:87) reflect an instantaneous shift in perspective where one is able to perceive the soul type of the other being rather than a transformation in the sense of the alteration of a physical form[225]. "The point of view creates the subject rather than the subject the point of view" (Ibid: 45). In other words, identity is relational. "There is no such thing as an owl in the absolute sense of the term but only an owl 'to me'. Both perspectives coexist at the same time, each hiding the other like the flipping over of front and back halves of two sided species" (Ibid: 87).

In conclusion, the question of how transformations work is really better phrased as a question of, how do people come to see things in a certain way? For the Nahua, the ingestion of bitter substances, behavioural changes through extended co-residence and shifts in their emotional states such as their attitudes towards animals, all permit these 'exchanges of perspectives'.

However, much of the ethnographic literature argues that clothing can also trigger these 'exchanges of perspectives'. For Vilaça, Wari use of clothing can be understood as a process of "Wari being Wari being white" (2006:515) and is analogous to a shaman's use of peccary hides or jaguar pelts. The next section asks whether it is possible to make a similar analogy for Nahua adoption of *mestizo* clothing.

Part 4: Amazonian clothing

Although the instant enthusiasm of the Nahua for white people's clothing immediately after they 'fell out of the forest' is striking, the attraction of such clothing is a recurring theme for many indigenous Amazonians peoples. The Desana call clothes, "skin changers" (Buchillet 2002:130) and it is this quality of clothes, their ability to be taken off and put on again that makes them equivalent to a form of skin changing and underlies their power. It is the use of clothing that their neighbours, the Barasana, cite

[225] These 'invisible transformations' are still a reality in contemporary Amazonia. Erikson describes how Matis men transform into jaguars through a distinctive cry, iiiiiii. This frustrated filmmakers expecting the use of a hallucinogen or at the very least some elaborate body decoration (2000:43).

as the reason why white people are healthier and live longer than themselves (S Hugh-Jones: 1988:144).

Thus, for many indigenous Amazonian peoples, changes of identity are often explained with the analogy of putting on new clothes or adornments. We have seen how Wari shamans transform into their animal familiars through the wearing of their 'clothes' (Vilaça 2007) while Tukano speaking peoples say that when tapirs are in their houses they wear shirts and are human but when they go out into the forest they remove their shirts and become tapirs (S Hugh-Jones 1988:8).

This capacity of clothes to be put on and off is not lost on the Nahua who refer to them as *tsaofeti*, literally 'dressers'. The other important quality of clothing is that, like bodily substances or material objects, the Nahua consider them to be aspects of the person. This is why clothes can be used to attack a person's spirit and must be destroyed when their owner dies.

For the Nahua however, changes in clothing seem to be attributed less transformative power. Even in mythic time, changes in 'clothes' or skin were rarely if ever used as mechanisms of transformation (with the notable exception of the Yaminawa story of *sharaenifo)*. Instead, they were predominantly instruments that disguised or revealed a primary specification. If clothing is not capable of engendering profound changes in transformation, yet is more than a form of impersonation or a mask of an underlying reality, the question remains, what does it do?

Imitation or impersonation

The Nahua also make a distinction between appearance and essence. Appearances, as we have seen, can be deceiving. Nevertheless, their dichotomy was subtly different from my own. The appearance is not false; clothing is not a mask that disguises a truth as Turner argues. Instead, it is a tool for acting and behaving as if they were the being their appearance resembled.

One way of making sense of the transformative capacity of *mestizo* clothes for the Nahua is to see them as 'diving suits' in which they can imitate, rather than impersonate, white people. As Ewart describes for the Panara, clothing or 'white man's skin', like other forms of body decoration, is a means of acquiring capacities and abilities to act like whites…clothes enable them to act in a certain way (Ewart 2007:44). Thus, Nahua clothes, like a diving suit, enable them to partially adopt the dispositions and affects of *mestizos* and to activate certain useful capacities such as speaking Spanish, handling money and gaining access to metal tools and powerful knowledge. To appreciate this, it is first necessary to explore the central role that 'imitation' plays in the lives of the Nahua and amongst Panoan speakers in general.

Amongst many Panoan peoples, techniques of education are often based on imitation[226]. As with the Nahua, Lagrou describes how the Cashinahua are expert mimics of *mestizo* gestures and actions especially when hunting and travelling to cities (1998:35). She also shows that, during their initiation rituals, Cashinahua men play at being women by putting on skirts while women play at being men hunting, and both men and women play at being animals and birds. These games of imitation are called *damiwa* – 'to make transform'. Those who dress up as white people or *yoshi* are not pretending or representing, they are 'being'[227]. Effectively, they are enacting a transformation by means of an imitation (McCallum 2002:384-5). "To dress in the clothing of another being means to become oneself transformed into the owner of the apparel" (Ibid: 286).

It seems that, for Panoan groups, successful encounters with white people, just as in hunting, are linked to the powers of attraction and seduction acquired through imitation and disguise rather than through force or attack. The danger of course with imitation is that it can result in the wholesale adoption of a different point of view. The fate of the man who became a peccary and of the Nahua, who have gone to live amongst *mestizos*

[226] Calavia Saez argues that apparently chaotic Yaminawa parties are spaces where they demonstrate their abilities to act like white people (2004:163-4). Déléage explains how Sharanahua children learn autobiographical songs by imitating adults (2007:84). McCallum describes how Cashinahua dreams are educational experiences, people's eye souls learn through dreams and imitation whereby people see and incorporate knowledge to the body (2001:49-50). By imitating outsiders, external knowledge and capacities are engrained in their bodies (Ibid: 114).

[227] The Cashinahua make fake money by writing 'bank of the Indian' on pieces of paper. They dance like white people by holding their partners closely or imitate policemen by holding machetes (Lagrou 2006:45).

and have become *nafa,* is testament to this danger. If we see the wearing of clothes like a diving suit then wearing *mestizo* clothes does not irreversibly transform the Nahua into *mestizos*. Wearing a diving suit only temporarily gives people the attributes of a fish but does not turn them into a fish. The danger however, is that if one wears the diving suit for long enough, one can become a fish. Nahua adoption of white people's clothing should thus not be seen as a form of superficial impersonation, but a form of education, and what better way to learn than to imitate.

Indigenous acculturation as elasticity

At first sight, this ability and desire to imitate the 'other' appears to coincide with a concept of acculturation theory whereby one part of a culture is attached to another. However, as Ewart argues, clothing is not turning the Panara into white people but enables them to act temporarily like whites. "The use of white peoples' clothes contributes to a temporary transformation, rather than the fabrication of a properly human body" (2007:50).

Vilaça also critiques the application of acculturation theory and argues that "indigenous social logic is above all a physiology, so that in place of acculturation and friction we have transubstantiation and metamorphosis" (2007:183). Vilaça uses the example of a famous case in Brazil in the 1980's where Mario Juruna, an indigenous politician, declared that the Pataxo Indians were not Indian because they had beards. This declaration outraged sympathetic Brazilian observers who maintained that identity was related to culture, ideas and language rather than to a person's appearance. The point that these observers missed was that Juruna was using a very indigenous logic of physiology rather than sociology to distinguish people from each other. For Juruna, the body was the locus of identity.

The thing about Amazonian bodies however is that they are considered to be highly flexible and constantly transformable; thus the Pataxo's white status did not preclude a return to an Indian identity from an indigenous point of view. Santos Granero discusses the case of a Yanesha girl who had been working for a year in Lima before returning to

her village dressed as a *mestiza*. For the Yanesha she had literally become Peruvian yet a short while later she became Yanesha again (2009:25).

Thus, the possibility of 'acculturation' does exist for indigenous Amazonian peoples but the difference is that it operates on the basis of corporality and is thus reversible. I use the term elastic to reflect the fact that they can be pulled in one direction but they are still resilient enough to return to their original form. This is why the Panara only wear white clothing in certain circumstances and why the Yagua do not wear white clothes because they say they will become white (Chaumeil cited in Vilaça 2007:185)[228]. From an Amazonian point of view, "if you look and act white, you are white" (Santos Granero 2009:21).

Clothing is an instrument not a mask

The pervasive trap that observers like Matthiesson (and my earlier self) fall into is to associate the identity of an indigenous people with a specific and unchanging material culture and thus to see clothing as either evidence of identity loss or masks of an underlying authenticity. Over time, it became clear that the only way to appreciate the constantly changing taste in fashion of the Nahua was to appreciate that scents, clothing and bodypainting are tools for transformation rather than masks. As with other material objects in indigenous Amazonian societies, we must not fall into the trap of seeing them as things in themselves but instead for what they can do. As tools, they allow the bearers both to influence the way they are perceived by others yet at the same time allow them to temporarily adopt the point of view of 'the other'[229].

This explains the apparent lack of nostalgia amongst indigenous peoples for objects or ornaments stereotypically seen as 'traditional' by outside observers. Long before they 'fell out of the forest' the Nahua had replaced pieces of shell for their nose rings with metal they found by excavating abandoned rubber or logging camps. Erikson shows that, far from being a departure from a previous logic, metal is valued by Panoan

[228] In a similar fashion, this is why the Matis wear white clothes only in specific contexts such as when making white houses (P. Erikson pers comm).
[229] There are, of course, many utilitarian reasons for clothing such as preventing stinging insects.

peoples because, like shell, it incorporates desired qualities of hardness, brilliance and sharpness (1996: 256)[230].

The Panara too have always dressed to impress. Their 'traditional' clothing was designed to intimidate the Kayapo. However, when they no longer needed to intimidate the Kayapo it was abandoned (P.Gow pers comm). For their part, the Kayapo no longer use lip plugs as these were related to the ability for 'hard speech', a form of oratory useful for internal politics but of no use in engaging with Brazilians. This is why many Kayapo abandoned their lip plugs and underwent corrective plastic surgery after contact with Brazilians (Conklin 2007) [231].

For the Nahua, clothing choices go beyond a superficial form of impersonation. Instead, they are part of a set of techniques that enable them to imitate and become the 'other'. The quality of clothing that makes them ideal for this purpose is that it can be put on and taken off, a form of skin changing. The Matis do not confuse 'real' jaguars with their deictic jaguars (Erikson 2001:111)[232] any more than the Nahua confuse white people with themselves dressed in shorts and tee shirts. Nevertheless, a physiological basis to identity means that bodily changes can trigger real changes in identity. This is precisely the danger of imitation which presents a real risk of literally becoming the 'other' and losing a sense of self. The constant fear of indigenous Amazonian peoples is not solipsism but of becoming 'the other' (Viveiros de Castro 1998:481).

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[230] Nevertheless, unlike the Nahua, the Matis still use shell. They say that metal is a poor man's shell (P.Erikson pers comm).

[231] Gow (2007a) argues that Piro 'old clothing', cotton robes with black designs, were an imitation of jaguar clothing. They wore this only for ritual purposes such as at the initiation ritual of a young girl . These initiations brought the Piro into contact with other Piro with whom they did not have sustained peaceful daily relations and, as such, were an encounter fraught with mutual tensions. The jaguar clothing was designed to inspire fear in others of the human capacity to be like jaguars, solitary predators, essentially the antithesis of the Piro core value, *gwashata*, living well. Gow argues that an analogous process is occurring with white people's clothes. The Piro do not wear white people's clothes to become white as white people are considered angry, ungenerous and forgetful (Ibid:289). Instead, clothes are used by the Piro to enable them to act like the white man so they can be perceived as unthreatening, thereby establishing peaceful social relations and gaining access to their material things and knowledge.

[232] When they shout *iiiii,* Matis men truly believe they are changing state and women and children must hide. The shout both induces and indicates the transformation. Jaguarness affects the hunters in a very real fashion. However, it is more akin to a familiarisation by which feline spirits are tamed than an actual ontological transformation. They are still aware of the difference between themselves and real jaguars; it is an addition of jaguarness rather than an abolishment of their human status (Erikson 1996:112).

According to Vilaca, when the Wari say they are becoming white they do not mean they are totally losing their identity but that they are experimenting with another (2006:512). They can be white and Wari at the same time in the same way that Wari shamans can be both animal and human simultaneously (2007:172). The Nahua, like the Wari, want to continue being Nahua being *mestizo*, a delicate balancing act that is the subject of the final section.

Genuine impersonation

I was still struggling to clarify what the Nahua meant when they laughed and said 'we want to be *mestizos'* when I read Rane Willerslev's brilliant ethnography of the Yugakhir in Siberia. Willerslev describes how Yugakhir hunters transform their bodies to resemble game animals, thereby seducing their prey through producing an illusion of similarity (2007:97). To seduce prey, they must project themselves onto the animal and create a performance that resonates with animal behaviours (Ibid: 91). The feelings are never allowed to peak but end the moment the hunter kills. They do not try to become the animal but temporarily to assume the animal's point of view by intentionally acting as an "imperfect copy" (Ibid: 95)[233]. The imitation of prey and their withdrawal at the last minute means the Yugakhir can assume the point of view of their prey and thereby act like an animal in order to seduce it, yet remain hunters so they can kill (Ibid: 108). Imitation is thus a space between projection and reflexivity; it is about being 'the other' and being aware of acting 'the other'.

The importance of maintaining this sense of self is very real for the Yugakhir. One man told Willerslev how, on one occasion as a young man, he was hunting reindeer when he came across a strange old man walking in the snow; he seemed like a man but he made deer prints as he walked. In reality, the old man was a deer who took him to an igloo where he was given lichen (meat from a reindeer's point of view) to eat (Ibid: 90).

[233] This resonates with Santos Granero's description of Yanesha imitation of whites which he argues should not be considered as a form of mimesis as described by Taussig, whereby the poor and weak imitate the powerful to try and gain their powers (2009:22). He argues instead that all the copies are transformed in the process and become different to their originals.

The man was eventually found by his relatives, he had been missing for several weeks and no one could explain his absence.

This is not to say that the Yugakhir confuse humans with animals and spirits. When they address animals with kin terms they are engaged in a game of deception in which the animal gets sexually excited and runs towards the hunter (Ibid: 101). After killing, the hunters avoid talking so they cannot be detected by the spirit of their prey and they also fashion a little sculpture of themselves and stain it with the blood of the prey in order to distract the animal's spirit (Ibid: 129). The Yugahkir hunter is not concealing an inner reality with an external mask. Instead, they know that through imitation they run a real risk of adopting the point of view of their prey. Borrowing Goldman's term, they are engaging in a form of "genuine impersonation" (Cited in Viveiros de Castro 1998a:86).

Lima describes a similar phenomenon amongst the Juruna who see peccaries not only as strangers but as potential friends. This means that they cannot joke or laugh during a peccary hunt in order to avoid establishing potential relations of affinity with peccaries (1999:112). The peccary hunt pits people (hunters) against peccaries (warriors) who are each trying to impose their own point of view on the other. The hunters attempt to prevent the peccaries' point of view from dominating and do not shout or express fear during the hunt as this would indicate the hunter were prey from the perspective of the peccaries. Lima was told, "take care, peccaries are like us, do not treat them like us or you too will turn into peccaries" (Ibid:124).

The Nahua thus have the capacity to be *nafa* or *yora*. Nevertheless, they cannot be both at the same time nor are they imitating white people while retaining an uncontaminated sense of *yora* beneath. The term 'genuine impersonation' neither means they are using the masks of *mestizos* nor that they are becoming them but somewhere in between. They are activating their *mestizo* capacities while attempting to retain their sense of self. The genuine aspect of this impersonation is that it can result in really becoming *nafa*[234].

[234] In a similar fashion, Vilaça argues that, through imitating whites, the Wari experiment with difference yet maintain their sense of self (2006:515).

Reading this material helped me think more clearly about Nahua hunting practices. They may not have the Yugakahir's elaborate techniques for preventing the assimilation of their prey's perspectives but they are similarly conscious of the dangers of identification with their prey and go to great lengths to avoid feeling compassion for game animals. Instead, they laugh at wounded animals in distress. In a parallel fashion, the Nahua also laugh when they explain that they 'want to be *mestizos'* when they wear their clothes. Lagrou describes these parodic imitations as "a way of becoming self instead of other…The secret power of humour is to capture the modes of knowledge and agency of the other without becoming encompassed by this same otherness" (Lagrou 2006:47). By mocking their own attempts to become *mestizos*, the Nahua are maintaining their sense of self given the very real possibility of becoming *mestizo.*

Conclusion

Skin and body: Clothing and smell

As we have seen, the person or *yora* is considered to be a combination of matter imbued with capacity *(yoshi*). A person is made up of multiple capacities; they are capable of being animal or human, man or woman, *nafa* or *yora*. The danger however with such flexibility is that the person becomes vulnerable to possession by external agents and risks becoming 'other'. This is the risk of eating certain foods, travelling and co-residence with 'others'.

However, the Nahua make a distinction between body (*yora*) and appearance or skin (*fichi*). The skin and its coverings in the form of clothing, design or perfumes are both cloaks and tools of communication. They communicate one's capacities but are also capable of deception.

It is important to stress that the Nahua do not confuse themselves dressed in tee shirts and shorts with white people. Nevertheless, they do recognise the distinct possibility that this imitation can go too far and overwhelm their sense of self. Definitively

becoming a white person is a genuine possibility and many Nahua who have gone to live amongst the *nafa* have become *nafa* themselves. The principle behind their astonishing facility to shift identity is the intimate association between identity and corporality in which bodily changes produce changes in identity.

Nevertheless, at least for the Nahua, not all bodily changes are considered equal. Ornamentation in Amazonia is commonly considered part of the continuous processes that form persons as they penetrate the body and construct personhood (Erikson 1996). Nahua tee shirts and shorts are however not comparable with the transformations in personhood caused by Matis piercings and labrets but nor are they masks of an underlying authentic identity. Instead, their clothes allow them to imitate rather than impersonate white people.

Unlike some other indigenous Amazonians, the Nahua do not attribute the same powerful transformative qualities to white people's clothing. Nevertheless, the use of clothing achieves both a political and pragmatic objective as well as a temporary shift in point of view. It is a form of 'genuine impersonation' that permits them to temporarily act like white people.

Over time however, clothes can trigger more profound transformations and the Nahua are fully aware of this risk. Perfumes and smells, on the other hand, are capable of temporary shifts in perspective yet at the same time have the power to trigger more profound and instantaneous transformations in senses of self. Perfume is closer to food and hence to the soul than clothing.

The role that clothing plays in these transformative processes is thus important but cannot be considered in isolation. Vilaça points out that Wari clothing functions as equipment but cannot also be disassociated from the entire context of transformation such as other 'white' activities including eating rice and using soap (2007:185). Wari shamans identify with their animal familiars through the use of animal clothing but becoming a shaman involves a long process of conviviality with the animal based on an idea of a transfer of substance whereby the animal gives the shaman their own achiote (Conklin 2001:120). The changes in clothing for Wari shamans would not work if they did not already possess this dual personality. Similarly, the use of white clothing would

not work if the Wari did not eat rice and wash with soap. Amazonian clothing seems to function more as a trigger of, and a reflection of change, than the basis of more profound changes.

Clothing operates as a powerful activator of one of many multiple capacities within a person. If necessary, these can be used for deception but, if combined with other more substantial changes, the use of clothing can lead to profound transformations.

The senses play a powerful role in these processes. At one level, they are a means of perception; tools for communication between intersubjective agents. The Nahua are highly conscious of the role these senses play in influencing relationships with game animals, forest spirits, lovers and *mestizos*. They skillfully use their appearance and smell to try and seduce, attract, disguise and imitate. At another level however, the senses play a very different role as they are the means for more profound transformations.

For the Nahua, it is the non visual senses that are most important in a world in which it is taken for granted that appearances can be deceiving. Smells seduce, kill, obliterate memory, heal and can reveal a true identity in a way that sight cannot. Smell and body decoration both possess transformative capacities but to different degrees. As Lévi-Strauss observed, the forest is a place "where hearing and smell, faculties closer to the soul than sight come into their own" (1997:414).

Half a ton of soap

We can now better understand the Nahua abandonment of their aromatic leaves in favour of soap within minutes of 'falling out of the forest' as well as Antonio's purchase of deodorant and aftershave. From a Nahua point of view, to relate with and seduce the *mestizos* at a political and social level they not only needed to appear like *mestizos* but also to smell like *mestizos*.

Today, their enthusiasm for sweet smells remains undiminished. In 2001, the Nahua received $25,000 compensation as a result of illegal logging operations. With some of

the proceeds they decided to buy half a ton of soap, a project that was destined to send them into aromatic bliss until tragedy struck. Shico, who was responsible for its transportation, capsized the boat while drunk at night and the entire cargo ended up at the bottom of the river.

At first it was difficult to accept when the Nahua, like the Wari (Vilaça 2006) and the Kayapo (Santos Granero 2009:36), say they are 'becoming more white'. This unease rested on an assumption that some kind of original or authentic 'Nahua culture' actually exists whereas the Nahua see their identity as something elastic, that is in a constant state of non linear and reversible transformation whereby they can become *nafa* just as easily as *nafa* can become *yora*.

Nahua corporeal acculturation conflicts with the view that acculturation is caused by changes in language, attitudes and exposure to different ideas. From a Nahua perspective they are becoming more white the more rice and potatoes they eat, the more tee shirts and shorts they wear and the more they live alongside white people. Of course, the Nahua objective is not to become white; if this were so then they would simply live in Sepahua. Instead, the location of their village halfway between their old settlements in the headwaters of the Manu and Sepahua allows them to trade with, rather than marry or live alongside *mestizos*. Thus, they can act as incomplete copies of *mestizos* without becoming *mestizos* themselves.

The power the Nahua attribute to clothes and smells reflects the principle that bodily transformations affect their perspective on the world. To engage with outsiders successfully they must learn to wear their clothes. Perfumes and tee shirts and aftershave and moisturising cream are the diving suits of *mestizos*, the keys to operating in their world. Dressing up in shirts and trousers for meetings with the Peruvian government or in rhino jackets as control post officials are simply new variations on an age old theme[235].

The first two chapters argued that, for the Nahua, history is a displacement in space and body rather than time and that the secret of their flexibility is the elastic nature of

[235] As Santos Granero points out, there is no contradiction when a Yanesha man uses deodorant before meeting a government official and then uses nettles to beat laziness out of himself (2009:34).

their bodies. This chapter has attempted to show that changes in their identity are as much influenced by sensory modes of perception as much as the consumption of physical substances. Bodily changes, whether they be food, perfumes or clothing affect their view of the world. The following two chapters develop this argument further through an exploration of Nahua emotional lives. Certain emotions are, like food and perfumes, also able to trigger changes in points of view. This is why the Nahua are so keen to restrict some emotional states while encouraging the expression of others.

Photos

Serjali: A view from above

A boisterous welcome

Under observation

Headwaters of the Manu River

Mashco Piro campsite in the headwaters of the River Mishagua, July 2003

Dressing to impress

Hairdressers of the Amazon: Antonio cuts a Nanti man's hair, July 2002 (Gregor MacLennan).

Marta with painted face

Throwing away their clothes: The first Nahua in Sepahua (May 1984,SIL).

Curaca outside the Presidential Palace in Lima, November 2004

Supermarket tourism, Lima, August 2005.

First Encounters: Juan meets a Machiguenga man. Headwaters of River Serjali, May 2006.

Chapter 4

The Sorcery of laughter

A cultural project of happiness

Travelling with the Nahua has its uncomfortable side. Few, if any, precautions are taken to ensure there is enough food or food procuring materials or protection against the elements. What I considered to be vital essentials such as matches, shotguns and tarpaulin are routinely forgotten. During one of these trips, four friends including three Nahua, a Machiguenga man and I were camped on a beach when we were caught by a torrential downpour during the night. We had some tarpaulin, but my Nahua friends were too tired to erect a campsite and so, much to the disgust of our Machiguenga companion, we spent the night lying on a pile of wet stones wrapped in the tarpaulin. Inside the plastic we passed a sleepless night as the Nahua told jokes, farted and tickled each other. My Machiguenga companion grumbled at Nahua thoughtlessness and lack of foresight but eventually relented. "I have never spent the night wrapped up in plastic", he grinned as he confided in me afterwards. In the right circumstances, misfortune and physical discomfort are not considered a source of suffering but of laughter.

Juan had spent six months felling timber in the forest, his only source of income. One day he woke to find a flash flood had washed away the timber. After the initial disappointment, he grinned as he explained what had happened. The uncertainty of daily life in the jungle is an endless source of amusement for the Nahua; if they are not losing their timber, money or boats, they are falling into the river. Similarly, they choose to stress the comic rather than tragic aspects of how they 'fell out of the forest';

listeners roar with laughter at the idea of Jorge running off into the forest having been shot in the buttocks or Walter being dressed up as a girl in Sepahua. Such is the general atmosphere of good humour that, when a friend visited me during my fieldwork his lasting impression was that the Nahua are "engaged in a collective cultural project of happiness" (R.Villagra pers comm).

The power of laughter as a force for creating conviviality out of the mistrust of daily life is a recurring phenomenon amongst indigenous Amazonian people (Belaunde 2006, Overing 2000). Yet, unlike many other peoples who stress the restraint and temperance of all emotional states (Descola 1996) the Nahua prefer expressiveness to reservation. Unlike their Machiguenga neighbours, the Nahua do not restrain the expression of grief, pain, nostalgia and illness any more than their good humour. If they are not laughing, they are crying. Like the Arawete, their "essential joyfulness has not been diminished by a long history of warfare and epidemics. They are fond of feast and lovers of flesh, tactile and affectionate, constant in laughter" (Viveiros de Castro 1992:9). This chapter sets out to explore the Nahua cultural project of happiness within a context where "such exuberance is itself a convention" (Ibid: 10).

The Nahua thus represent an unusual variation on a common Amazonian theme of the quest for conviviality and "the artful conditions for living together intimately" (Overing and Passes 2000:7). The good life however is not a given state of affairs but must be continually fashioned from a prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. Just as laughter, cheeriness and tenderness are encouraged, as they contribute to the conviviality of life, so too is the expression of negative emotions such as grief, pain, illness, suffering and homesickness that elicit compassion and love in others. The Nahua are acutely aware that emotions are not simply subjective experiences that concern only the individual but are intersubjective phenomena (Rosengren 2000). Thus, they are acutely sensitive to the moods of others; they expect to be exposed to the mood swings of their families and to play a role in their return to a state of harmony.

Chapter outline

The first part of this chapter describes the mistrust and suspicion that forms a backdrop to life amongst the Nahua. The second part explores how the appropriate use of laughter, humour, gentle speech and good leadership counters this atmosphere and contributes to convivial relations amongst co-residents. A third part explores Nahua anxiety for the health of their relatives, their tendency to leap to morbid conclusions and the association between suffering and solitude. The fourth part begins to address the Nahua preference for what seems to be a life of 'self-indulgence' over 'self-control' and explores how they describe these emotional states as embodied experiences. The fifth part concerns anger, the only emotional arena that the Nahua do subject to intense control. The final part explores their uncompassionate side and argues that emotions, just like food and clothing, are tools for creating similarity from difference and difference from similarity; they too are instruments for shifting perspectives.

Part 1: It's a dangerous world

Sorcery

In the late 1970s, a young and beautiful Nahua girl called *Cafarani* was living with her family in the headwaters of the River Manu. *Cafarani* was in love with *Atonoima*, her cross cousin, and consistently refused the advances of her other cross-cousins, *Reteni* and *Cheteiroma*. One day, *Cheteiroma* tried to insist, and in defense *Cafarani* stabbed him with a piece of bamboo. After the incident she was followed by *Reteni* and *Cheteiroma*. They watched her carefully from hiding places in the undergrowth until one day they collected a leaf spattered with drops of her urine. They mixed the urine with the resin of the *catuaba (Sp)*[236] tree in a pot and chanted over it, describing how she would succumb to illness and die. Soon after she fell ill and a year later she died.

[236] *Erythroxylum catuaba.*

"With anger in their hearts they kill people. With our urine they can see us" Lucco told me by way of explanation of the mysterious world of sorcerers. Nahua oral histories[237] are littered with the attempts of malevolent sorcerers to kill their victims using a person's urine, hair, spit or even clothing to access and kill their spirit, a process known as *yamafai*[238]. In several cases the victim was unintended, their possessions or substances had been confused with somebody else's either through error or deceit; thus the person does not even need to be aware that they have been attacked. One story describes how *Maishato*, the most powerful *yofe*[239] (seer/shaman) in recent memory mistakenly killed his own brother after his nephews gave him his urine but told him it belonged to another man. As he sang, *Maishato* began to yawn, a sign the urine belonged to his kin, but he took no notice. His brother fell ill shortly afterwards and died a few months later. In the absence of a name or even a photo to recognise the person's *feroyoshi,* a sorcerer needs a physical substance; bodily fluids and possessions are considered as extensions of the person and a key to accessing their spirit.

Another form of sorcery involves the introduction of pathogenic elements into the victim's body and can only be cured by sucking out the offending items. According to Perez Gil (2008) this is referred to as *yotowai* by the Yaminawa. It can be practiced by anyone and is broadly equivalent to the regional concept of *daño*[240] (Sp). The Nahua say that the *daño* remains in the body, often manifested as fish bones or arrows, the *tetso*. Powerful shamans in the past could even suck the *tetso* from the body[241].

Julio was sick with worry; his two year old son (Leandro) had been ill for a week with vomiting and diarrhoea and the antibiotics were not working. "He is going to die", he groaned mournfully. Despite this, Julio was reluctant to approach one of the village shamans for treatment. "They will not want to help, I have nothing to pay", he said.

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[237] A significant number of Nahua deaths since the start of the 20th century are attributed to sorcery either perpetrated by other Nahua groups or even by co-residents.

[238] According to Perez Gil's study (2008) of Yaminawa shamanism there are two categories of sorcery: *yamawai* and *yotowai*. *Yamawai* involves singing over the possessions or substances of the victim in a pot (*xubu*). This is broadly equivalent she says, to the regional concept of *brujeria* and can only be completely cured by the original sorcerer.

[239] Explored in Chapter 6.

[240] Intended harm through sorcery.

[241] This is described dramatically in the Nahua myth of *ishpifafo* where the giant vulture sucks the tetso from the sick man's body. According to the Yaminawa, a class of shaman existed in the past called the *tsibuya*– the sucking shaman - but no longer exists today (Perez Gil 2004:188).

Initially I was confused. At least two of the four village shamans had always been very generous towards me with their treatments and Julio after all was family. Eventually they took Leandro to see Velasco[242], one of the other shamans in the village. Velasco pronounced that Leandro's *shina* (spleen) was broken and he would fix it in return for five shot gun cartridges. I was shocked. Could it be possible that Leandro's tenuous grip on life depended on five measly shot gun cartridges?

This apparent meanness with shamanic power seemed to conflict with the esteem in which the Nahua hold generosity with food, money, possessions and affection. For the Nahua there is no worse insult than to be called *yoaxi* (stingy), so how could such generosity coincide with such mean-spiritedness?[243] Calavia Saez *et al* (2003) discuss the same phenomenon amongst the Yaminawa for whom, unlike the giving of gifts and food, there is no obligation to transmit knowledge (2003). In fact, power is specifically associated with mean-spiritedness. Thus, amongst the Nahua two of the four recognised shamans were known to be much more *yoaxi* than the others, yet they were also considered to be more powerful. In general terms, shamans are mistrusted because they are considered capable of withholding their healing powers and there is always the fear that they can attack you if they have been offended (Perez Gil 2001:337)[244].

Amongst the Yaminawa, this mistrust of shamans meant that before 'contact', shamanism was something that most men learned rather than being the preserve of specialists as it is today (Carid Naveira and Perez Gil 2004). Everyone needed to be a shaman due to the general feeling of mistrust that prevailed, an attitude that resulted in the frequent splits of Nahua villages due to conflicts and accusations of sorcery.

Accusations of sorcery are a common theme amongst indigenous Amazonian peoples where illnesses are considered to originate in a powerful external force. Surrallés describes how the Candoshi live in a world where "hostility is endemic, settlements are

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[242] Velasco's wife *Xopote* was the mother of Leandro's mother's father.

[243] To be generous is the expressed ideal but, like the Cashinahua, the Nahua are extremely good at hiding food or barefaced lying when food is scarce. They operate a strategy of "avoiding sharing while appearing to be generous" (McCallum 2001:95).

[244] Yaminawa shamans for example refused to treat the Chitonahua who came to live with them after their 'first contact' in the mid 1990s (Carid Naveira and Perez Gil 2004). Individuals want to learn to become shamans so they can treat their own families without having to rely on others and they rarely want to teach a non relation the shamanic arts (Perez Gil 2001: 338-9).

isolated….and sorcery is suspected in all illnesses" (2003a:779). The Wayapi for example understood the epidemics after their 'first contact' with Brazilians to be "internal shamanic accusations" (Campbell 1995:117).

Even in a seemingly harmonious village such as Serjali there is still scope for healthy suspicion. *Auxini*, an old Yaminahua man who migrated from the Purús and settled in Serjali in the mid 90s, is one of four practicing shamans. Perhaps it is his 'outsider status' but, despite his apparent popularity, I often heard comments suggesting that he might be responsible for some illness or that one should be wary of making him angry. This is why it is dangerous to admit one is a shaman or has any power. Thus, Curaca laughed when I asked him if he was *yofe* (a seer). "I have less power than a small shrimp", he said[245]. The denial of shamanic power is a prudent policy in an atmosphere of mistrust but the Nahua must take even more positive steps to ensure the maintenance of a harmonious community.

Part 2: The power of laughter

In the light of a full moon, more than thirty men lay in their hammocks suspended from the creaking beams of a house. Rosa was recovering from a serious miscarriage and her husband Antonio had prepared *xori* (*ayahuasca*). Lothe to miss an opportunity to take *xori*, the rest of the village were present. Curaca sang over Rosa's prostrate body, her tenuous grip on life in the balance. I was transfixed by the gravity of the scene until suddenly a loud bang ricocheted off the beam directly above my head. A gunshot! I looked up expecting pandemonium but all I saw were smiles and all I heard were giggles. Shico had farted.

When the *xori* visions are strong, bright and overwhelming, shamans (*yofe*) sing *xoiti* (healing songs) while others sing *rami,* chants that describe their visions and sensations. When everyone has stopped singing they quietly puff on a pipe or give head massages

[245] The Huaraoni, for example, try and suppress shamanic practices and dreaming. Future shamans are approached by jaguars in their dreams but their relatives do everything possible to abort a shamanic career (Rival 2005:296-7).

and suck the 'bad blood' from the stomachs of their companions. Soon after, the laughing begins. They tickle their neighbours, imitate forest animals, tell jokes, giggle and fart. Jokers wrest the centre stage from the shamans, holding the others in thrall with bawdy tales. In the midst of this raucous atmosphere Santiago would call to me, "Brother-in-law! How big is my sister's vagina?[246]". I would answer appropriately and the house would creak and strain with laughter.

In this atmosphere, absent or long dead Nahua would often be imitated. One man liked to mimick the voice of *Yafakexa*, 'wild boar mouth', a long dead Nahua lady with an unfortunate deformity of the jaw, while another man's inexpert attempts to sing shamanic songs would be teased mercilessly when he was not present[247]. Nobody was exempt from this treatment. The distinctive accents of Spanish missionaries would be expertly imitated as would the valiant attempts of different visitors (mainly my friends) to learn the healing songs. José Chorro loved to tell the story of one anthropologist who had drank *ayahuasca* in Sepahua, taken off all his clothes and danced around with an empty banana skin on his penis[248]. Giggles, farts and impressions would travel along the creaking beams of the house and infect everyone with fits of hysterics.

I initially assumed that this hilarity was simply related to the properties of *ayahuasca* but my first *ayahuasca* experience outside Serjali when I visited a renowned shaman in Pucallpa, could not have been more different. Firstly there was no chaos; everything was precise and ordered. Alejandro (the shaman) controlled everything from when participants could go to the toilet to when they could smoke a cigarette. 'Permission to fart' I felt like asking. Alejandro's was the single voice to be heard and talking was frowned upon by the other 'patients'. "Concentrate!" One whispered to me fiercely when I asked him how he was feeling. "Be strong!" My other neighbour told me when I enquired about his well being. The discourse was one of control and restraint whereas taking *ayahuasca* amongst the Nahua is not only about healing but about the demonstration of concern for and awareness of their companions. Receiving a head massage or putting a glowing log underneath someone's hammock to ward off the midnight chill reinforced the bonds of affection that constituted their relationships.

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[246] I lived with Dora, Santiago's classificatory elder sister (*chipi*).
[247] He was nicknamed *Asharo* (boa) because of his insistence that he knew how to heal, as the boa is associated with shamanic knowledge (See Chapter 6).
[248] The anthropologist in question disagreed with José's version of events!

Jokes

Nahua good humour is not limited to the world of hallucinogens. *Amenafa* is now an old man but in his youth he was the acknowledged king of practical jokes. One day he was defecating behind a bush when he heard his two young nieces returning to the village carrying bananas from their garden. He wrapped some of his excrement in banana leaves before smearing *achiote* on top so that it would appear to be a packet of the highly coveted *achiote* and placed it on the middle of the path as if it had been mislaid. Marta saw it first: "*Ooohhhh aicho"* she exclaimed gleefully and picked up the package. Her sister who was lagging behind said, "Give some to me, give some to me" and tried to grab the packet from Marta's hand. "Wait wait" said Marta but to no avail. In the struggle her sister grabbed the package and…

Amenafa, who had climbed up a nearby tree to gain a good view, almost fell out laughing as the girls dropped their bananas and ran screaming into the river. *Amenafa* has a wealth of similar stories and on a rainy day his grandchildren gather round and bellow their requests into his only ear that still functions. His audiences are always enthusiastic. Adult listeners smile and chuckle indulgently, shaking their heads in mock disbelief. Younger listeners are less controlled and writhe around in fits of giggles.

One morning just before dawn I woke to overhear my hosts having a quiet discussion in their mosquito net. "Why do you never bring back meat, the children are hungry", Dora complained. Her husband explained that he was trying but it was not easy. He did not own a gun and depended on borrowing an unreliable one from his brother-in-law. To add to his problems, the animals were all far too suspicious and it was always raining. But the remonstrations continued and he was accused of being a lazy husband who never provided meat. The man continued to protest but with no successs until he said, "Well, if you are that hungry for meat, you can always eat mine" and pointed between his legs. Dora spent the next ten minutes giggling. Married bliss had been restored[249].

[249] McCallum (2001) and Siskind (1973) both emphasise the role of humorous innuendo in Cashinahua and Sharanahua married life.

Many anthropologists have emphasised the important role that laughter plays in indigenous Amazonian rituals. Lagrou demonstrates how the humour of Cashinahua festivals "has ritual efficacy that makes cosmic powers act in favour of humanity" (2006:52)[250]. Overing stresses however that we should not confine ourselves to analysing humour in ritual contexts but to its role in the everyday lives of Amazonians (2000). Overing's point is important, but we should not emphasise the significance of daily practices simply to reinforce the exoticism of supposed 'ritual practices'. The reason why laughter works in Cashinahua rituals is because the Cashinahua inhabit a world of "beings who need to be seduced into collaboration and cooperation" (Lagrou 2006: 52). Relations with cosmic beings are thus no different from social relations; people, like spirits, must also be seduced.

The joke that went too far

A joke of course can go too far, especially when its butt is a powerful outsider, and several Nahua myths such as the origin of the smelly fart relate the drastic consequences of foolish behaviour[251]. The myth of *shafemasharopinifo,* 'the tortoises ate the jaguar', describes how tortoises (*shafe*) came to live solitary lives in the forest.

Ancient tortoises were nimble, speedy and playful. One day they had rigged up a vine from which they swung themselves over a stream bed full of spikes and spines. They fell down constantly but were protected by their hard shells. Suddenly a jaguar (*masharo*) approached and the tortoises cleverly tricked him into playing. Predictably, the jaguar broke the vine and impaled himself on the spikes. The tortoises proceeded to chop the jaguar into small pieces, mix them with forest mushrooms and wrap them in leaves ready for roasting. As they were eating, the jaguar's brother came looking for his sibling. The tortoises denied any knowledge and sent the jaguar off in another direction but he returned having seen his brother's footprints and demanded to know what the tortoises were eating. One tortoise replied, telling him the variety of mushrooms in each package until finally he foolishly admitted he was eating 'jaguar eyelashes with

[250] McCallum suggests that Cashinahua rituals that have typically been described as 'wars of the sexes' are really about fun, not war (2001:170).
[251] See Chapter 3.

red mushrooms'. The jaguar flew into a rage and opened up all the packages to find pieces of his brother. In revenge he caught all the tortoises and broke their legs thereby forcing them to walk on their knuckles.

This is why tortoises no longer move rapidly and live alone in the centre of the forest. They paid a terrible price for their foolishness and for a game that went too far.

Words that might break

Nahua myths not only reveal the dangers of jokes that go too far but are themselves designed to make people laugh and thus function to diffuse tensions. It is not only the message of myths that is powerful but the words themselves have a magic effect (Overing 2000:77) [252]. It is how they speak, not just what they say, that is important.

The first time I arrived in Serjali, I was immediately struck by the high pitched tone in which the Nahua spoke and was under the impression that they treated their words so gently as if they were afraid they might break. Over time I learnt that softly spoken, high pitched speech, *tsai pishta*, 'little speech' is music to Nahua ears and a raised voice is a rare occurrence[253]. Not only is Nahua speech soft and tender but they are obsessive about adding a diminutive suffix (*ashta*) that can be added to names, objects and verbs. This means that everything takes a very long time to say but it contributes to the fabric of conviviality that the Nahua go to great pains to weave[254]. The high pitched tone of *tsai pishta* influences the perception of their fellow villagers by creating an environment of mutual compassion, support and sensitivity[255].

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[252] Also for the Cashinahua (Kensinger 1995:188). Overing (2000) argues that myths are very important because strong words, unlike bad words, produce good laughter which creates pleasure and feelings of well being.

[253] Lévi-Strauss found Guyacuru speech gave him "the impression of a stream lapping over pebbles" (1973:193) while Rivière describes the Trio as quiet and softly spoken in their efforts to construct *oken*, the harmony of everyday life (2000:256).

[254] The Cashinahua disapprove of 'strong talk' which makes people deaf and lethargic, whereas good talk and sounds make one serene and happy (Keifenheim 2002:96).

[255] Surrallés also shows that the style and delivery of Candoshi greeting dialogues are just as, if not more important than, their content. The body language and tone of voice are all designed to have an effect on the perception of the visitor (2003a).

Leadership and mood management

Most visitors to Serjali are immediately impressed by Curaca. Despite his lack of comprehensible Spanish, he is a man with obvious charisma and leadership qualities. One morning I wandered towards Curaca's house for a chat but found him at the community house holding a broom. Government representatives were coming to Serjali for a meeting that afternoon and Curaca was anxious that the floor should be clean. He brandished the broom at Moises, his six year old nephew, but Moises shrugged disinterestedly and continued to chew on a piece of grass. Curaca attempted to convince him but his words fell on deaf ears. He did not press the issue and started sweeping himself. From afar I watched in astonishment as this little episode unfolded. Curaca is a man whose sheer physical presence commands instant respect amongst outsiders, ranging from multinational oil company executives to government ministers, yet he cannot even convince a six year old to sweep the floor.

Similar restrictions on indigenous Amazonian leaders have been recognised by a host of anthropologists who have emphasised the egalitarian nature of their societies, the autonomy of individuals and the non-coercive nature of their leaders (Rivière, Overing *et al*)[256]. As Campbell summarises neatly, "the chief speaks and everyone does as they please" (1995:115). Instead, Curaca's style of leadership revolves around the power of his words and his ability to inspire affection and respect from others instead of coercion. "He makes us think…he makes our thoughts grow", the Nahua say. Apart from his moralising discourses Curaca tells jokes and is sympathetic to people's problems[257], a typical Amazonian leader who relies on the "politics of mood management" rather than coercion (Overing 1989:163).

[256] Overing (1989) explains that autonomy for indigenous Amazonians is not individualism in a Western sense of freedom and equality that situates an individual outside of society. What was important to the Cubeo was how to take responsibility towards others rather than self regarding ones such as ambition, talent and courage.

[257] McCallum describes how the repeated moralising speeches of Cashinahua leaders build up a person's awareness of how they ought to be and act; "just as food makes sociality so do words" (1990:425). Lagrou describes how Cashinahua leaders "only succeed in engaging people in collective work by creating a festive atmosphere that encourages people to join in freely" (2006:50).

Part 3: Fearing the worst: An anxious people

Just as the good humour of the Nahua is unrestrained, they do not hesitate to let you know if they are sad. One afternoon during my first period of fieldwork I wandered along to visit *Xopote* and Velasco. *Xopote* was a sprightly old lady who interspersed thrusting bowls of manioc beer on visitors with smiling demands for their bracelets. Tugging gently on their forearms she would demand, "I want it, give it to me", and her sparkling eyes were often very difficult to refuse.

Today was different. *Xopote* was crying mournfully and a crowd had gathered. "What's the matter?" I asked. Between sobs she replied, "My son is dying, my son is dying". A group of women and men surrounded her prostrate son, Enrique who was lying in his hammock and moaning that he wanted to die. His relatives cried and wailed a repetitive high pitched lament (*fini*), *efe roa fake, efe yora chaka*, 'my beautiful child, my body/kin is bad' and beat their heads with their hands. *Ma nai, ma nai*, 'he is dying, he is dying', they wailed. I asked if anyone had informed the Dominican nun who worked as an informal nurse but I was ignored and they continued crying and so I rushed off to find her myself. "Mother Meche, Mother Meche, come quickly, come quickly, Enrique is dying", I called breathlessly and expected her to jump up, grab her medicine kit and run like the wind. Instead she calmly sipped her tea and asked if I would not sit down and eat a biscuit. I n a state of bewilderment I returned to find a pale Enrique moaning in his hammock and surrounded by a gaggle of wailers. A few days later Enrique was up and about. He had a nasty foot infection and a fever but from my perspective certainly nothing to warrant such melodrama!

The leaps that the Nahua make to these morbid conclusions were a frequent occurrence and Shepard relates a similar story from his own fieldwork.

> *One day I heard loud moaning coming from the house of Marta. 'My child is dead, my child is dead'. A radio had communicated the news of a commercial plane crash near Arequipa and Spanish speakers had spread the word. Marta's son and the sons of other women had been recruited in the Peruvian army. They knew that army troops were sometimes transported in planes and they thought the crash might have killed their children. The women continued to cry and wail for*

much of the afternoon full of nostalgia for their distant sons" (Shepard 1999: 95).

Similarly, I would often hear Dora cry and sing when her sister went off to her garden. 'I am afraid that something might happen' she explained.

mefe yora ishtaya – Your body with you
yosha cafatio – The old woman (her sister) that always travels
yofi chakatani – I will always say this to you
mefe afi yoraki – Your body of a woman
yosha shina mesefo – I fear for you old woman
akatsa shaki – I always say
fefo shina afishta – Sister, I always think of you
ana fato fetsama - Now you will not be accompanied by anybody
afishta fetstaya – Who is going to keep me company now?
yosha cafatio – The old woman that always travels

At night I was often kept awake by the haunting laments of Macofene who would lie in his hammock singing for his son in the army[258].

efe poifake - The son of my sister
efe oinoma – I have not seen him
ari netepakeni – You left here and have not come back
pakachakanikisho – There they have treated you badly
matopoi yorashta – The brother of you all
oimaki enema - They almost killed you
efe nafa rakafo – Your body almost dead.

The Nahua are constantly departing on hunting and fishing expeditions or travelling downriver to Sepahua, but if they do not return when expected their relatives would fear the worst[259]. They assumed the travellers had been eaten by a jaguar or killed by Mashco Piro, and my attempts to reassure them that they had probably been delayed by

[258] Déléage shows how the Sharanahua, like the Nahua, sing a genre of song, *yama yama,* to express nostalgia for absent kin or an old lover (2007:82-83).
[259] Also see Lévi-Strauss on the Nambikwara (1973:370).

a broken motor or a fallen tree were ignored. Having imagined the worst, their arrival would trigger a mournful lament from their relatives.

Similar incidents peppered my stay with the Nahua, and their leaps to what I perceived to be morbid conclusions are an abiding memory of fieldwork. In fact, all my intricately planned trips with the Nahua to Lima or visits to other indigenous communities for advocacy or educational purposes had to be foreshortened because of their anxiety at the health of their relatives in the village. A mild cold or general malaise communicated by radio would be translated into impending death by those at the receiving end. We would have no choice but to rush back at great expense and trouble only to find their relatives fully recovered and in the rudest of health.

Historical hysteria?

Many observers have concluded that the apparent hysteria of the Nahua at what seem to be the mildest of health concerns must surely be related to the devastating post-contact epidemics. Of course this experience goes some way to explaining the melodramatic response of the Nahua, especially to respiratory infections of which they had no prior experience, but it does not tell the whole story, as they are as morbid if it is a gardening or hunting injury of which they have a wealth of experience.

The emphasis on epidemics as an explanation is yet another example of how indigenous peoples are often reduced to the passive victims of wider historical processes. This is despite the fact that ethnography after ethnography shows how Amazonian indigenous peoples are active agents in the construction of meaning in their worlds (Vilaça 2006, Gow 2001). Just as it is tempting to see 1984 as the overridingly significant event in Nahua history, so are the epidemics that afflicted the Nahua in the mid 1980s attributed explanatory value for their apparent 'over-reaction' to illness.

Nahua oral histories and mythology also defy the argument that this anxiety is something new because they are littered with references to crying and the laments of relatives as their kin both leave home and return after perilous expeditions. The story of *isofini* for example relates in graphic detail how a woman responded after her husband

was killed by the monkeys who had abducted their child. She went into spasms of grief (*manokani)*, tearing out her hair and vomiting mucus and phlegm.

If it were the case that the epidemics were responsible for the Nahua response to illness, it would be logical to conclude that all indigenous peoples with similar experiences would respond in the same way. In fact their neighbours, the Arawakan speaking Machiguenga and Nanti (Lev Michael pers comm) were almost as severely affected by epidemics after 'first contact' but have a much more stoical approach. Diverse attitudes to illness and pain thus exist amongst people who have similar lifestyles, face similar health issues and have had similar recent experiences of lethal introduced diseases. The following section attempts to answer the question of the Nahua response to illness by exploring the meaning of crying from a Nahua point of view.

"They are always crying"

The expressiveness of the Nahua of their sadness and pain is a quality that distinguishes them from many other indigenous Amazonians and most markedly from their stoical neighbours, the Machiguenga. Glenn Shepard, whose thesis compared Nahua and Machiguenga sensory perceptions, tells the following story about when *Raya*, an elderly Nahua man approached him with a small cut on his finger and raised his voice to an empathetic falsetto…

> *….**isi** he whined, as I applied a topical antiseptic, 'it hurts'. As I treated him, Alejandra, wife of my Machiguenga field assistant, watched with crossed arms and a contemptuous look... "How is it possible, a grown man crying about a little cut. Well if you treated that then treat this!"... She showed me where she had stubbed her toe. The skin had been ripped off exposing raw flesh from the tip of the toe to the crease below the second knuckle. As I prepared to apply the antiseptic I warned her "This is going to hurt"... She giggled hysterically though it was clear that the treatment was painful* (Shepard 1999: 96).

Shepard's Machiguenga field assistants, Mateo and Alejandra, were horrified at Nahua expressiveness of pain and illness. "They are always crying", Mateo exclaimed, exasperated (Ibid: 96).

Machiguenga stoicism is startling especially for someone accustomed to Nahua pain thresholds. On one occasion while travelling downriver to Sepahua I stopped at a loggers camp and bumped into Alberto, a Machiguenga man from a neighbouring community who was fishing from the prow of a boat. I had met Alberto several times before and we began to chat. I asked him why he was at camp as he was normally deep in the forest with the rest of the team. "Oh, I fell yesterday" he explained nonchalantly and I thought nothing more of it until later when his boss returned and asked me about Alberto's health. "Fine" I shrugged, "Why?" He looked at me in surprise and went on to explain how, only the previous day, Alberto had leapt into a small stream to trap a log of mahogany that was hurtling downstream in a flash flood. His foot had landed on a razor sharp three-inch bamboo spike that impaled itself in his foot. I listened, open mouthed and watched aghast as a grinning Alberto took off his boot as his boss gently applied a clean dressing. As Alberto giggled, his boss showed me how he had stitched up his foot with no anaesthetic. Alberto had refused to be taken to hospital for treatment and had wanted to return to work immediately. His boss had refused but after Alberto insisted he eventually conceded that he could go hunting.

Thus, while the Nahua generally over-exaggerate illness, the Machiguenga underreport it (Ibid: 62), and while the Machiguenga are stoical, the Nahua are melodramatic (Ibid: 69). These characteristics even extend to Nahua mythic heroes. In the myth of *notishoniyamafani* the giant hawk is mildly wounded by the man who was impersonating his brother. The hawk returns to his house and lies in his hammock insisting to his wife and any visitors that he is going to die. Needless to say, he recovers.

Machiguenga medicinal plants are often selected for their painful qualities; the more they sting, the better they are considered to work[260]. The Nahua, in contrast, "show a

[260] The benefits of pain for treating emotional disturbances seem to be widely held amongst Arawakan speaking groups. Young Ashaninka on the river Tambo in Peru are forced to run several times around football pitches to treat laziness or other emotional disorders (J.P Sarmiento pers comm).

more hedonistic appreciation of the pleasant qualities of many plant medicines including aromatic or fragrant leaves and warm infusions administered as body compresses" (Ibid: 97). The Machiguenga are very reserved about revealing emotional and physical pain because such displays can lead to ill health, and they consider excessive displays of negative emotions (apart from drinking binges) to be a sign of physical and social pathology and evidence of spirit attack. Machiguenga children are thus taught from an early age to laugh at wounds and refrain from crying (Shepard 1999).

> *The Machiguenga are a people concerned with ethos so that negative emotions are restrained and released according to strict social norms. The Yora (Nahua) are a people of pathos for whom the public release of pain and sorrow provides personal comfort while contributing to the social solidarity of the group. Not to express such emotions would be a sign of individual and social pathology (Ibid: 97).*

It seems that for the Nahua, like the Iqwaye, "self pity makes the pain sweet and turns hardship into an ameliorative pleasure" (Mimica 1996:224).

Solitude is suffering

It is solitude that thus defines suffering for the Nahua. Being caught in a torrential downpour on the river in a cold wind and with no food is a huge joke as long as they are with their friends and family. To be on their own in such circumstances is to be *omiskoi*, to suffer. The myth of *notishoniyamafani* describes how a man cruelly abandons his companion by the side of the river. The man suffers: the sun burns his back, the midges bite mercilessly and the constant bubbling of the deep pool instills him with fear. But it is his solitude, the fact that he has been abandoned, which is the underlying cause of his suffering.

Many Nahua stories of hunting or raiding expeditions that go disastrously wrong describe how their protagonists were forced to return home on their own. While they were living in the Manu, *Enefafichi*, an old Nahua man, became separated from his three companions after a disastrous raid on a logging camp. His companions returned home on foot, as they thought he had been killed. *Enefafichi* however had simply

become lost and eventually, after a few days of wandering, he could go no further. He hung up his hammock at the mouth of a large river where he waited to die. Three weeks later he was found by a Nahua hunting party. He was crying and wailing in the forest. When such stories are told, it is the solitude of the person that is emphasised. The listeners ask in shocked and high falsetto tones, "*ares fistishta?"* 'Just one little person on their own?' *"Eh eh"* the storyteller affirms, heartfelt sorrow infusing their words, "*ares fistishta omiskoishta"*, just one poor little suffering thing on its own.

For the Nahua it is solitude, rather than hunger or discomfort, that constitutes the basis of suffering. The story of *oakariyoshifo* tells of a baby whose mother is killed by an enemy people. An old childless couple amongst the killers is moved to adopt him by the baby's cries. For the Nahua, solitude and crying elicit compassion and create kinship[261].

The most expensive urinal in Lima

Jorge and Julio were visiting Lima for the second time. They were going to stay for two weeks to help transcribe and translate a collection of myths. My preparations for Nahua visits were now well tuned. This included stocking up the freezer with multiple chickens, because the Nahua refused to eat anything else in Lima. Fish from the sea was horrifying because of its smell and strange colouring, while the meat in supermarkets was always bloody and its provenance was never clear. I also needed to storm proof the bathroom because the Nahua have not been raised to control their bladders, and as I discovered on many occasions the aim of Nahua men is never more than a hopeful gesture in the toilet's general direction. On one visit to the Presidential Palace to meet advisors of the First Lady, each of my six Nahua friends visited the toilet every half an hour (Photo 11). The meeting lasted three hours, and by the end, the photo of the Peruvian President above the sink gazed imperiously over a minor flood.

After their first visit, Jorge and Julio had gown in confidence, and during breaks from our work they wanted to leave the house to hunt for ice-creams, to go to the beach

[261] Similarly, the Piro say that it is the solitude of newborn babies that elicits compassion on the part of their relatives (Gow 2000:47).

to see the sea and look at women, to visit supermarkets where they took photos of tins of tuna and frozen chickens, to travel up escalators and in lifts, and of course to visit the zoo (Photo 12). On their return to Serjali they told their friends about how many potential lovers (*sisati*) roamed around Lima.

During their second visit we had friends to stay in our tiny two bedroomed flat which meant there were two people already sleeping on the floor in the small communal space. One toilet and shower was already a bit tight between six people - a couple more would probably be too much. I imagined, perhaps naively, that Jorge and Julio might want a bit more independence, especially with all the *sisatis* in Lima. I decided to rent the empty flat next door, a way of giving Jorge and Julio a little independence that would not make them feel unloved and would spare my flatmates the constant task of cleaning the toilet and wiping spit off windows[262]. I struck a deal with the owner for $100 and made it homely by putting in some comfortable mattresses and cheerful sheets.

At two in the morning on their first night there was a knock on my door. Julio and Jorge were standing in the corridor with their bags and mattresses. *Epa*, Julio said, "We want to sleep with you, there is a *yoshi* in our room banging on the doors". Julio and Jorge joined the overflow in the sitting room and stayed for two weeks. They did however continue to use the toilet next door.

The desire for companionship is a recurring theme for the Nahua. Their laments (*fini*) for the death of siblings or children focus on the solitude of the living - 'who will accompany me now,' they sing - and many Nahua myths describe how single men or women speak of their loneliness to animals who later become their spouses. To be homesick amongst the Nahua is not thought of as a weakness but as proof of one's humanity; a person who does not feel loneliness or homesickness or physically express this state will be regarded with deep suspicion[263]. For the Nahua, only *yoshi* live rootless lives, wandering deep in the forest, which is why solitary forest animals such as the deer are associated with dangerous forest spirits[264].

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[262] The Nahua spit a great deal; it is part of their techniques for expelling sources of contamination such as pestilent smells.

[263] Also see Lagrou 2000 for a similar sentiment amongst the Cashinahua.

[264] The Ache go even further: the dead man's greatest problem is his solitude and in the past sometimes even the dead man's own daughter was killed to provide him with companionship (Clastres 1998: 170). Rival also notes this for the Huaorani (2005:297).

One Nahua myth (*roanafaafipipone*) in particular dramatises the suspicious nature of solitary activities. It tells the story of a man who would go hunting but would end up cutting pieces of flesh from his own leg that he would eat raw. Returning home he claimed he had been scratched by bamboo. Eating his own flesh was perverse and anti-social as it had been unmediated by human action or relationships[265]. His perversity resulted in terrible consequences. The man's taste for human flesh eventually resulted in the murder and consumption of his first wife and his own children. The Nahua label those beings who engage in such asocial activities as *yoshi*.

The world of *yoshi*

As we have seen, yoshi refers to both any animate being's spiritual capacity as well as the body spirits of the dead. It is also a gloss that describes a range of non-human entities, many of whom inhabit the forest and are collectively labelled as *niyoshi* (forest spirits)[266]. Many of these *yoshi* appear in myths but are not confined to the past. The Nahua continue to encounter them today and often with dramatic consequences, as Laura discovered during her encounter with *nimeramapoa*[267].

Some of these forest spirits have the capacity to control and lure animals in a form of mastership, and they all have the ability to assume a variety of appearances. These *yoshi* are in one sense very human. They joke, eat, laugh and dance; they have chiefs and burn their houses when these chiefs die. Yet at the same time they are paragons of many anti-social vices. They squabble and argue, they fight and kill each other over food and they have sex openly. *Yoshi* see the world through different eyes, animal shoulder blades are their axes, *lupuna* trees are their houses and its leaves are their tobacco. It is amusing that the Dominican mission post in Serjali is built under the shade of a gigantic *lupuna* tree. The nuns refuse to cut it down despite Nahua recommendations. Its arching canopy provides the nuns and other visitors with a

[265] In a parallel fashion, the Piro are constantly paranoid about their children eating earth, because earth is considered to be socially unmediated (Gow 1989).
[266] For reasons of space it is not possible to review the diverse range of forest spirits here.
[267] See Chapter 2.

staggeringly beautiful view. On the other hand, they do not have any next door neighbours…

Yoshi thus refers to profoundly asocial characteristics as opposed to *yora*, a person that is defined by characteristics of compassion, pity and affection[268]. Such asocial beings are also described as *enikoima,* a term translateable as 'improper' or 'not real'. Siblings of the same parents are often referred to as *enifetsa*, 'other very real one' and unsuspicious foods with no associated dangers are *enikoi* ('very real one'). Venison for example is tasty but considered *enikoima* because of its associations with forest spirits. On their various visits to Lima, Nahua friends looked in amazement at the household appliances. They peered into the glass top of the washing machine and exclaimed in shock, *keeerr*, *enikoima ares fisti patsai*! 'This is not real, it washes by itself', and applied the same description to the kettle that boiled water on its own[269]. The mini disc recorder that was used to document their songs, stories and interviews was *yoshikoi*, 'very *yoshi*!' Humanity is defined by its sociability to such an extent that solitary activities and beings are considered inhuman in contrast to a profoundly social and compassionate humanity.

The Arawakan speaking Yanesha live in a world of "controlled sociability" (Santos Granero 2000:272) where people are extremely conscious not to impose themselves on others. Visiting between houses is valued but they also highly respect privacy and get tired of constant demands on their sociability. Households are much more dispersed than in the past, but many Yanesha own another house to which they can escape.

Nothing could be further from the Nahua reality where people operate a policy of 'open all hours'. Many is the time I have been woken at night by someone passing the house and wanting a chat. Homesickness, loneliness, sadness and nostalgia are not considered signs of weakness but an expression of sociality. Kensinger describes the case of a Cashinahua man whose non-observance of food taboos was punished by ostracism. The punishment worked because he was more petrified of solitude than anything else (1995:189). In short, "to be alone is to suffer" (Ales 2000:135).

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[268] The equivalent Cashinahua concept of *huni kui* is translated as 'real people' (McCallum 2001, Kensinger 1995 *et al*).

[269] Amerindians do not just attribute souls to animals, humans and spirits but also to 'inanimate' objects (Viveiros de Castro 1998a:61)

Thus, it is references to suffering that elicit compassion. On a hunting trip upriver with the Nahua we encountered a Machiguenga man and his two wives. The beach was strewn with bamboo that the man had felled to make a small garden by the side of the river, but he had no shoes and had to tread carefully to avoid the bamboo spines. The Nahua referred to him as *omiskoishta* (poor little thing) when describing this encounter to elicit compassion in their listeners and help for the man (Photo 13).

In a similar fashion, many Nahua myths relate how help is offered after the characters are moved by compassion towards the suffering of others. In the story of *tetepafa* a man cries in order to convince a frog to help him defeat a marauding giant hawk that is eating all the people[270]. Similarly, the tortoises whose legs have been broken by the jaguar cry and plead for help from a passing wasp. The wasp stings their legs thereby releasing them slightly and enabling the tortoises to walk again, albeit extremely slowly.

Part 4: Emotions as embodied and learned

The Nahua, like other indigenous Amazonian peoples, thus deliberately fashion conviviality through the careful use of language, non-coercive leadership and their emotions. For many of these peoples, the expression of emotions is learned; they are "formalised processes of sociability" (Ales 2000: 141). Erikson, for example, describes how Matis children are taught from an early age to control the expression of pain and suffering. For the Matis, crying is considered an illness and is quickly repressed. Erikson cites an example of a child who was scolded when he cried after accidentally stepping in the ashes of fire (1996:289)[271].

[270] After her death, an old woman transformed (*shinaeni*) into a giant hawk (*tetepafa*) and began to raid all the villages and kill many people. One man was crying and wailing after his daughter had been killed and pleaded for help from a passing frog. frog appeared to the man as a person and told him to make a model of a person out of sticky clay and leave it on his patio to attract the hawk. The hawk was attracted by the model but became stuck to it and was killed by the man.

[271] Matis children, unlike their Marubo neighbours, withstand serious cuts without crying and Erikson even observed Matis toddlers throw themselves repeatedly on the ground to learn how to withstand pain (P. Erikson pers comm).

Many indigenous Amazonian peoples such as the Huitoto, are similarly conscious of the dangers of indulging their desires and choose to regulate these by voluntarily exposing themselves to suffering (Echeverri 2000:35)[272]. Thus, Achuar children "are constantly reminded to check their natural greed" and taught that "temperance in all its forms is the mark of a superior human being" (Descola 1996:51), and many Tukanoan groups in the North West Amazon are known for their ascetic regimes of icy baths, whipping, fasting and sleep deprivation (S Hugh-Jones 1996:22)[273].

The Nahua could not be more different. While Matis and Machiguenga toddlers grin and bear serious wounds, strapping Nahua hunters moan about minor cuts and scrapes. Nevertheless, the Nahua also recognise the influence of child rearing on emotional states. In common with many other indigenous Amazonians, they refrain from hitting and scolding children as this would teach them to be violent and bad tempered (Belaunde 2000, 2006). They may not train their children to suffer pain gladly but as we will see later they are extremely conscious of the importance of controlling their anger.

Sweetness and indulgence

Nahua preference for indulgence over restraint is reflected in their attitudes towards sweet and bitter sensations. While the Machiguenga recognise the value of bitter or stinging experiences, the Nahua are engaged in a constant search for pleasurable sensations and enjoy sweet smelling herbal treatments, *Inka Kola*[274] and therapeutic massages. This reflects a particular Panoan focus on sweetness and bitterness (Erikson 1996). For the Nahua, while sweetness is associated with women, softness and the interior of society, bitterness is associated with men, hardness and relations with the exterior. The Nahua were astounded when they heard that the Achuar prefer to drink sparkling mineral water over sickly sweet soft drinks when they visit town. For the sugar obsessed Nahua, water is *paisma*, 'tasteless'.

[272] See Reichel Dolmatoff (1976) for a description of the ascetic regimes of Kogi trainee mamas.
[273] For the Piaroa, beauty is a condition of restraint and the mastery of powerful yet dangerous forces of gods; they value tranquility over exuberance (Overing 1989). Also see Kidd on the Enxet (2000:120).
[274] A sickly sweet Peruvian soft drink.

Sweet things (*fata*) are the food of the immortal beings. In the land of the dead, the deceased gorge on sweet and succulent pineapples. This was why it made sense when the Yaminahua told them that sugar comes from the sky and explains the immediate obsession of the Nahua for sugar and salt after they 'fell out of the forest'[275]. Their land of the dead is a paradise for hedonists, a place where they can eat sweet pineapples to their hearts content, where there are no poisonous creatures and where they can make love all day with no risk of pregnancy. It is a place where they do not age or get ill, experience pain or suffer grief and emotional distress. If anyone appreciates the good things in life or in death, it is the Nahua.

Bitterness and restraint

While sweetness is associated with indulgence, bitterness (*moka*) is associated with restraint and suffering, and the Nahua tend to avoid this as much as possible. However, the one aspect of life where some form of suffering, restraint and bitterness is considered essential is the arena of shamanism because of the connection between bitterness and powerful knowledge. During the process of shamanic training, the initiates are subjected to the stings of ants and wasps. Their *pae* (capacity/power) is conceived as impregnating the initiate in the same way that the qualities of animals, tobacco and *ayahuasca* are acquired by people when they are consumed. Plants, just like animals, are considered subjects. Initiates must not eat nor can they moan or complain during this ordeal. It is the bitterness and venom of these experiences that give their voices and stomachs their potency.

Consistent with general Amerindian notions of alterity as something productive yet dangerous, the Nahua distinguish between the world of insiders that is characterised by teasing, joking, sweetness and pleasure, and relations with the outside world which are governed by idioms of bitterness and suffering as well as reservation and respect. This is why 'playing the fool' with outsiders can have devastating consequences. It is no surprise that dietary restrictions - one of the few systematic areas of control and self

[275] This is a fact that has not been lost on their Piro and Ashaninka neighbours who frequently remark on Nahua greediness for sugar (J.P Sarmiento pers comm).

restraint in Nahua life - come to the fore when the person is exposed to attack from external predators because of a heightened state of vulnerability.

Shared bodies: Shared emotions

For the Nahua, emotions are considered to be fully embodied experiences; sadness is considered an illness whereas happiness is healthiness. Those who are sad or *shinaibetsai* lose their appetite and take refuge in their hammocks, crying and singing softly all day. The physical expression of emotional states means that the Nahua are very aware of the fragility of the moods of their companions and very conscious of the dangers reflected by a person's desire to stay in their hammock or to refuse food.

The *oiti* (the heart) is the locus of *shinai* (thought/memory/love) and emotional perception for the Nahua[276]. When they are happy they have *oiti fipi sharai*, 'bouncing heart' but when they are grieving and suffering from *shinabetsai* they say *noko oiti isi paekoi*, 'our hearts have tremendous burning pain'. Rage or *sinai* is also located in the heart, as one Nahua friend explained: *ma sinai noko fichiato*, *noko oiti fishki,* 'When rage grabs us, our hearts are furious'. This rage in turn is necessary for acts of homicide. Estella, a Nahua lady with an untypically sharp tongue is acknowledged by some Nahua to be so angry because she was burnt as a child, thereby incorporating the qualities of fire. Physiology and emotional states are both signs and triggers of each other and their intimate relationship mirrors the inseparable relationship between *yoshi* and flesh that defines the concept of *yora*.

The embodied nature of emotions is a recurring theme amongst indigenous Amazonian peoples and explains why many such peoples often attribute emotional states to physical causes and treat them with physical therapies[277]. This relationship was made explicit to McCallum by a Cashinahua man who explained that emotions and

[276] Similarly, the Wari disbelieved Beth Conklin when she said she missed her husband, for she was fat and healthy. If she really missed him she would be thin and unwell (2001:143). The Wari also describe emotions as cardiac processes. Worry is a 'groaning heart', while to be excited is when the 'heart is moving fast'. Weak blood and slow circulation make a person lazy, thin and depressed (Ibid: 141-2).
[277]Laziness, anger and bad emotions are treated by the Cashinahua as if they have natural rather than supernatural causes (Kensinger 1995:214). The Machiguenga treat anger by dripping the resins of certain sedges in the eyes of the quarreling parties (Shepard 1999: 92). The desire to die, *imana,* is treated by the Cashinahua as a substance that must be extracted from the body, thus explaining its treatment with eye drops and medicinal baths (Keifenheim 2002:93).

moral qualities are related to *yuxin*: sadness and happiness are caused by bad or good *yuxin* entering their hearts (1996:54-55). The Candoshi equate emotional states with physiological experiences. Desire produces a dangerous viscous substance in the body called *yatama* and every morning they drink a bitter emetic to get rid of this dangerous substance (2003:41-42). For the Ache, sadness is described as a deep anguish and pain in the chest and is considered dangerous as it can trigger violence (Clastres 1998:186). The Ache drive the sadness out of their own bodies by beating themselves with their own bows (Ibid: 36).

This embodied nature of emotions is critical for understanding the Nahua response to trauma. The Nahua consider their families as *noko yora* (our body), literally bodily extensions of themselves. This principle explains why their laments for the sick repeat the refrain, *efe yora chaka*, 'my body/kin is bad' because they too feel this pain. As Mimica observes the crying that Iqwaye people express when their relations are sick or in pain reflects the empathy that people feel for those who share their bodies (1996:226)[278].

Part 5: Thoughtlessness and anger

Unlike the Nahua, many other indigenous Amazonian peoples engage in an explicit project of emotional control. The Piro for example consider crying to be negative because it is thoughtless. They say that the Yaminahua are thoughtless and angry, manifested by their inability to control powerful emotions and their lack of fear in front of others (P.Gow pers comm). Similarly, the Machiguenga consider the Nahua to be *kogapakori,* a reference to beings who act without any apparent reason, such as ambushing and killing people, an occurrence which took place frequently during the 1970s and 80s when the Nahua often raided Machiguenga hamlets for metal tools (K.Swierk pers comm).

[278] The Wari even call affines by consanguineal terms when they are ill; a husband is described in songs as 'flesh of my children' and mother-in-law as 'flesh of my grandchildren' (Conklin 2001:69-70).

Interestingly, the Nahua possess a similar definition of thoughtlessness. As Shepard noted, many illnesses are caused by the unprovoked attack of angry and malevolent beings such as wasp spirits (1999:103). Thoughtlessness, *shinai tapiama,* 'to not know how to think', is equated with asociality and is a characteristic the Nahua extend to individuals who are anti-social such as killers. Thoughtlessness is thus a relational condition. For the Machiguenga and Piro it is the Nahua who constitute the profoundly thoughtless other while for the Nahua it is wasps and killers who are unpredictable and beyond compassion. Thoughtlessness however is not an inherent state. It can be triggered by the most powerful emotion of all, anger.

Anger

Before I began my fieldwork proper I was helping the Nahua resolve problems of illegal logging and insecure land tenure. As part of this process, my colleagues and I were working with the Nahua to make maps of their land as part of a process of gaining more secure legal recognition of their territory. After two months of data collection the initial process was complete and we were due to return to Lima to process the information. As we prepared to leave it was discovered that the GPS containing all the information was missing. Finally it emerged that it had been stolen by Jaime, our 20 year old neighbour, a fact I did not believe until his mother found it in his bag. My initial relief quickly turned to outrage. His petty theft could have set back the whole land recognition process by months. I confronted Jaime but he denied all knowledge. When I told him we had just found it in his bag he became belligerent and aggressive. I calmed down quickly but was left with a sense of frustration. His mother was so happy when she found the GPS, but why was Jaime neither berated nor at least reproached? This was the second and last time I was to get angry in Serjali. As with the first, Curaca was alarmed and moved quickly to calm me down[279].

My error of course was to confuse the refusal of the Nahua to punish Jaime with an absence of moral values. In time I realised that Jaime stole from everybody including

[279] The first was during a conflict with loggers when a Yaminahua man acting as the loggers' intermediary attempted to convince the Nahua that I was profiteering by selling their photos. He was unaware that I could understand him and I responded angrily.

his own mother. Jaime is *yoshi* I was told. He was thoughtless, rootless, asocial and uncompassionate. Yet in a small village where everyone is related and the cracks of latent mistrust and suspicion run just beneath the surface of everyday life, anger is a dangerous enterprise as it can lead to violence amongst kin. Thus, the one emotional arena that the Nahua do subject to specific and detailed restraint is anger. For the Nahua, in common with many indigenous Amazonian peoples, anger is the exemplary anti-social emotion (Belaunde 2005), and great lengths are taken to live a non-confrontational life.

Thus, despite the multiple opportunities for arguments and tensions amongst the Nahua, including frequent adultery, conflicts with loggers and misuse of community funds, I only heard of two instances of confrontation over the course of six years. Both of these involved furious women who encountered their husbands in a compromising situation[280]. Instead, great efforts are made to avoid potential confrontations. As McCallum explains, "No amount of moralising can put a stop to minor delinquencies such as theft, gossip, drunkenness and laziness…for the Cashinahua this is the normal human condition" (1990:425). Nahua abhorrence of conflict is something they share with the Machiguenga who frequently move villages if tension arises, rather than engage in confrontation (Rosengren 2000:224)[281]. For both the Machiguenga and Nahua, actions that result in disharmony are extremely negative but the consequences of getting angry are even worse[282]. Through inaction or movement, violence is avoided.

For the Nahua, anger (*sinai*) is the other side of the coin of love. The Nahua explain that when they lived in the Manu they killed many loggers and Machiguenga to avenge their relatives who had been killed[283]. Just as sadness and nostalgia are experienced physically, so too is anger, which is considered an affliction of the heart (*oiti sinai*) that can escalate into violence. They explain that their warlike aggressiveness in the Manu

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[280] As I never witnessed an angry outburst in Serjali I never asked the Nahua about treatments for anger.

[281] For the Cashinahua, anger and resentment are normally suppressed and are expressed largely by a coolness and distance in the relationship (Kensinger 1995:99).

[282] In the Machiguenga myth of the origin of moon, moon escaped into the sky because his mother was angry and confronted her son. His father did nothing however and his behaviour is seen in positive light (Rosengren 2000:230).

[283] The drinking of manioc beer for the Juruna intensifies sociability to such an extent that their love turns to anger (Lima cited in Belaunde 2005:176). Surrallés explains similarly for the Candoshi: "Hate is the other side of the coin of love". Their love for their kin can result in their rage and desire to kill if and when their kin die (2003:71).

fuelled the anger of their hearts. After they had killed once they were infected with anger and this is why they say, *noko oiti sinamis* – 'our hearts were always angry'. Anger, like other emotions, is considered powerful because of its ability to shift their perspective on the world.

Just as the Nahua recognise the dangers of becoming more angry the more they kill, the Cashinahua acknowledge the inevitable dangers of the aggressive attitude they must adopt in hunting and their relationships with macho white men (McCallum 2001:114-115). By imitating outsiders such capacities are ingrained in their bodies, a danger comparable to that risked by the Nahua when they wear *mestizo* clothes.

Just as the Nahua today need to tread a fine line between the imitation of outsiders and maintaining their sense of self, the conundrum for Nahua men in the past was that they needed to be fierce to deal with an aggressive outside world yet prevent this anger spilling over to the inside. The Nahua are astonishingly successful at balancing on this tightrope. Given their very recent violent history it is incredible that the strapping man rubbing noses with his small grandson and cooing in a high pitched voice is a multiple assassin. As Fausto notes, "the Parakana are incredibly peaceful except when they are killing you" (cited in Belaunde 2005:179).

Many indigenous Amazonian peoples recognise the capacity of anger to shift their perspectives. Clastres describes how the Ache can be overcome by anger and even kill their own kin. He notes how an Ache man, whose son was killed by lightning, killed the son of another man in his anger (1998:172)[284]. Similarly for the Juruna, drunkenness results in the recurrence of nostalgia and memories of past deaths which generate anger and the desire for revenge. Perversely, the violence was often directed at those people, most probably their own kin, who were trying to introduce some calm. The violence did not have a cause; they were violent as they were angry (Lima cited in Belaunde 2005:175-177). For Amazonian peoples, anger is a transformational force–

[284] The Arawete say that anger causes thoughtfulness to leave the body while nostalgia for dead or absent kin can also result in loss of thoughtfulness and cause them to become estranged from themselves (Viveiros de Castro 1992:194). For the Airo Pai if one is not controlled and does not direct predatory attitudes towards the outside, then one ends up consuming the inside. In this context the use of *ayahuasca* is dangerous as one can become susceptible to manipulation by spirits (*huati)* and could attack and kill one's own kin. The epidemics were conceived of as attacks by sorcerers, "people who do not know how to think" (Belaunde 2005:153).

an "operator of radical alterity" (Belaunde 2005:209) in which people become monsters who treat their own kin as prey.

It seems from the ethnographic literature that many indigenous Amazonian peoples value the restraint of emotions such as grief and pain not because they are dangerous in themselves but because they are associated with a lack of self-control that can lead to thoughtlessness and anger[285]. This is why the Matis and Machiguenga train their children not to cry when they experience pain.

The restrained Machiguenga and Piro thus fear Nahua expressiveness as an inevitable precursor of violence, but the Nahua disagree. When I asked my Nahua friends why they thought the Machiguenga restrain grief, they told me that Machiguenga hearts must be very hard (*keresh*) in comparison to their own 'soft hearts'. For the Nahua their exuberant expressions of all emotions including grief and pain are not considered a precursor of anger but are designed specifically to elicit compassion from others. The alternative that is explored in the following chapter, is a possible descent into sadness and the desire to die.

Part 6: Denying compassion: Emotions and points of view

The Nahua do not however offer their compassion universally. Just as I have been astonished and overwhelmed by their tenderness I was often shocked by their callousness with game animals that they treat with aggressive nonchalance[286].

This callousness was not reserved exclusively for animals. One night on a journey down to Sepahua, we were hailed by a shout from a logging camp on the riverbank. One of the loggers had sustained a serious axe injury and was bleeding heavily, and they wanted us to evacuate him to Sepahua. Our boat had space and it would have

[285] Erikson suggests that amongst Panoan speakers sadness and anger are linked not only conceptually but linguistically. *Sinan* is a general term for rage in Pano languages and also means sadness in Matis (1996:288).
[286] See Chapter 2.

made sense as the loggers had no motor of their own. They were even prepared to contribute some gasoline. My Nahua friend who was driving the boat, an invariably sweet and mild mannered man was unsympathetic and wanted to continue travelling despite the man's serious injury[287]. It seems that the principle of shared bodies means that just as the Nahua feel the pain of their kin they may not feel the pain of others with whom they have no connection.

The Nahua attitude towards game animals that I found so troubling revealed an interesting aspect to their notion of suffering. For the Nahua, to provoke crying from their game animals would have been to show that the animal they were about to eat was 'like them', capable of pain, fear, tears and suffering. That is why they laughed when the animal roared in anger. The Nahua could not risk making the animal cry - establishing a relationship of compassion with one's food is a disastrous policy. Just as anger is an operator of radical alterity, compassion is an operator of similarity. Physiological experiences such as clothing, smells and foods can influence points of view, but for the Nahua, emotions can also trigger shifts in perspective; their identity is relational.

This capacity of emotions to trigger shifts in perspective is perfectly illustrated by a Shipibo myth described in Chapter 3 in which a jaguar/man was worried about his wife extracting something from his mouth with a bone for fear of the pain it might cause. The pain could transform into anger and he would lose his human sense of self, assume his jaguar identity and eat the woman. The story is explicit that pain and anger (its consequence) can trigger changes in perspective (Roe 1982:54).

The capacity of emotions to trigger shifts in perspective sheds further light on the comparison between hunters and killers that was made in Chapter 2. The risk of losing their sense of self through identification with their victim is why a killer must be angry in order to make their victim as 'other' as possible. The problem is that by becoming angry the anger can spill over to the inside, making killers dangerous to their own kin. By the same token, hunters behave with aggressive nonchalance towards their prey

[287] I am unaware of any personal conflict that might have caused this man to act in this way and I observed similar behaviour with unknown outsiders on other occasions.

ensuring they do not feel compassion towards them. Anger is a tool that enables them to 'other the similar' thereby ensuring they are less vulnerable to impregnation.

There is almost no place for reticence amongst the Nahua. The expression of joy at a visitor's arrival is designed to elicit a similarly affectionate response, both confirming the potentially questionable humanity of the visitor as well as creating a community of compassionate individuals[288]. Their identity is constructed out of these encounters; it is relational rather than given. Similarly, to be melodramatic and to moan are also means to elicit a display of humanity. It is these capacities of joy and laughter, fear and suffering, homesickness, pain, grief and loneliness that define the human condition for the Nahua and their expression is part of their project of conviviality. The repression or improper management of these emotions has potentially devastating consequences because they are both triggers and signs of a serious pathology, the process of becoming 'other'.

Conclusion

The Nahua combine a fierce sense of personal autonomy with a profound sensitivity and compassion for other people's feelings. For the Nahua, the exchange of their dreams with each other and the expression of all emotions contribute to the circulation of feelings amongst members of a small community. The effect of this expressiveness is to elicit compassion from their fellow villagers.

Nevertheless, while compassion may be a result of such 'indulgence', it would be inaccurate to give the impression that this is an explicit project on the part of the Nahua and would confuse cause with effect. Nahua emotional response to pain, suffering and grief are, I believe, "moods…of existence rather than an ideologically elaborated attitude toward living" (Mimica 1996:225). Their pain and grief reflects the logic of shared bodies by which they feel the pain of their relatives. In contrast, the 'self control' of many other Amerindian peoples who share the Nahua concept of collective bodies is an explicit project related to the prevention of potential violence. At least in the case of anger the Nahua are similarly conscious of the importance of self restraint.

[288] See Chapter 5 for in-depth discussion.

Like many indigenous Amazonians the Nahua prioritise the cultivation of psychic comfort over material advantages (Overing 1989:162). This is the good life and to achieve this they must constantly be on their toes. The sensitive management of emotions ranging from grief to anger and laughter is critical because they are weights in a balancing act between personal autonomy and social cohesion. The Nahua are engaged in more than a 'project of happiness'; they are working full time in a collective project of mood measurement and management[289].

The Nahua characterise a good person as someone who is soft and with a happy heart. A good heart implies generosity and softness translates as compassion, while someone with a bad heart is perpetually angry. Anger, like other emotional states, is not considered a faculty of the mind and thus the Nahua attribute Estella's anger to the fact she was burnt as a child[290].

Body and soul, emotion and physiology cannot be considered in isolation from each other. The inseparability of *yoshi* from materiality means that the Nahua do not distinguish between afflictions of the soul and the body. The body is not only a reflection of the person's emotional state; physical interventions are used to treat emotional conditions just as sorcery can be waged on someone's soul through their bodily substances or clothes[291].

In contrast with many indigenous Amazonian peoples who emphasise the virtues of restraint, temperance and suffering, the Nahua limit such virtues to the sphere of shamanism and to the control of anger. The Nahua do not withhold the expression of pain, illness or sadness but are as self indulgent as the Machiguenga are self restrained[292]. Unlike their more restrained neighbours the Nahua do not see grief and pain as a prelude to anger and violence but as instrumental in eliciting the compassion

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[289] They even watch closely for the emotional state of animals. The happiness of small birds (*poiya inimai*) is a good omen for hunting while the cry of the hawk is a portent of sadness.

[290] In a similar fashion, the Waura explain white people's aggressive behaviour because their children are treated violently and become angry themselves (Ireland 1988:160). The Waura also notice that whites boast about angry and violent behaviour whereas Waura who succumb to it are ashamed (Ibid: 160).

[291] See Chapter 6.

[292] Langdon describes 'two sets of opposed values including greed versus restraint and self indulgence versus self deprivation (Cited in S Hugh-Jones 1996:22). Shepard describes the Nahua as Dionysians and the Machiguenga as Apollonians (1999:97).

of their kin. Unlike the Machiguenga who preach the control of desire, the Nahua are happy to throw caution to the wind.

This is not because they do not recognise the consequences of uninhibited desire. Many Nahua suffer illnesses that they attribute to their own inability to observe dietary restrictions and they attribute their raiding of *mestizo* camps before 1984 to their irresistible desire for coveted things. In fact, the story of how they 'fell out of the forest' is a story of people indulging their desire to sleep on the beach.

Like other Amazonians, the Nahua recognise the consequences of uncontrolled desire; the difference is that other than in the sphere of shamanism the Nahua are much less willing to control their sensory pleasures. The post-mortem destiny of the Nahua is a world where they can indulge these pleasures with no consequences. The following chapter explores how the dangers of expressing sadness and illness are not lost on the Nahua but rather than aggravating the problem, the expression results in the compassion necessary for their effective treatment.

Six months after they 'fell out of the forest' the Nahua population had halved. This was an epic tragedy yet, without wishing to downplay the traumatic nature of this experience, the overriding impression that the Nahua give to their visitors today is that they are not only surviving but living the good life[293]. The following chapter explores their techniques for not remembering the dead that have helped them cope with such difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, beyond their ability to separate the living from the dead, it is their 'project of happiness' that has enabled them to recover from this traumatic period. Their propensity to become easily downcast and nostalgic is offset by the ease with which they regain their cheery disposition.

Many indigenous Amazonians are embroiled in a continual cycle that oscillates between conviviality and violence and which is dramatised by binge drinking of manioc beer that exposes the repressed memories and tensions of life (Santos Granero 2000:284). The Nahua do not engage in such binges, nor is there any evidence they have done so in the past. Rather than switching between conviviality and violence, the

[293] Thanks to Luisa Elvira Belaunde for drawing this to my attention.

Nahua are constantly oscillating between happiness and sadness, a lightness and heaviness of heart. Their hilarious jokes and raucous myths, their tactility and need for companionship, all counter the dangers of sadness.

Laughter, like anger, triggers changes in points of view. While anger creates otherness out of similarity, laughter is a force that fashions similarity out of difference. The power of laughter and anger, like all emotions, is that they are tools for affecting the other's point of view. This is the "sorcery of laughter" (Belaunde 2005:305)[294].

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that emotions are both a sign and a trigger of shifts in points of view. This capacity of emotions is related to their embodied nature. The following chapter argues that it is only through understanding this embodied nature that we can understand the apparent volatility in emotional states amongst the Nahua. The chapter focuses on their ability to shift rapidly between memory and oblivion. Their emotional states are as flexible and elastic as their bodies.

[294] A Curripaco love song.

Chapter 5

Remembering and Forgetting

A death in the Amazon

The day that Teocho died was unforgettable. For a week I had been living with him and several other Nahua while building a guard post at the border of their territory. One morning he suddenly developed an acute stomach pain and was evacuated to Atalaya. Tragically, a complication developed as he was waiting to be airlifted to Pucallpa for an operation and he died from an intestinal blockage. The news was relayed to his relatives in Serjali by radio. His immediate and extended family went into spasms of shock; they cried, wailed and cut their hair, beat their heads with their hands and shook uncontrollably with grief. A speedboat was arranged to transport his immediate relatives and myself to Sepahua and collect Teocho's body for burial.

The departure was painful. The tiny boat barely had space for four passengers but at least 15 of his relatives attempted to jump on board. They were shaking uncontrollably as they repeatedly sung the mourning laments (*fini*). In Sepahua, arrangements were made to transport Teocho's body the following day in a speedboat along with two of his relatives. I hired a second speedboat to transport his remaining relatives, including his brother Lucco and his mother's sister Marta, for whom there had been no space in the first. This boat was still too small for all of us so I decided to stay behind and follow as soon as possible. Two hours later I received a call on the radio from concerned Nahua in Serjali. When I explained that I had been unable to travel they became extremely agitated. "You should have come. You have to come immediately. You cannot be on

your own, you must be with us". Fortunately as we were speaking, the occupants of the second boat returned. They had broken down and had been forced to float back to Sepahua. With no money remaining, we borrowed a painfully slow *peke peke* motor with a larger boat and travelled upriver together.

The three day journey was strangely tranquil but was occasionally peppered by storms of grief when we passed trees that Teocho had planted, paths he had wandered along or when we met one of his relatives. Teocho was a bachelor and had no house or garden of his own but by the time we arrived in Serjali his meagre possessions had been burnt and the fruit trees he had planted had been felled. *No ana ofekaspai*, 'we do not want to see this anymore' they explained. The community even abandoned the control post that Teocho had been helping construct and effectively moved the borders of their territory a few kilometres upriver.

Teocho was buried in the small cemetery on the other side of the river from the village and the grief of the previous few days intensified once again. His kin held on to the coffin and singing and crying they piled on top of it in a chaotic scrum[295]. After the burial, his *koka* (mother's brother) stayed alone in his house for two entire days singing a mournful lament with the repetitive refrain; *efe roa fake*, *efe yora chaka*, 'my beautiful child, my body/kin is bad'. Jader, Teocho's youngest brother, travelled downriver to Sepahua where he stayed for six months while Lucco, another of Teocho's brothers, shaved off his hair and was given a new set of clothes to wear. People spoke to him in a high pitched tone of respect and referred to him as *fisti*, 'one', to reflect that he no longer had an elder brother. However, barely three weeks later, Lucco was laughing, eating, drinking manioc beer, having seemingly recovered his voracious appetite for life. When I asked whether he was no longer sad, people told me *ma shinamakia,* which they translated in Spanish as 'he has forgotten'.

Two years previously I observed a very similar reaction when Reyna, a 35 year old lady, drowned in tragic circumstances. Even before her husband (Mario) found the body he knew she was dead because he had seen her *yoshi* on a beach. Within moments of returning to the village he had set fire to their house and her possessions. Her

[295] Such is Wari desire to embrace the corpse that it is often in danger of being pulled apart (Conklin 2001:74).

relatives wailed and cried. Their bodies shook with tears; they cut off their hair and beat their heads with their hands. After the burial, Reyna's mother and siblings stayed in Sepahua for six months. Mario was distraught and for several days lay in his hammock without eating while singing repetitive and mournful lamentations. like Lucco, barely a few weeks later Mario seemed to have made a full recovery.

At first this seemed surprising. How could people with such intense emotional attachments to their loved ones seemingly 'forget' them so rapidly? When I first presented this to colleagues in the UK many of them were troubled. From their point of view, I was painting a picture of a callous and unfeeling people. I realised that the term 'forget' was unhelpful as it evoked associations with childishness and callousness and went against everything that my colleagues took to be human. 'Forgetting' was a false friend; rather than aiding translation it undermined my analysis.

A more literal translation of *ma shinamakia* was simply 'to not remember or not think'. Nahua stress on 'not remembering' is common to many indigenous Amazonian peoples who have developed elaborate post-mortuary rites specifically to "remember to forget" (Taylor 1993) and to separate the living from the deceased (Chaumeil 2007)[296]. This chapter describes how Nahua funerary practices including burial, lamentations, crying, burning and destruction of the deceased's possessions as well as the temporary abandonment of the village, help to sever contact with the spectre of the dead, the *yoshi*. Nevertheless, the Nahua explain that the principal reason for these practices is to help them deal with sadness. The banishment of the *yoshi* is a secondary benefit of this process but their priority is to actively 'not remember' the dead. To remember would be to descend into sadness that in turn could lead to death. The seriousness attributed to states of sadness is because they are not considered as a mental faculty but as a manifestation of a very real relationship with the dead. If not controlled, this eventually results in becoming overwhelmed by the seductive power of the dead and the desire to die.

[296] Chaumeil (2007) summarises the classic anthropological picture of Amazonia as a place where there are few rituals and practices associated with the dead and as a place where there is a great deal of interest in the dead but forgetting rather than remembering is stressed. Nonetheless, he points out that much of the ethnography that describes processes of remembering has been overlooked.

The focus of this chapter is how to understand not only the stress the Nahua place on 'not remembering' the dead that is common to many indigenous Amazonians, but also their particular ability to do this so rapidly. This can only be understood if it is appreciated that their concept of memory (*shinai),* like the emotions discussed in the previous chapter, is not a faculty of the mind but a form of embodied knowledge. Memory, or lack of it, is a key component of healing and grieving practices and is implicated in the causes of, and treatments for states of 'becoming other' that include nostalgia, sadness and anger. This sheds further light on Nahua capacity to switch between states of *yora* and *nafa*.

This embodied nature of memory explains why many of the techniques the Nahua use to remember and to forget revolve around transforming the bodies of the living and dead as well as the avoidance of any sensory triggers. Visible evidence of the dead does not trigger memory in a purely mental sense as understood by my colleagues. Memory for the Nahua is a faculty of the body and it is the body that remembers and knows.

Chapter outline

The first part of this chapter describes what the Nahua say about the destiny of the dead and the continued relationship they have with the living. The following section addresses the danger this poses for the living who are vulnerable to the seductive power of their dead relatives. The next section addresses the important question of memory and describes its embodied nature. This embodied nature provides the conceptual basis of the following section which describes various Nahua mourning and funerary practices and how these bodily techniques assist the living in 'not remembering' the dead. The concluding part attempts to synthesise this material and argues that the embodied nature of memory is what enables the Nahua to rapidly assume the identity of 'others' and become 'other' themselves.

Part 1: The destiny of the dead

Death has always been a source of rich information for ethnographers of indigenous Amazonian societies because it is the moment when the person is broken down into its constituent parts. The Nahua say that when a person dies, the flesh rots and while the *feroyoshi* or eye-spirit travels to the land of the dead, the disembodied *yoshi* (body spirit) clings to the possessions of the deceased.

The *yoshi*

Unlike the disembodied *feroyoshi*, the *yoshi* is attached to the person's *sefa,* the places they frequented during life, and it is thus sentenced for eternity to wander through its former gardens and hunting paths. Juan explained. "They do not sleep, they sit bent over in the forest during the day. They are all around us".

One does not have to spend much time with the Nahua to appreciate the constant presence of the dead. Walking in the forest the Nahua frequently hear the *yoshi* of deceased relatives who used to hunt in the area. At night, sometimes they spot them sitting alone in a canoe or hear them rustling in the bushes. After Reyna died, her *yoshi* threw stones onto our roof and at a small girl when she went to bathe. It even hurled pots and pans from our neighbour's kitchen in the middle of the night. Small children and women were considered in much more danger from her *yoshi* than men because of their more vulnerable status. Children were not allowed to bathe in the river directly opposite the cemetery for at least a week and I was strongly advised to avoid washing at night without a companion.

The presence of *yoshi* in the landscape was made even clearer one summer when I travelled with the Nahua to the headwaters of the River Manu where the epidemics of the 1980s wiped out almost half the population. Gregarious people became subdued and tearful as they passed places where siblings, parents and children had died, and where living relatives, currently absent in a distant town, had slept. At night, people could not sleep as they were tormented by the *yoshi* of their long deceased relatives that whistled or cracked branches in the forest. "Listen, they are calling to us" Marta

explained. "My wife, my wife they are saying, they love their family, they want their family". At one point I asked an older man to explain who had lived at the site of an old village. He told me the names of its inhabitants in a sad and tender voice and then said, "I do not want to see this anymore" and we continued walking. From a Nahua perspective, the landscape is less a 'space' and more a 'place' inhabited by a range of beings including disembodied spirits. Pedro explained further:

> *Their yoshi do not want to leave us. If you are eating, the yoshi of your dead wife will eat by your side, but you will not see her. This is why we must leave our houses. If we do not, the yoshi finds us and annoys us. If you do not leave then every day your wife will sit beside you, eventually you will die*[297].

In part, this explains why a person's houses, gardens and possessions are destroyed and burnt after their death. The burning of the house and possessions banishes the deceased's *yoshi* to the centre of the forest where it is forced to linger on hunting paths or in abandoned gardens.

The Nahua describe how their funerary practices have changed subtly since they lived in the 'centre of the forest' when they would occasionally even abandon an entire village after the death of an adult relative, especially one whose *yoshi* was considered particularly powerful such as that of a shaman. Today, rather than establish a new village they often move house or travel to a distant town that was less frequented by the deceased and they cite the permanent presence of the Catholic mission, the school and health post to explain their reduced mobility[298].

Today, they also bury their dead in a cemetery close to the village. That, as we have seen, causes certain problems because of the lingering presence of the *yoshi*. Burial in itself however is nothing new, despite the fact that the Nahua share the antipathy of other indigenous Amazonian peoples for contact with the ground which they regard as dirty. The Nahua are scrupulous in their efforts to wipe seats before they sit down and where possible avoid sitting directly on the ground. They regard the Mashco Piro with

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[297]For the Cashinahua, conviviality with *yuxin* eventually results in the living becoming *yuxin* themselves (Lagrou 1998:53).

[298] Abandonment of a village was no simple matter. New gardens would have to be cleared and planted and they would suffer food shortages before their new gardens began to produce.

horror and they call them the *tsaonafa*, 'the sitting people', because they lack hammocks. They are both amazed and horrified at my own apparent casualness towards dirt; "You have no fear of dirt", Jader once said to me and shook his head in disbelief at my appearance.

Nevertheless, despite this attitude, they never shared the vehement distate for burial practices of other peoples such as the Wari and Cashinahua (Conklin 2001, McCallum 1996)[299]. Thus, the most significant change is not burial itself but the practice promoted by missionaries to bury the dead in a cemetery close to the village.

It is only kin of the deceased who are molested by its *yoshi.* This is because of the intimate association between *yoshi* and flesh and the fact that kin are literally considered to be people of the same flesh. The association of flesh with the *yoshi* means that the grief is felt most intensely until all material remains of the person have been destroyed and the main danger from the *yoshi* for its living relatives lasts until the body has dried and been burnt. For many indigenous Amazonians, blood and bodily fluids indicate the presence of spectres. This explains why the Cashinahua (McCallum 1996, Lagrou 1998) and Wari (Conklin 2001) thoroughly cooked the flesh of the dead before consumption[300]. As Conklin argues, consumption of the dead is an act of service for the dead and their relatives rather than an incorporation of the deceased's potencies. Although the Nahua do not practice endocannibalism, nor did so in the recent past, the same logic is evident in their desire to thoroughly cook the flesh of animals. To eat raw flesh would be to expose oneself to possession by *yoshi*.

The *feroyoshi*

While the fate of the *yoshi* is a life of restless terrestrial solitude in the centre of the forest, Nahua *feroyoshis* (eye spirits) face a happier destiny in the land of the dead. At

[299] Conklin describes how, for the Wari, there was no fate worse than burial. The earth is considered cold, dirty and wet and thus a terrible destiny for their dead kin (2001:85). This was one of the reasons why the Wari preferred to roast and eat the dead over burial. During the dismemberment of the dead, they would even support the body with their own bodies to prevent the fluids from touching the earth and would catch fat dripping off the body and smear it on themselves to prevent it from touching the earth (Ibid:79-81).

[300] Similarly, the Achuar used to leave bodies unburied to hasten decomposition (Taylor 1993:665).

death, their *feroyoshi* travel downriver to the root of the sky where they ascend to *naimera* (within the sky), a celestial paradise with no affines, no illness and none of the problems of earthly existence[301]. Illness and dying are conceived as processes whereby the *feroyoshinafa* (spirits of the dead) attempt to seduce people to the land of the dead where they give the recent arrivals a perfume to smell that is so powerful they instantaneously forget the living. While many other indigenous Amazonians consider death as a process in which they are consumed by cannibal gods and are thus transformed into gods themselvesthe Nahua 'die' through the transformative power of smell, another illustration of the equivalence of eating and smelling[302].

The post-mortem destiny is not the same however for all the Nahua. At death, *yofe* (shamans) have the capacity to assume the form of (*enitero)* a boa or jaguar with the power of their thought. These beings are referred to as *shinaenifo*, literally 'thought that is formed'[303]. On one journey with the Nahua, Marta showed me a place where, about twenty years ago, the dead body of a small child who had gone missing was later found. His body had been mutilated and his head had been scalped. Nearby, they found a strange set of footprints; the left foot was that of a jaguar while the right was that of a man. The culprit was a *shinaenifo,* the transformed thought of a powerful shaman. This particular manifestation was a jaguar/man that has one jaguar paw and one human foot; one side of the face is that of a jaguar while the other is that of a person.

The *feroyoshi* of those people who are killed by arrows or guns do not go to the land of the dead but are said to become *pakashoma* (bamboo/arrow demon) and attempt to eat and kill their own family. *Macofene* told me several stories of his narrow escapes from the bloodthirsty *pakashoma* whose bald heads and red faces dripped with blood,

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[301] For the Cashinahua, the dead do not eat, have sex or die they just have fun! (McCallum 1996:49).

[302] At death, Cashinahua men and women are eaten by the *Inca* and thus become *Inca* themselves (McCallum 1999:453). The Arawete suffer a similar fate at the hands of the *mai*, the celestial divinities (Viveiros de Castro 1992:71). The definitive moment of death for the Wari arrives when they drink corn beer given to them by the master of underworld (Conklin 2001:44).

[303] Piaroa shamans (*ruwang*) share a similar fate; once the body rots, the powers that the *ruwang* has accumulated during life are unmastered, released and often transform into bees and jaguars (Overing 1993:199). Machiguenga shamans are the only humans who can access paradise, the rest are destined to live a miserable life (Shepard 2002:11). The destiny of Cashinahua men and women at death is also different. While men are received in hostile fashion by the *Inca,* the women are treated as kin (McCallum 1996:52).

The Nahua closely associate the *Iri* (immortal beings) with the *feroyoshinafa* and with places located downriver[304]. In mythic time, some people were able to visit the land of the *Iri* and return and the Nahua still understand death as a journey, rather than a definitive status, albeit a journey from which it is very difficult to return. This is why several Nahua are said to have died several times and why illness is conceived of as a low intensity form of death. This also explains why they often refer to each other, especially those who have suffered from severe illnesses, as *feroyoshi*, a term that reflects the fact that they are considered to have died and lived again. Thus, the difference between illness and death, as Taylor has reported for the Achuar, is one of degree and intensity rather than of kind (1996:203)[305]. For the Nahua, death is a process of travelling to the land of the dead and 'not remembering' one's kin.

Amazonian ghosts

Much of the ethnographic literature describes how indigenous Amazonian peoples do not commemorate the dead. Instead their often elaborate post-mortuary rites are considered as means for separating the dead from the living (Taylor 1993). For the Machiguenga, this separation is considered essential because the presence of the dead can cause illness and death amongst the living and this explains why they paint their faces and cut their hair to avoid recognition from the deceased (Shepard 2002:13).

For the Achuar however, "forgetting the dead" is a social rather than a pathological imperative. The Achuar conceive of themselves as part of a limited and scarce set of individual identities. "Forgetting them – is in every sense a vital necessity: if someone does not die then someone cannot be born" (Taylor 1993:659). Moreover, "as long as the dead are remembered as recogniseable and specific individuals, the existence they occupy remains unavailable" (Ibid: 658). Their post-mortuary rites involve erasing the

[304] According to the Cashinahua, life is a process of going upstream whereas death is a process of going downstream towards the place of birth; the eye spirit travels downstream and climbs a ladder into the land of *Inca* in the sky (Lagrou 1998: 240-1).

[305] For many indigenous Amazonian peoples, death and the loss of consciousness are not considered to be different states (Surrales 2003:58, Conklin 2001:44). Wari funeral practices, where close relatives sing laments while surrounding and touching the body, closely mirrors what they do when people are sick (Conklin 2001:66).

deceased's particular identity including their name. Meanwhile, songs are sung to the vengeful *wakan* (the spirit of the deceased) to remind them that they are dead, women cut their hair, they jump over a fire (the dead cannot pass through flames), tobacco juice is spat into peoples' eyes to keep them awake and thus avoid dreaming of the dead

The recurring theme throughout the ethnographic literature is that as long as the body and its extensions (gardens, houses, possessions etc.) exist, the spectre of the dead maintains a connection with the living. As Conklin points out, this continuity is as problematic for the dead as it is for the living. This is why the Wari destroyed possessions, gardens and houses and modified the landscape used by the dead so the *jima* (ghost) would become confused and return to the underworld (2001:162). Even the smoke derived from roasting the corpse confuses the *jima* (Conklin 1995:87).

The Piaroa share similar ideas. One of the roles of the shaman (*ruwang)* is to ensure that the deceased arrive safely in the land of dead otherwise they can return and attack their living relatives. The *ruwang* seals this separation by burning beeswax whose smoke prevents the dead from returning (Overing 1993:196).

For the Nahua, some spirits of the deceased such as the *pakashoma* pose a predatory danger to the living. The danger of *yoshi* however is their desire for company[306]. In common with the living, all they need is love. To be loved by a *yoshi* however is to become like them, in other words, to die. This is why it is so important to be in contact with others after a relative has died otherwise the *yoshi* of the dead can replace their normal links with kin[307]. Seen in this way, Nahua post-mortem practices seem to mirror a Euro-American principle of 'moving on'. From a Nahua perspective however, death results in a potentially destructive relationship with a real yet different being that if uncurtailed could lead to the demise of the bereaved.

Townsley explains Yaminahua mourning practices as principally a means of banishing the *yoshi* (1988:113) but the Nahua, like the Wari, attribute very little mortal danger to the spectre of the dead. *Yoshi's* cause *sustos* (frights) and can be dangerous

[306] The Piro also distinguish between bone demons (*tunchi*) that can attack and rape the living and the souls of the dead that can only make people want to die who are already sick or nostalgic (Gow 1991:186-7).
[307] See Lagrou for similar ideas amongst the Cashinahua (1998:79).

for small children but I have not found a single example in my genealogies where people were killed by *yoshi*. Instead, like the Wari, the Nahua are insistent that the primary objective of their funerary practices is to deal with their grief rather than banish spirits (Conklin 2001:166). The danger of death that the Nahua emphasise is one of grief rather than ghosts. *No shinabetsai* they say, 'we have sad thoughts'. Sadness and grief however are not a faculty of the mind but are considered a serious illness that produces nostalgia for the dead and ultimately the desire to die. To understand this further the next section focuses on the meaning of sadness for the Nahua.

Part 2: Wanting to die

During my fieldwork, barely a week would go by without someone 'wanting to die'[308]. Initially, I was startled and worried by the sight and sound of people crowding round a prostrate body singing "my beautiful child wants to die" in a plaintive tone. My initial reaction was to wonder how they expected people to get better when they were listening to such depressing dirges. Below is a song sung by Dora when her daughter Lucy was sick.

efe fano fakeshta – My beautiful child
efe fano yoraki – My beautiful body/kin
yosha shinasharaiya – I am an old woman with beautiful thoughts
aka tsasho aki - I always think of you
efe fano fake – My beautiful daughter
efe fano shinaki – I always think of beautiful things
noko oshopishtai – Our daughter is going to come back
akiyakaito – I will always say
mefe fano yoraki – Your beautiful body
yora shinamesefo – I have fearful thoughts for your body
akatsa shaki - I will always say.

[308] See Gow (1991:181).

So preoccupied are the Nahua with their laments that feeding the patient is often overlooked. I often found myself wondering how; could someone recover when their only food was an occasional piece of three day old manioc? The mould and ants on its surface must have had more nutritional value. I was convinced that what they needed was some nourishing homemade food and consequently I spent much of my initial fieldwork with the Nahua making cauldrons of squash and coriander soup.

My endeavours proved useless however because while I conceived of illness as an affliction of the flesh, for the Nahua it was an affliction of the soul. When the Nahua said that they wanted to die, what they meant was that their *feroyoshi* was being called by the spirits of their dead relatives. All their living relatives can do in such circumstances is to try and recall the soul with the force of their love. What use is soup, however tasty, when one's spirit is being called by the immortal souls to the land of the dead? If the laments of their relatives were insufficient then the task was given to shamans who would take *ayahuasca* and recall their spirit with their sheer authority over the rival *feroyoshinafa*.

Siskind argues that the similar laments of the Sharanahua are; "ritualised responses to the sick person's emotional state rather than a clinical judgement as to the odds against him" (1973:164). However, although the laments and crying for the ill are expressions of compassion and self-pity, the Nahua do consider sadness to be a clinical condition. The laments can only be understood if we see them not as "ritualised responses" but as tools in a tug of love between the dead and the living.

In any case, my well-meaning plans to nourish the sick backfired. The patient was incapable of eating because when the Nahua are sad they have no appetite. Happily the soup did not go to waste but ended up in the tummies of the relatives. Wailing builds up an appetite after all.

For the Nahua, death is thus not discontinuous with the world of the living but a process by which the *feroyoshi* of the sick are seduced by their dead relatives. Curaca told me that after his brother died from snake bite he wanted to kill himself so he could

join him in the land of the dead[309]. This continuing relationship between the living and dead is the principal reason why the Nahua go to great pains to 'not remember'. In contrast to the Awajun and Airo Pai who relate 'suicide' to the anger they feel at the death of a loved one (Belaunde 2005:236) the Nahua describe suicide as an effect of wanting to join their dead kin. Several Nahua were thus named *fenefefani* (taken by spouse) because they died immediately after their spouses. Similarly, the myth of *poiyafenifo* describes how a man died and his brother, a powerful shaman, loved him so much that he followed him to the land of the dead causing his house to fly into the sky with the power of his breath. Memory and love is dangerous for the living as it can result in their own death.

The distinct possibility that people may 'want to die' is a constant fear for the Nahua and one of the reasons why they go to great lengths to monitor the state of people's souls and to express compassion and love for those who are sad[310]. This in part explains why they were so concerned that I was unable to return to Serjali after Teocho's death. To be alone in such circumstances was to over expose myself to the seductive power of his *feroyoshi*. While the families of the deceased must be prevented from remembering the dead, the *feroyoshinafa* apply the same principle to the recently deceased through the use of their powerful perfumes[311]. Just as the relatives of the deceased must not remember the dead so they can live, the dead must no longer remember their living relatives otherwise they will want to return.

Before exploring these techniques of 'not remembering' in more depth it is critical to appreciate first what the Nahua mean by memory, the closest possible translation of which is *shinai*.

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[309] During my fieldwork, a middle-aged man, who had suffered from a protracted illness, died in Serjali. One of the Dominican nuns who was present just before he died (he had asked to be baptised) suspected that he had asked his relatives to help him die by administering a poison. Some form of euthanasia amongst Amerindian peoples is relatively common. The Zorohua attribute half the deaths of their population to 'suicide': the administering of poisons to a person when they want to die (Belaunde 2005:239). Before contact, the Wari practiced euthanasia by suffocating the sick (Conklin 2001: 99).

[310] Returning Cashinahua hunters are treated very solicitousl. They are watched very closely to see if they exhibit any signs of melancholy or absent looks. The concern is that, in the deep forest, they have encountered spirits of the dead via their smells (*inin*) and sounds. Such contact can lead to death if not addressed (Keifenheim 2002: 92-93).

[311] For the Arawete, after being eaten by the divinities, the deceased marries a celestial spouse and is bathed in perfumes, "a bath of forgetfulness". The friendship with the gods, and the perfumes he is given to smell, make him forget. On the other hand, the stench of rotting flesh is the smell of memory (Viveiros de Castro 1992:213).

Part 3: Memory and embodied knowledge

The previous chapter described the intimate association the Nahua make between emotional states and physiological experiences where the body both reflects and affects the state of the soul. For the Nahua, like the Candoshi, "sensation and cognition are inseparable categories" (Surrallés 2003:72). It is therefore no surprise that they should make a similar connection between memory and physiology.

The Nahua use s*hinai* to refer to 'thinking' in an intellectual sense but it is also used to describe the strong bonds of affection and memory between kin especially when they are absent. *Shinai* is thus the closest possible translation of love[312]. As with other emotional states, love and memory are also embodied experiences; the Nahua consider the *oiti* or heart as the principal site for feeling emotions, thus explaining why Nahua shamans use the word *shina* to refer to the heart in their healing songs[313]. Consistent with this physiological basis to memory, Kensinger has famously described how the Cashinahua explicitly articulate that the body remembers and knows. Thus for example, the hands possess the knowledge for gardening, the skin possesses the knowledge to be a successful hunter and the liver possesses the capacity to express emotions (1995:239).

The development of memory

Belaunde cites a Huitoto leader who explained that the difference between people and animals is that animals do not remember their kin (2005:255). For the Nahua, to be homesick, sad and nostalgic are not signs of weakness but of humanity. Memory is what defines humanity for indigenous Amazonians and distinguishes the present from mythic time (Ibid: 259). Thus, the Nahua define babies and the angry as structurally similar because they are both thoughtless, albeit for different reasons. While babies have not had the time to develop relationships of memory with their kin, the state of

[312] The verb *nofi* could also be used as a translation of love but its meaning is more one of desire than memory.

[313] The Candoshi translate love as 'my heart thinks' (Surrallés 2003:70). The Shipibo also associate thoughts with blood and heart. A baby with little blood has few thoughts (*shinan*) but as they get older they develop more blood and have more thoughts (Colpron cited in Belaunde 2005:205).

anger involves the temporary memory loss of these relationships. As Keifenhiem notes for the Cashinahua, *shinan (*memory*)* preserves the individuals' "integrity in face of the risk of becoming other" (2002:103)[314]. However, memory, like kinship, is not something that is given at birth but something that is socialised over time. As Gow articulates, memory and kinship is constructed and continually reinforced by acts of caring and feeding. In other words, "kinship is memory" (1991:273)[315]. This is why for the Nahua it is only the kin of the deceased who need concern themselves with the dangerous presence of the *yoshi*.

For this reason, Nahua children have relatively little *shinai* which explains why their names must be called to prevent their souls from wandering and why their *yoshi* are attributed very little significance at death compared to those of older men and women. The strength of a person's *yoshi* is thus clearly proportionate to the level of memory built up over time[316]. Nahua concern for my own well being and vulnerability to the *yoshi* of Teocho stemmed from my position as kin because we had lived together and shared food; processes which are "more important than biological relations in the constitution of memories and kinship" (Gow 1991:194).

For the Nahua, like other indigenous Amazonians, there is no separation between a mind that thinks and a body that acts[317]. Spiritual and material substances cannot be separated; one necessarily implies the other. It is the body that remembers, knows and acts. The concept of the person as embodied knowledge explains why Nahua methods for 'not remembering' are focussed on the modification of their own bodies, the destruction of material objects associated with the deceased and the avoidance of sensory perceptions of the dead. If remembering is to love and to become similar to, to

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[314] For the Cashinahua, strong *shinan* protects the person against impregnation while weak *shinan* means one's perceptions can be deceived (Keifenheim 2002:104).

[315] The Cashinahua conceive of growing up as a process of accumulating knowledge from external sources. Men have more knowledge and stronger *yuxin* than women as they engage more with the outside world through travel, hunting and shamanism (McCallum 1999:449).

[316] See Rosengren (2006:85) and Surrallés (2003:43-44). For the Piro, until people develop *nshinikanchi* (mindfulness) they are all *samenchi* (spectres). This explains why children get lost easily (Gow 2001:238).

[317] Similarly, the Yaminahua have no concept of 'mind' as something that is internal to the person and separate from the world. "All that a Western observer might consider 'mental' is a property of entities closely related to bodies yet not permanently attached to them" (Townsley 1993:456).

remember the dead is to die oneself. The dead must therefore be forgotten and what better way to do this than by transforming the body.

Part 4: Techniques of forgetting

We have seen how one of the purposes of Nahua funerary and mourning practices is to avoid the *yoshi* of the dead. Nevertheless, the Nahua explain that these practices are primarily tools for dealing with their sadness that are designed to avoid the seductive lure of the dead. As Conklin describes, "mourning is a multi layered process" (1995: 94). As sadness is an embodied experience, many of these practices incorporate bodily techniques. Some of these are reviewed below:

Confronting death

The first part of this phase of 'not remembering' is paradoxically a process of intense remembering. When Teocho died, it was essential not only that I should return for my own safety but also to ensure that I arrived in time for the funeral in order to witness the burial. Like other indigenous Amazonian peoples, when the Nahua die far from home their relatives are anxious to receive as much information as possible. Their desire for graphic details jarred with my own sensibilities[318]. If they were not present at the funeral then their return to the village at a later date resulted in the classic 'welcome of tears' whereby the person's arrival is a trigger for the memory of the people who have died in the interim (Wagley 1977:238). If memory is a faculty of the body then the physical presence of a person who has not assimilated the death of their loved one means they are a permanent embodiment of this memory.

Destruction of possessions

In part, the destruction of the deceased's possessions and their house and garden avoids attracting the *yoshi* that is lured by the association between these objects and their

[318] Similarly for the Piro, (Gow 2000:55) the Wari (Conklin 2001:113) and the Cashinahua (McCallum 1999:450).

former bodies. Amongst many indigenous Amazonian peoples, objects are not only symbols of the person or memory triggers but have literal meaning (S Hugh-Jones 1996:22). Objects are entangled with the spiritual presence of their owner and can be considered as extensions of their bodies, or as "aspects of the person" (McCallum 2001:93)[319]. If the possessions of the dead continue to exist, the living experiences the continuation of a relationship. In the case of the Cashinahua and Wari, this destruction was achieved by the actual consumption of the dead as well as a host of practices designed to destroy visual reminders of the dead[320]. While the Nahua say they never practiced endocannibalism they go to great pains to destroy the possessions, houses and gardens of the dead that are literally considered as extensions of their bodies.

Modifying bodies

The Nahua also go to great lengths to transform their own bodies. They often throw away their clothes and shave off their hair because they wish to *shinamakia*, 'not remember'. Unlike the Machiguenga, the Nahua do not explain that cutting one's hair disguises the living from the spirit of the dead. Instead, they say that hair, just like the house, garden or possessions of the deceased is painful to see; *no ofekaspai*, 'we do not want to see it'. Hair is particularly important because a loving relationship involves repeated head grooming looking for head lice and their eggs; the hair is thus infused with the memory of the deceased and has to be shorn so the mourner will no longer remember.

[319] The indissociability of objects from their owners also explains why the Matis are extremely loath to borrow, share or even touch another person's stool, ornaments, weapons or any other material item (P.Erikson pers comm).

[320] The Wari were very explicit that eating the dead was only part of a set of techniques (sweeping/burning house and objects etc.) that they used to destroy visual reminders of the dead and deal with their sadness (Conklin 2001).

Laments

The multi layered reasons behind Nahua funerary practices can perhaps be seen most clearly in the funereal laments. The Nahua would not feel at home at a British funeral. Putting on a brave face and a stiff upper lip is simply not their style. Their extravagant displays of grief would even appear strange to many indigenous Amazonians such as the Arawete for whom displays of sorrow are discreet and who expend great effort to minimise the importance of the event; very few people attend the funeral except children (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 200).

Many ethnographies of Panoan speakers describe how the lamentations are designed to sever the contact between the living and the dead. Townsley says that the Yaminahua laments (*fini*) show the *niafaka* how much their kin care so they will not be angry. The Cashinahua explain that their crying, singing and dancing ritual (*pakadin*) accompany the *bedoyuxin* (eye spirit) downriver to the root of the sky (McCallum 1996:61). In their laments (*nui kaxadin*) they sing; "Are you there? Are you happy there? Do not come back!" (Ibid: 67). For the Cashinahua, both endocannibalism and these songs served to separate the *yuxin*, the persons, possessions and gardens from the body (Ibid: 63). In the process, the name was also severed from the body and could in time be recycled (Ibid: 70).

The recurring objective of these songs for many indigenous Amazonians is to ensure that the deceased realise that they are dead. "The dead do not know they are dead…they have to be told" (Taylor 1993:664). As Conklin describes for the Wari; death results in a shift in point of view that produces misunderstandings between the living and dead. The dead are confused by the affectionate laments of the living and think they are saying 'go away, go away' while the living misinterpret the dead's search for affection as aggression (2001:199). Crying thus has two functions for the Wari; it expresses compassion and love for dead but it also drives the spirit away (Ibid: 102). Similarly for the Cashinahua "crying is a way of recognising the soul and sending it away, crying is neither one thing or the other but both" (McCallum 1999: 455).

The laments the Nahua sing when someone is sick constitute a tug of love with the *feroyoshinafa* who are attempting to seduce the person's *feroyoshi*. The laments express their love for the person and recall the spirit. Moreover, the laments that are sung after the person's death is definitive are subtly different. Once the *feroyoshi* has totally abandoned the body and forgotten its relatives it is an irreversible process and the laments can no longer recall the dead. Instead, the funereal laments are comparable with their propensity to cry when the Nahua experience pain, suffering or nostalgia. Both are designed to elicit compassion from their kin albeit for different reasons. While compassion for a cut finger is part of the gradual and ongoing process of fashioning conviviality amongst co-residents the compassion required by the grieving is essential if the bereaved are to avoid the descent into a downward spiral of sadness; a nostalgia that can culminate in the desire to die.

The compassion that their laments elicit thus combats the dangerous isolation and loss of bereavement; the reason why the Nahua were so concerned that I remained in Sepahua after Teocho's death. Nevertheless, the Nahua do not frame their emotional response in these functional terms. For them it is simply the understandable reaction of compassionate human beings.

Movement

Today, the Nahua no longer abandon the village after the death of a relative but simply move house or travel to a distant town rarely or never visited by those people. Juan explained. "When one of our family dies, we travel somewhere where we will not remember". In these distant places, the Nahua say they encounter people who are not sad and by surrounding themselves with these cheerful people they quickly do 'not remember'. Just as sadness is associated with nostalgia "joyfulness is associated with the capacity to forget" (Viveiros de Castro: 1992:196)[321].

[321] For the Arawete, while anger is a disembodying emotion, it is joy that makes people heavy and forget the dead (Viveiros de Castro 1992:196). This is why friends of the living always intervene after death to prevent anger and help them forget. The gods also make friends with the dead to help them forget the living (Ibid:196).

It is not just death that makes the Nahua move. During my fieldwork, one man, who was left by his wife, immediately travelled to the distant town of Puerto Maldonado where he stayed for a year. As Juan said, "It is good, now he will no longer remember". The Nahua, like the Trio are "unwilling to tolerate any psychic discomfort" (Rivière 2000:260)[322].

When Teocho died and I remained in Sepahua the Nahua were worried that if I was not reminded of the love of the living I would be easily seduced by the love of the dead. Just as kinship and similarity with others is easily constituted through the processes of co-residence, the corollary of this is that they can be severed through separation.

For the Nahua, travelling is thus not only a means of engaging with powerful others or acquiring their knowledge but also part of a series of techniques for disentangling relationships, both with the living and the dead (Feather 2009). It is one of their strategies for being *isharai*, 'to live well and peacefully'. These journeys are about modifying a person's sensory perception of the world. When a person moves across space, even if it is just to the other side of the village, they find themselves doing different things. They speak with different people, they walk on different hunting paths, they collect firewood from a different garden and they fish in a different stream. In other words, they "move to forget" (Feather 2009:79).

Managing emotions not ghosts

Nahua funerary practices sever the connections with the *yoshi* but their discourse places much more emphasis on the removal of visible reminders of the dead to avoid sadness. It is sadness, love and nostalgia rather than the predatory agency of the disembodied *yoshi* that they consider most dangerous. Like the Wari, the priority of the Nahua was for "managing emotions rather than ghosts" (Conklin 2001:166).

For the Achuar, forgetting the dead is a social imperative, if a person is not forgotten their identity cannot be recycled. Headhunting is thus a disaster for the Achuar as the

[322] The Trio are similarly mobile, they might move because of a sense of shame (*piime*) or sadness (*ernume*) (Rivière 2000:260).

person cannot be forgotten, its life force cannot be recycled and a new person cannot be born. Only the beheaded dead are never forgotten. Similarly, for the Nahua 'not remembering' is not an act of callousness. It is precisely to prevent the descent into illness and depression that can be triggered by their love for their relatives and their intense sadness. It is a pathological imperative. To not do so would be suicidal.

Nahua funereal and mourning practices are thus primarily about not remembering the dead and their diverse techniques enable what Battaglia has called a "willed transformation of memory" (1992:14). Most of these techniques revolve around the avoidance and destruction of visual reminders of the dead as well as the transformation of the bodies of the living. In the case of the Cashinahua and Wari, this included the actual consumption of the dead as well as a host of practices designed to destroy visual reminders. The Nahua may not eat the dead but they go to great pains to destroy the deceased's possessions, houses and gardens that are considered to be extensions of the body. While they may not 'sweep' the landscape like the Wari, they do abandon their territory, at least temporarily.

Given this emphasis on 'not remembering' the dead it seems paradoxical that the Nahua should have accepted missionary policy of burying the dead in cemeteries, especially one so close to the village. Certainly, its proximity causes some discomfort and inconvenience, but the relative ease with which they have accepted the cemetery confirms that the Nahua prioritise the prevention of sadness rather than the banishment of the *yoshi* who rarely pose a mortal threat. Although the cemetery is geographically close to the village, it is sufficiently detached from their daily activities that it represents only a minor inconvenience.

The body forgets

The body and its extensions are thus the sites of identification with others which is why the Nahua refer to their kin as 'our body'. "The body is a site of the construction of identity and personal relations rather than relations existing in the space between bounded bodies" (Conklin 2001:132). If the body is the locus of memory then they can only 'not remember' if they destroy the body of the deceased. Endocannibalism and

destruction of the possessions are both means by which indigenous Amazonian people transform the bodies of the dead. In a slightly different manner from the Wari, the Nahua focus proportionately more attention on the transformation of their own bodies rather than those of the dead. By cutting their hair, changing their clothes and travelling, they transform their memories of the deceased through the modification of their own bodies. Thus, their ability to rapidly forget reflects a concept of memory that is less a faculty of the mind and more an embodied condition.

Part 5: It's easy to forget

When he was 16, Julian travelled to Sepahua and decided to enlist in the army. He was away for four years. "I never thought about my family" he told me. One night however, he dreamt of his *koka*. When he woke the next day he was extremely concerned and called his relatives on the radio only to discover that his *koka* had died. He was granted leave but he never returned to the army.

Just as kinship, memory and similarity with others are easily constituted through the processes of living together; they can also be severed through separation. The distinct possibility of 'not remembering' absent kin and 'becoming other' is highlighted in many Nahua myths. The story of *chaikoshififani* recounts how a young girl was captured by forest spirits and consequently forgot her kin. In the story of *Isofini,* a boy is captured by spider monkeys and lives amongst them and even takes a spider monkey wife. After a period of mourning his family no longer thought of him and he no longer thought of his family until an unexpected re-encounter one day in the forest. In another story, *Afani* was a man who went to live underwater with the fish people. The man lived underwater and no longer thought of his old family until one day, like Julian, he dreamt of his son and wanted to return. The story of *yokofakefo* relates how a man who was captured by a raid of the *roanafa* married a woman in his new village and eventually no longer thought of his kin.

After telling these stories, Juan the narrator commented. "It's like when we go to a town and meet a girl and we do not want to come back". For the Nahua, death, travelling and marriage are all processes of estrangement from kin and becoming

other[323]. The capacity of contemporary Nahua to become other is highlighted by the following story.

The man who became 'other'

During my fieldwork I witnessed countless arrival scenes in Serjali. All of them were characterised by the gregarious exuberance that I felt on my very first visit. One day however, I travelled to Serjali with Roberto, Dina's brother and only surviving relative, who had been living outside of Serjali for the last 15 years. I was excited because I expected a fantastic welcome, especially because he had been away for such a long time. When we arrived, Dina was washing clothes in the river; she made a quiet and sad noise but scarcely looked up as Roberto stepped onto the beach. He disappeared up the bank and was welcomed with uncharacteristic silence before disappearing into the house of Elena, a distant relation.

Roberto stayed for five days but barely emerged from Elena's house. Occasionally, people came to visit and asked quietly about him but always in the same quiet and high pitched tone. This reaction seemed extraordinary considering Nahua customary boisterousness. Roberto would have received more of a welcome arriving in a Machiguenga village.

Ironically, I had first seen Roberto in Sepahua in April 2000 on my very first visit to Serjali. I watched him wandering barefoot up and down the streets of Sepahua with his only possessions: a pair of shorts and a machete. His long hair flowed down to his waist; his immense physique unadorned by English premier league football shirts. I was still coming to terms with my naïve disappointment with the apparent lack of nostalgia felt by the Nahua for their long hair and their current enthusiasm for shorts and tee shirts. I contrasted them with Roberto who I saw as an indigenous man proud of his heritage and assumed, in similarly naïve fashion, that he was Ashaninka or Machiguenga. It was only when I was doing a formal genealogy several years later that

[323] In the transformational universe of Amerindians, dying is not the negation of life but a further mode of ontogenesis (Gow 2001:64). The Piro explained to Gow that, just as people go to live with other kin and 'become other' when they die, so too does the *isula* (a highly poisonous ant) become *tamshi* (plant) when it is tired of living (Ibid: 63). The Cashinahua also make an explicit connection between death, travelling and marriage. They use the verb 'to go' to describe both processes and conceive of death as a journey to visit their dead relatives and their eventual marriage to the *Inca* (McCallum 1996:62-3).

I discovered that Dina even had a brother and that they were referring to my machete wielding noble savage.

I began to ask about Roberto. Roberto was in his late 20's and lived an itinerant lifestyle between Sepahua and Atalaya where he would wander the streets apparently aimlessly and secure the occasional job or plate of food by cutting the grass outside someone's house or fetching water. He liked to wear lipstick and eyeliner and some people said he worked as a male prostitute. When I spoke to Roberto he would always avoid speaking in Nahua but chose to communicate in halting Spanish. SIL missionaries, who had known Roberto since he was a young boy, told me that he had escaped Serjali after being sexually abused by a school teacher. Their explanation of Roberto's desire to isolate himself from his own family was a deep emotional scarring. When I asked a Nahua friend about this he offered a different explanation. He told me a story of how one night Roberto had been humiliated after an embarrassing incident. He left the next morning and had never returned.

Roberto's tragic personal story sheds light on why the Nahua place so much emphasis on being sensitive to the emotional state of others; it was his shame that caused his departure. It also says a great deal about Nahua enthusiasm for greeting visitors. Until I began a genealogical survey I had never heard of Roberto. When he left Serjali and did not want to return he had become almost irreversibly 'other' just like the Nahua who disappeared amongst the Piro in the mid 20th century. Although his 'family' saw him when they were in Sepahua, Roberto had made every attempt to distance and isolate himself, even linguistically, so that very few people in Sepahua were even aware of his background. Although the Nahua did not tell me this explicitly, their principle of embodied kinship that is constructed through co-residence and the sharing of food suggests that Roberto's isolation, whether through trauma or shame, had turned him into an 'other'. When he returned to Serjali it was not as *yora*, a body infused with ties of memory and affection to others, but as an outsider and they knew that the enthusiastic greeting would not be returned in kind.

The enthusiastic greetings of the Nahua can thus be understood as a test of common humanity. It is the space in which humanity is tested and resolved by both parties. This dimension is what unites the diverse treatment of visitors by many indigenous

Amazonian peoples described in the Introduction. The boisterous welcomes of the Nahua seem diametrically opposed to the more reserved and suspicious attitude of their various Arawak speaking neighbours[324]. These apparent differences however mask an underlying theme. Whether extroverted or reserved, both forms of reception are strategies for evaluating the humanity of the visitor. In the case of a stranger, greetings test what kind of person they are as appearances can be deceiving. In the case of a returning family member, it is a test of whether they have changed; a trip away from the village represents a possibility for becoming other. The Piro adopt a wait and see approach to observe whether they will act like a human being. They gradually warm to them if they do not appear to have become 'other' in their absence (P.Gow pers comm). The Nahua however employ a different approach, they do not wait but unleash a torrent of affection combined with demands for their possessions to see if the visitor has retained their affection for, and memory of, their hosts. This is why the Nahua would go to great pains to inform me each time I prepared to leave the village that I would be remembered.

The principle that their identity is constituted through their bodies and through relations with others means that for the Nahua, kinship can be lost almost as easily as it is made. After they 'fell out of the forest', the Nahua said they adopted *mestizo* clothing because they wanted to be like *mestizos*. This elastic ability to adopt new ways of being that so frustrates those observers who see them as throwing away their culture is part of this capacity to adopt a new identity.

The other side of this coin is their ability to incorporate others and transform them into kin. Nahua success at rapidly establishing kinship relations with new people and relations of familiarity with new places provides a veneer of coherence and stability that disguises a reality. Their apparently stable villages are actually the product of constant break ups and reformulations. Strangers and anthropologists arrive and are incorporated, while kin leave and never return.

[324] The boisterous receptions of the Nahua are more comparable with those of the Arawete. Outsiders, especially white visitors, are typically subjected to an assault which appears to be a ferocious assessment of their ability to be generous with their things. This mirrors the arrival of the recently deceased in the land of the dead whose souls are greeted rapturously by the gods (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 211).

The Nahua use a range of techniques to avoid memories of the dead and enable them to recover extremely rapidly from the death of their family members. The embodied nature of memory means they are able to construct relationships of mutual memory extremely quickly, but it also means they can lose them almost as fast. For the Nahua, one of the principal motivations for travelling, dreaming, taking hallucinogens or killing is for the encounters it enables with powerful and potentially benevolent beings (Feather 2009). Nevertheless, such encounters are always risky. Raiding is dangerous as one might be killed; dreaming exposes one's *feroyoshi* to potential attack while travelling is risky because one might never return. This flexibility carries with it the real risk of not remembering the living, effectively a process of relinquishing kinship. It is presence rather than absence that makes Nahua hearts grow fonder.

Remembering the dead

It was late at night in Lima and some Nahua friends and I were preparing for a meeting the next day with government officials to discuss the problem of illegal logging. Curaca was organising his documents – a crumpled heap of letters and community meeting acts. At the bottom of the pile he found some old photos. His powerful and joyful voice cracked as he pointed to a man chopping up fish and whispered tenderly, *efe oeshtoshta ma namishta,* 'my younger brother who died'. The rest of the Nahua stopped what they were doing and looked at the photo. Their exuberance evaporated immediately and they became melancholic.

Years later, despite their efforts to 'not remember', a photo of a relative or a journey to a place where a deceased person slept and hunted can trigger a bout of sadness. This was revealed most dramatically during the trip to the headwaters of the Manu where we were confronted with the drastic consequences of the epidemics. During my attempts to document the genealogies, the mention of the dead always triggered a moment of sadness and a high pitched tone of voice. Amongst the Nahua, just as Lévi-Strauss experienced amongst the Nambikwara, "a melancholy from melancholy from time to time settles on their souls" (Lévi-Strauss 1997:353).

The recurring nature of such practices of 'not remembering' has led to a characterisation of indigenous Amazonian peoples as possessing a shallow genealogical memory. However, as Chaumeil (2007) points out, many indigenous Amazonians also remember and commemorate the dead. The Candoshi leave the dead to dry out on raised platforms so they can be visited by their living relatives who live nearby[325]. The Bororo keep the bones of their dead relatives; while their possessions are destroyed their identities are recycled through their names. The Siriono carry the bones of dead with them on treks which gives them good luck and protects them from illnesses while the Yanomami destroy all traces of dead but keep their pulverised bones for up to 15 years in a funeral gourd to remind people that revenge is still pending (Ales 2008: 68).

For some indigenous Amazonian peoples, the importance of this memory is because the dead continue to play an active and productive role in the lives of their living relatives. The Matis can establish a specific relationship with recently dead relatives and implore them to give help (Erikson 2007) while the Wari dead transform into white-lipped peccaries and return to the land of the living to offer their bodies as food thus perpetuating cycle of human-animal exchanges (Conklin 2001:183). For the Wari, Matis and others, "death is a creative moment essential for the continuation of social life" (Ibid: 223).

This continued relationship between the dead and the living results in lingering memories for many indigenous Amazonian peoples. In time, the Wari forget their dead. There is no fixed time span but after about a year they organise a big hunt and have a feast (Conklin 2001:233). Conklin argues that for this reason the Wari do not obliterate their memories of the dead. By modifying the landscape where they wandered ('sweeping') and eating their flesh, the Wari retain their memory but in a different form[326]. This explains Wari current desire for photos of dead relatives which at first sight may appear paradoxical[327].

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[325] The Candoshi keep remains of dead in little tombs near their houses and only after two or three years are they eventually buried (Surrallés 2003:60-61).

[326] The Wari 'sweep' the places that were formerly inhabited or used by the deceased. They revisit the areas of forest used by the deceased and cut down trees they have planted and modify paths they have made (Conklin 2001:172).

[327] The Cashinahua also explain forgetting as a gradual process; their eye spirits take a few years to forget the living and go definitively to the land of the *Inca* (Keifenheim 2002: 101).

The Nahua seem to suffer less from such lingering memories. The *feroyoshi* instantly forget the living once they have smelt the perfume of the *feroyoshinafa* while the living recover extremely rapidly. This rapidity is expressed dramatically by *Reteni,* a Chitonahua man. "When they died we cried only in the morning and midday, we stopped in the afternoon!" (Carid Naveira and Perez Gil 2002:165).

From the point of view of the Nahua, the possibility of relationships with the dead is ever present, yet there is no sense that this can be a productive relationship. The living can manage perfectly well without the dead. For the Nahua, the tension between remembering and not remembering is simpler. They must obliterate and avoid memories of the dead as quickly and completely as possible.

It is thus not that the Nahua 'forget the dead' in an absent minded or callous manner. In fact, the consequences of maintaining a relationship with the dead are drastic. Instead the Nahua have developed a series of highly effective techniques for 'not remembering'. Because memories are embodied, these techniques focus on the destruction or avoidance of the bodies of the dead (and by extension their objects and territories) and the simultaneous transformation of their own.

The embodied nature of memory means that the Nahua are able to construct relationships of mutual memory extremely quickly but when this is combined with the imperative to 'not remember' the dead it also means they can sever them almost as fast. The desire to quickly forget the dead is an art form honed by indigenous Amazonian peoples. In this respect the Nahua are typically Amazonian only more so!

Conclusion

Living and travelling with the Nahua was like taking an intensive course in mood management and I soon realised not to take their moods for granted. Volatility and sudden shifts between happiness and melancholy were the rule rather than the exception. Constancy was not something held in high esteem and nor was sadness interpreted as a sign of weakness. The cries of a hawk, the sight of a shooting star, or a

disturbing dream were all potential triggers for a wave of melancholy. *E shinaichakai*, 'I have bad thoughts', or *e shinahuitzacuzcara,* 'I am thinking in another way' they would say. During trips with the Nahua, when they received the news of sick relatives or adulterous spouses they quickly became sad and disconsolate, but when we moved on they quickly recovered their usual cheer; they had apparently 'forgotten'.

For the Nahua, like many indigenous Amazonian peoples, the process of remembering is constitutive of shared social relations and a defining feature of humanity. It is because of this humanity that people are expected to express their sadness, nostalgia or homesickness. To remember is to love, while thoughtlessness can lead to anger: a characteristic that defines enemies and forest spirits. In other contexts such as illness, death or travelling, memory can be dangerous and seductive. This is why funerary practices should be seen as a series of explicit bodily techniques for 'not remembering' rather than absent-minded forgetfulness.

For the Nahua, memories are inextricably tied to people's bodies and sensory perceptions. They do not conceive of their funerary practices as avoiding a memory trigger or 'moving on', instead they help them avoid a very real and potentially devastating social relationship. These techniques help them deal very successfully with the trauma of death; this is clearly evident in their remarkable capacity to have recovered from the epidemics of the 1980s. On the other hand, this flexibility increases the possibility of 'not remembering' their own kin during their constant journeys to distant lands in body and in dreams.

The secret of the Nahua lies in their very Amazonian ability to influence memory through the modification of their bodies combined with the imperative to 'not remember' the dead. Changing clothes, cutting hair, destroying possessions and travelling all help avoid sensory triggers of dead or absent kin. The same process occurs with the dead who must also 'not remember' the living and the potent perfumes of the *feroyoshinafa* cause instant amnesia. The living do not have the luxury of such perfumes and as successful as the Nahua are at 'not remembering', they are always susceptible to a bout of nostalgia if they see a photo or hear a name. The hairdressing, self beating, wailing, crying and travelling are all ways through which the Nahua

transform their embodied memories and emerge with new bodies that are no longer infused with the thoughts, love and memory (*shinai*) of the deceased.

From a Nahua point of view, they inhabit a chronically unpredictable world where 'becoming other' is an ever present possibility. Every hunting trip risks encounters with dangerous animals or forest spirits. Every trip to Lima or Sepahua could result in marriage to a *nafa* and a social death. Even sleeping is an experience that dices with death. The Nahua never take their return for granted and tend to fear the worst.

Their embodied ability to 'not remember' has well equipped them to deal with the constant possibility of 'becoming other' but it makes them highly susceptible to mood swings and in the worst-case scenario, the possibility of not remembering their kin. This is why the Nahua can shift with such ease between being self and other, *yora* and *nafa*, alive and dead. Death is a displacement in perspective rather than status just as 'contact' was a displacement in space rather than time. To counteract this volatility, the Nahua must construct and fashion memory every day. I have been visiting the Nahua regularly for almost ten years yet every time I return I am always afflicted by the same anxious thought. Will they remember me?

This chapter has argued that the Nahua capacity to oscillate between remembering and not remembering is a reflection of their highly elastic bodies and their embodied capacity to shift between self and other, human and non-human, *yora* and *nafa* and alive or dead. Their ability to respond to changes in the world, be they contact with Peruvians or the death of a relative, reflects the fact that history for the Nahua is a displacement in perspective rather than time. The key to Nahua resilience is not only embodied however but rests on their astonishing ability to make sense of the mysterious. The final chapter explores Nahua knowledge practices that underlie their flexible cosmologies.

Chapter 6

Scientists of the Amazon

My name is Miguel

It was late afternoon when José and I arrived in the small town of Atalaya. I was returning to Lima for a break while José was desperate to go to Pucallpa (the regional capital), a seven day return boat journey. He had convinced me to buy him a ticket and explained, "It's urgent *epa*[328], I must buy a pair of glasses and 10 kilos of onions".

Visits to Atalaya with the Nahua now had a familiar rhythm. After showering and eating we always visited an old lady known simply as *abuelita* (grandmother). A resident of Atalaya, she was the *curandera* (healer) of choice for the Nahua whom they visited to cure their various ills or simply for a general check up. This time she was not alone. Her young trainee shaman, an Ashaninka man, sat by her bed and was instructed by the *abuelita* to blow tobacco smoke (*soplar*) over us as part of our 'general cleanse'. When José left the room to urinate, the young trainee asked me the name of my companion and whether he was Amahuaca. I told him he was Yaminahua and called José Chorro. He said nothing more until José returned when he asked him if he was Yaminahua. José replied without blinking, "My mother was Machiguenga and my father was Amahuaca, my name is Miguel". The shaman nodded disinterestedly and carried on puffing but I began to squirm.

As we left the *abuelita's* house I prepared to urinate in a bush by the side of the path. José pulled me back sharply. "Do not do it! *Brujos* (sorcerers) live here, if they collect

[328] *Epa* refers to father but is also a term used by the Nahua to refer to men of the same generation.

your urine they can see you and kill your spirit". We wandered home. "Good job I lied" José said, "If that *brujo* knew my real name or where I came from he could find and kill me". I nodded sagely. We wandered home slowly, each absorbed by our thoughts. José chuckled under his breath. "My name is Miguel, my name is Miguel…".

The Nahua take it for granted that they live in a dangerous world, a world where everything is not as it seems. Just as in mythic time when *yoshifo* beings could appear in human form, today a deer they meet in the forest may really be the manifestation of a forest demon. Encounters with the outside world are thus always laced with danger and the night offers no escape as dreams expose the *feroyoshis* of the Nahua to attack. Even amongst kin, social relations are far from rosy. Mistrust and suspicion run only slightly beneath the surface of village life, one's own brother-in-law might even be a dangerous sorcerer.

Under such circumstances the use and control of knowledge is critical as knowledge is considered the source of power. The revelation of true names for example can both establish productive social relationships yet at the same time expose the person's spirit to attack. Thus, while encounters with 'outsiders' are viewed as exciting opportunities for acquiring knowledge, the Nahua must constantly be on their guard. Knowing someone's 'real name' (*anekoi*) or acquiring some of their bodily substances allows a *brujo* to 'know' (*ena*) a person and attack their spirit. While all Nahua can protect themselves to some degree, only *yofe* or seers have the ability to see through appearances. A *yofe* 'knows' and thus not only has the capacity to heal but also to harm.

This chapter explores the steps the Nahua take to protect themselves from this world of danger as well as take advantage of its opportunities. Through the careful use of names and the care they take over their bodily substances, the Nahua avoid many of the dangers presented by malevolent sorcerers. To take advantage of them however is the sphere of shamanism and dreams and both dream interpretation and shamanism can be understood as 'techniques for knowing the unknown'. The unknown is a source of power and danger, thus to know the unknown is to avoid these dangers and appropriate their power. This capacity is evident in their astonishing ability to be unfazed by the

new world in which today they find themselves whether this is manifested by a devastating new illness, a Chinese soup spoon or a solar powered torch.

This ability to make sense of a strange world confounds the narratives of Tello and others that Nahua 'ancestral knowledge' is being substituted by new forms of knowledge and alien values. This resilience is no more clearly seen than in the changing face of shamanic practices which appear to be both old and new at the same time. For the Nahua it is less important what they know and more important how they know. To the extent that all the Nahua have this ability, albeit to different degrees, they are all shamans. It seems that a Nahua understanding of the world is as elastic as their bodies.

Chapter outline

The first part explores the particular power of personal names as an aspect of their intimate association with their owners and the relationships they establish. The second section compares these personal names with river names and establishes that the power of names ultimately derives from the role they play in enabling the Nahua to know the unknown. The final section develops this argument by comparing naming first with shamanic practices and second with the interpretation of dreams as techniques for knowing the unknown. The chapter concludes with some stories that illustrate how the Nahua use these same techniques to understand the radically different world they have been exposed to since they 'fell out of the forest'.

Part 1: Names

From a Nahua point of view, they live in a precarious world surrounded by visible and invisible dangers posed by both human and non-human agents. The following section explores how and why the careful use of real names limits the dangers they are exposed to from human sorcery. The subsequent section compares the naming of people with the naming of rivers in order to illustrate the principles that make names so powerful.

Real names

In 2001, Nahua territory was invaded by over 150 armed loggers from Sepahua and their protests to local authorities fell on deaf ears. A delegation travelled to Lima to protest but on departing they received death threats from the loggers. Two days later, one of them, Vidal, an otherwise healthy man in his mid 50s, collapsed, began to convulse and five minutes later had died. His Nahua companions were afflicted with an illness and hospitalised in Lima for a week. For the Nahua, the explanation was clear; the loggers had employed a renowned *brujo* from Sepahua to kill their leaders. He succeeded with Vidal where he had failed with the others because they said he knew his full Spanish name including his maternal and paternal surnames.

A real name (*anekoi*[329]) is more than a signpost. In common with a person's bodily substances names are inseparable from the person as they provide direct access to the *feroyoshi* and can be used to kill or harm their owners[330]. The link between the real name and the essence of the individual is illustrated in the myth of *notishoniyamafani* where the water spirit smells the men to confirm or discredit their statement that they are who they say they are. Names, like smells, are an aspect of the person. This is why real names (*anekoi)* are never spoken publicly. A *brujo* can use these 'real names' to call to and capture the spirit of their victim. This results in illness and eventually their death. Caution with real names is thus vital. By concealing their name they are protected from sorcery. Nevertheless, just as a shaman can use a person's real name to kill, a powerful shaman can use a real name to sing to the dying and recall their spirit.

It is not just the risk of sorcery that people are attempting to avoid, there are many potential benefits of remaining incognito, a practice in which the Nahua are highly accomplished. Several years ago, a young Nahua man travelled downriver for ten days to the small settlement of Boca Manu[331] where he was looking for work. He used a false name and told local people he was from Pucallpa. He had no national identity card and when asked for his ID by military patrols, police or state officials he told them it

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[329] *Ane* means name and *koi* is a suffix that, here, I translate as 'real'. The Nahua use *koi* to indicate 'properness' as in its use in the term *yora enikoi*, real/proper person. *Koi* is also used as an emphasiser. For example, *sharakoi* means very good (*shara*, good).

[330] For the Wayapi, illness is caused by being "seen and known" by shamans (Campbell 1995:196).

[331] A small town at the mouth of the River Manu and the gateway to the Manu National Park.

was currently being processed. His concealment of his identity ultimately worked in his favour as he was later accused of stealing $200. He was arrested but later escaped from the police station by climbing out of a toilet window.

Such caution is absolutely necessary as Curaca explained pragmatically, "You never know when you will have to steal something or kill somebody" and this prudence is nothing new. In the Purús, *Maishato*, the renowned seer lived at one stage with a group called the *Pisinafa* but lied about his name thus preventing the possibility of sorcery[332]. The association of names with their owners is what makes them so powerful. The following section attempts to explain this association, a relationship that is not given at birth but a process generated over time.

Fixing names

On one river journey with Nahua friends we spent the night camped on a beach. We set off at first light in our boat and I was sat next to two year old Wilson and his mother, Edith. As we pulled away from the beach his family began to call towards the beach, "Let's go Wilson, let's go Wilson". This was a common practice and Juan explained it to me, "When a child sleeps, its *yoshi* wants to stay on the beach because its body does not think. It can get ill without its *yoshi;* we call to it so its *yoshi* hears its name". Juan's explanation reflects Nahua ideas that a child lacks both self awareness and an awareness of how it is related to other people. Using the child's name repeatedly helps them gain this awareness. Over time, the child's *yoshi* and name become much more intimately associated with their bodies so the name is no longer used.

McCallum describes a very similar process amongst the Cashinahua for whom although the eye souls are present from birth the body spirit only develops gradually. Without the body spirit, the human being is incomplete and its development is likened to the hardening of corn. Eventually, at the same time as the body spirit develops the

[332] See Chapter 1.

true names are fixed securely to the child's body and the name makes relationships with other people possible (McCallum 2001:26)[333].

The desire to fix this identity is reflected by the Cashinahua effort to give a name to all outsiders as part of an ongoing process of transforming an outsider into a real person. Names are just one part of this dynamic process of making kinship (McCallum 2009). As Erikson has noted more generally for Amerindian peoples; "to have a name is to be alive" (1999:6). Thus, the power of a name lies less in the name itself but in the process by which it comes to be associated with the person. Over time, names become so intimately associated with a person that this becomes problematic when they die.

Nicknames

This concern with real names means they are never used to address someone directly. Instead, people refer to each other with kin terms, nicknames or even by an affectionate term such as *yamashta* or *feroyoshi* referring to the fact that they have died and come back to life.

The multiple nicknames of Nahua individuals often accrue because of unfortunate or amusing physical features as well as small incidents in their life histories[334]. One man, *Manahui*, was referred to as *chipapafa* (huge arse) because he was shot in the backside by loggers but survived and his relatives had to pick out 10 separate lead shots. One of his contemporaries was a lady called *testopafaya* (big throat), probably a victim of a severe case of goitre, while another lady had the misfortune to be called *chuchoma* (no breasts).

[333] As McCallum explains, the repeated use of the name attaches the name to bodily matter through the ear; this is comparable to an act of creation or transformation (2001:22-3). The Cashinahua *nixpopima* ritual fixes names and gender to children's bodies thereby endowing the body with the capacity to be social (Ibid: 41). In a similar fashion she argues that, like the *nixpopima* ritual, the *kachanafa* is an initiation ritual for plants, whereby plants, like children, are named and in the process their capacities are fixed (Ibid: 175).

[334] Also see Erikson on Matis names (1996:163).

Name transmission

Initially, one of the most mystifying aspects about living with the Nahua was the kinship terms they used to refer to each other. For example, Dora, a lady in her late 40s would address her 'grandson' Edouard as *ochi* (elder brother). If this was not confusing enough she would refer to Rafael, her own son as *koka* (mother's brother). Dora explained this enigmatically, "Edouard's *xini* (old one and namesake) is my *ochi"*.

However, when I finally started to draw kinship diagrams, it began to make sense. Edouard's namesake *(xini)* was Velasco as he was the *koka* (mother's brother) of Edouards mother (Lorena). Velasco in turn was Dora's elder brother[335] (*ochi*). This was why Dora called Edouard (who I thought of as her grandson) 'elder brother'. In a similar fashion, Dora addressed Rafael as *koka* (mother's brother) because he shared a namesake relationship with Dora's mother's brother.

[335] In reality, they shared a mother but had different fathers.

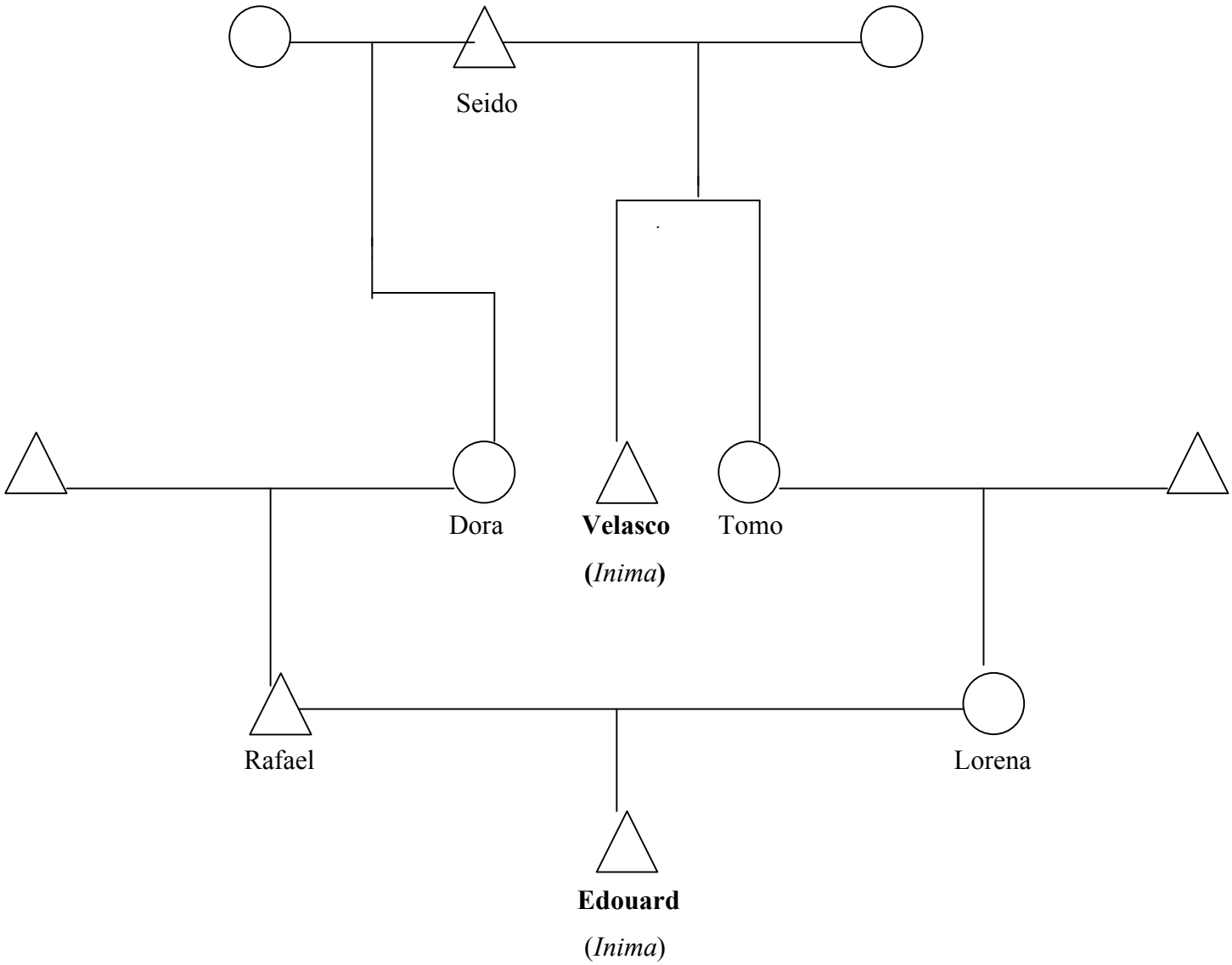

Figure 1: Edouard/Velasco namesake relationship

Nahua parents thus begin to call the child after a namesake (*noko anefo*) by referring to them with a kinship term. If the *xini* is themselves alive, they can create this namesake relationship themselves simply by referring to a small child who is related to them appropriately as their *fena* (new one). While women will call their sons *koka* (mother's brother) Curaca refers to his own daughter called Estella as *achi*, (father'ssister) because Estella's namesake was *Pana*, who was Curaca's *achi* (see figure 2). While boys are generally given the names of their mother's *koka (*MMB*),*

girls generally receive the names of their father's *achi (*FFZ*)*. Nevertheless, this is not always the case and there are several examples where girls receive the name of their mother's mother's sister (MMZ) while boys receive the name of their father's father's brother (FFB).

Before continuing the analysis it is important to briefly compare the principles of the Nahua system of name transmission with some other Panoan and Amazonian groups to highlight some subtle differences.

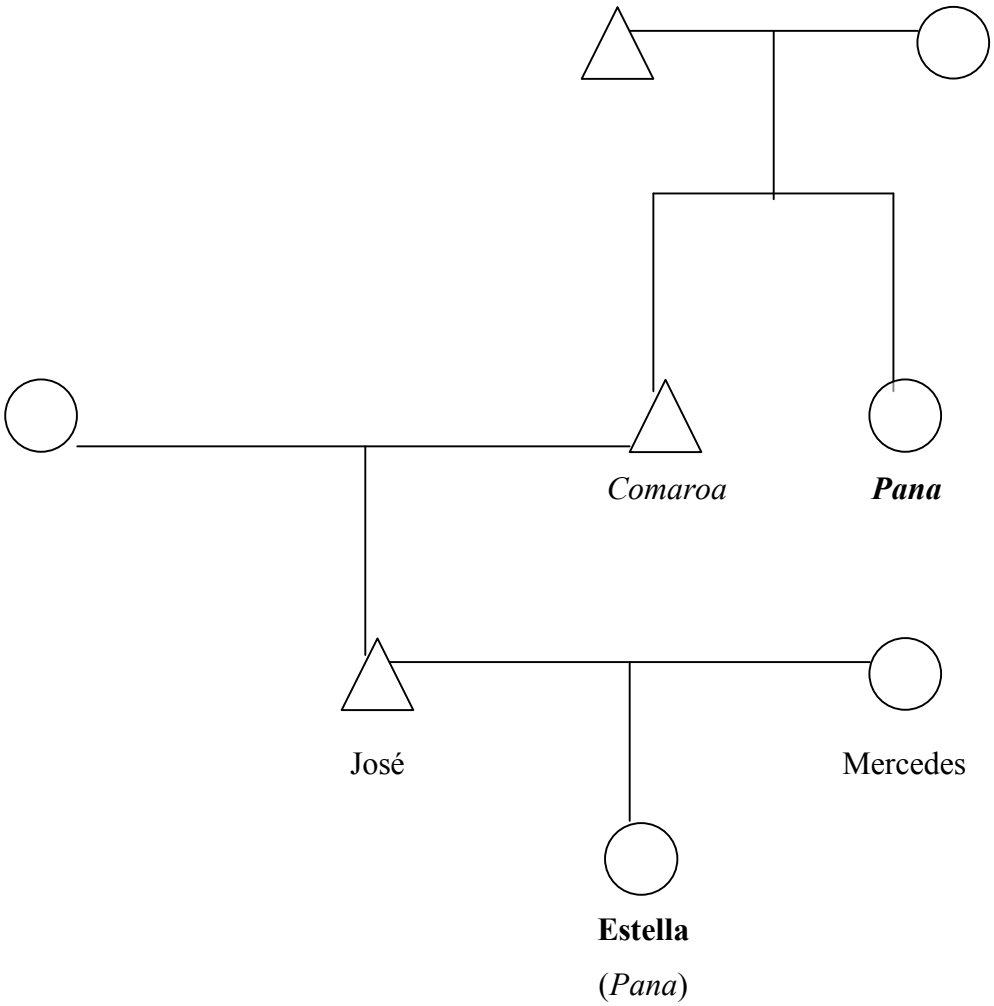

Figure 2: Estella/*Pana* namesake relationship

The Yaminahua naming system has been described in detail by Townsley (1987) who identifies two key principles. The first is a system of parallel name transmission whereby the father gives his son the name of his own father and the mother gives her own mother's name to her daughter. Although two names are given, the most important one is given by the parent of same sex. This is why a man will address his own son as *epa* (father)[336]. The result is that names are associated with one of the moieties, "names belong to the moieties" (Townsley 1988:58)[337] and are passed on irrespective of whether namesakes are alive or dead.

The Cashinahua system of names is even more rigid; they have a fixed stock of names each belonging to one of 8 marriage sections and they too are transmitted in parallel fashion through alternate generations (McCallum 2009). At death, the Cashinahua detach names from their owners and they are also very keen to stress their recyclability. "Cashinahua names summon up the anonymous past…signs of people that have been safely forgotten and therefore thinkable" (McCallum 2001:26). They compare them to dried seeds and corn because they are never lost. Cashinahua names are thus endlessly repeated despite the death of bodies to which they are attached (Ibid: 46).

The recycling of names explains why their use when the person is alive might be restricted as this could mean that their use after their death would be too painful for their relatives[338]. Townsley thus points out that the Yaminahua often temporarily abandon the use of words associated with the names of the dead[339].

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[336] Siskind confirms a similar system for the Sharanahua although she says that names are always chosen by the father. They name the boy after its father's father and the daughter after their father's father's sisters (1973: 61-2).

[337] For the Nahua, it is through the father that an association with one of the exogamous moieties, *roanifo* or ***nafa*** is established. For example, Curaca is *roanifo* because his father was *roanifo* while his mother was ***nafa***. Manuel is ***nafa*** because his father was ***nafa*** although his mother was *roanifo*. Names are moiety based because boys receive names from their mother's *koka* while girls are given names from their father's *achi*. The important point is that because of the exogamous nature of the moiety system, namesakes are in the same moiety. Not all the Nahua have a clear moiety affiliation. Juan and Enrique, for example, are defined as 'mixed', *roanifo exiya,* because of multiple paternities. While Juan's mother was pure *roanifo,* his father (*Seino*) had two fathers as his mother had sex with two men, one from each of the moieties.

[338] These name changes are part of a series of techniques the Nahua use to avoid evoking painful memories of the dead (see Chapter 5).

[339] Thus for example, if a man called 'jaguar' dies then, at his death, the use of the word jaguar may be changed and they may appropriate the word jaguar from a different language (1988:64). This may explain much of the linguistic drift between Purús Panoans.

Like the Yaminahua and Cashinahua, the Nahua also recycle names through alternate generations however they did not explain to me that they are given a name by both parents[340]. They also chose to emphasise the non-parallel nature of name transmission. In general, Nahua men explain that they were given their mother's *koka's* name while women told me they were given their father's *achi's* name. However, there were also examples of parallel transmission[341]. The Nahua emphasise cross transmission but the result is the same. The "principle of replacement" (Townsley 1988:61) means that names (even those of the dead) are passed on and form an "enduring grid of social classification" that define the rights and duties of persons (Townsley 1987:365).

In the literature on the Cashinahua and Yaminahua, the permanence of names both during the person's life time and after their death, tends to be emphasised. In fact, generally throughout the literature on Amazonian indigenous peoples, names are considered to be forces for stability and permanence that balance the impermanence of their chronically unstable bodies (Surrallés 2003:48). However, this emphasis on the permanence of names did not quite match with Nahua names that seemed to change just as much as they were recycled.

Unfixing names

Unlike the Cashinahua, the Nahua stress that 'real names' are not necessarily permanent fixtures. The origin of Juan's name (*Ifirete)* is an excellent example of this process. One day, when the Nahua were living in the Manu long before Juan was born, a middle aged man called *Ronoiroma* (wounded by snake) was felling a tree to make a garden. He was being assisted by his two young brothers-in-law one of whom was called *Xoma*. Tragedy struck however and the two young boys, including *Xoma,* were killed by the falling tree. Juan explained, "*Xoma* was my mother's *koka*, my *xini*, they did not want

[340] In the myth of *notishoniyamafani,* the man is asked for his names on 'both sides' by the water spirit. This refers to both of his fathers rather than his mother and father.
[341] The practice that cross cousins marry each other means that a man's father's father is often the same person as their mother's mother's brother.

to remember so they called him *Ifireteni"* (killed by tree)[342]. This is why I am *Ifireteni*, I was almost *Xoma*. If the tree had not killed him I would have been called *Xoma"*.

Similarly, Curaca is called *Nixpopinima* because his *xini* was called *Nixpopinima* (his mother's *koka* – mother's brother). As he explained: "Before he died he was called *Fakonafa* but at death his name changed to *Nixpopinima*, (he who did not eat *nixpo)* because he died before he could eat his *nixpo* that he had brought from the forest". When he died, all the old men began to refer to him with this name and Curaca's mother gave this name to her son.

Nahua names are thus often changed at death. One man called *Kaparete* (killed alligator) died in a freak hunting accident in the late 1980s. *Kaparete* had pierced a spider monkey with his arrow but the enraged monkey pulled it from his thigh. He hurled it back angrily and killed him. From then on he was known simply as *Pakatsakamis* (impaled by bamboo). A general pattern emerges that when a person has died before their name has been inherited the name is often changed. These new names are then passed on to their unnamed namesakes.

Death is not the only context in which names are changed. An ancestor of the Nahua was renamed *Oxonafa* (white man) after he killed a white man in a raid. *Oxonafa's* contemporary was *Maishato* whose original name was *Xorixini*. After he died he was being buried but he spontaneously resuscitated and lived again. As a result, his name was changed to *Maishato* (moved earth). Only four years ago, a man who killed a Mashco Piro man in self-defence in the Manu is now referred to as Mashco.

Other names reflect a variety of transformative events in a person's life including death, illness an accident or homicide. This explains the origin of many names including; *Poichotamani* (she who had sex with her brother), *Iripafifani* (she who was abducted by *Iri*), *Faifati* (he who always made gardens), *Pacairoma* (wounded by

[342] The Chacobo delay the naming of infants to avoid wasting a name on a child who might die, otherwise the name could not be used for some time (Erikson 1999:145). The Yanomami also stop addressing people with their personal names after puberty. Ales argues that this is because they need to allow time for forgetting these names as if they died it would cause great sadness. The inverse of this is that killers use the names of their victims in order to increase the suffering felt by the relatives of the dead (Ales 2000).

bamboo), *Yamishpota* (she who was pushed over by armadillo[343]). Curaca explained this to me explicitly; "If I were to kill the mayor (of Sepahua) tomorrow we could change my name to Mayor and then the name of my next *fena* would also be mayor". The names of his existing namesakes however would remain as *Nixpopinima*.

Thus, names, like the bodies to which they are attached, are not fixed but continue to transform alongside a person's capacities. Nahua names it seems are more flexible than those of their Cashinahua counterparts; they are as elastic as the bodies to which they are attached.

Names are powerful because of the intimate association with the person that is generated over time. It is not only important what one is called but with whom one shares this name. The power of names is not only because of their processual nature but because they are also relational.

Sharing names

Although the Nahua must be prudent with the use of their names, deception can be counterproductive. It is often beneficial to reveal one's true name in an encounter with strangers as shared names can result in the realisation of kinship links with apparent strangers and subsequent material benefits.

When Juan visited a Yaminahua village in the river Yurúa an old man asked him. "Who made you?" "My mother was called *pakakoro*" Juan replied. The old man broke down in tears, "You are my grandchild. My daughter was *Pakakoro*". During this journey, one of the Chitonahua, a man called *Reteni* who was living with the Yaminahua, amongst whom he had no relatives, decided he wanted to move to Serjali. He had no relatives there either but *Reteni* shared his name with Santiago's father so the Nahua immediately inserted him into their kin network. "Father", Santiago calls him,

[343] This refers to a Nahua lady who was waiting outside an armadillo's hole in the forest in order to trap it when it emerged. Unfortunately, the armadillo rushed out at great speed and bundled her over.

while Curaca, (Santiago's brother-in-law), refers to him as father-in-law[344]. Whether intended or not, one of the functions of this naming system is that it facilitates the incorporation of outsiders into the group.

Today, the multiple Purús Panoan local groups live dispersed in small villages in the headwaters of the rivers of the Western Amazon across a massive swathe of jungle in Bolivia, Peru and Brazil. Chapter 1 described how the first encounters of the Nahua with the Yaminahua were facilitated by the naming system and the endless recycling of names between alternate generations. The revelation that José Chorro's real name, Comaroa, was that of Curaca's father was highly significant as Curaca began to call him by his kinship term, father[345].

To refer to someone with a kin term is thus to describe the quality of that relationship and to evoke the conviviality of living with people 'like us'. This is why the Nahua go to great lengths to establish such connections with strangers. The first time that a friend came to visit me in the field my Nahua friends asked me "He is your what?" I must have looked confused so they prompted me further; asking if he was my brother, cross cousin, father or even my mother's brother. To each of these I shook my head. Now it was the Nahua who were confused. "Oh" they concluded. "He is your nothing". From this point, whenever anyone asked who he was, helpful Nahua interjected on my behalf. "He is his nothing". The next time a friend visited I had my answer prepared. "He is my *chai* (cross cousin)" I declared and the Nahua were happy. For the Nahua, one is either somebody or nobody; a concern to classify that is highlighted by the following episode.

One afternoon, Curaca had gone fishing when a helicopter arrived bearing the representatives of Pluspetrol, an Argentine oil company, including their community liaison officer, a man called José. The meeting was underway when Curaca stormed in angrily and declared that the company was uninvited and thus they had no right to start a meeting without the chief. He stopped the meeting by standing in the middle of the house. He introduced himself as José Dixpopidiba Waxe and demanded to know this

[344] As Siskind notes for the Sharanahua, "upon learning the name of a stranger one may instantly know whether to address him as brother, father, mother's brother or cousin and interact in the appropriate way" (1973:61-2).
[345] Macquarrie also notes the obsessive interest of the Nahua in Yaminahua names (1991:132).

white man's name. When he learned they were namesakes, Curaca's tone softened. "Well *tocayo* (namesake), why have you come?" he asked more pleasantly. For Curaca, name sharing implied certain bonds of generosity, mutual support and the establishment of a special relationship with his *tocayo*[346].

Revealing a name can be beneficial as it establishes a connection that transforms a 'nobody' into a 'somebody'. Sharing a name does not result in sharing an identity but in a relationship with the person (McCallum 2001:21). Having a 'nobody' around is potentially dangerous while 'kin' are generous to each other with material goods, food and support.

Thus, the Nahua must strike a delicate balance between revealing a name and permitting a potentially beneficial relationship or hiding it and protecting themselves from potential sorcery. When the Nahua first arrived in Sepahua, the Yaminahua asked them their names but as Tomas described, "They asked us our names but my elder brother said he did not know, he was scared but he was a fool".

Today, as citizens in a nation state, the Nahua are learning that it is often beneficial to reveal their true names and even their ID cards if required. Nevertheless, they are astute observers of situations and can switch their hats effortlessly when required. One moment Curaca is in a meeting with a government official in Lima and presents himself as José Dixpopidiba Waxe, President of the village with ID No 978642634. Leaving the office to go to lunch however he meets a policeman on the corner of the road and becomes Walter Perez, a peasant farmer from the Andes who has lost his ID.

Sometimes even the Nahua get caught out. I was working in Lima with Julio and Jorge and was helping them process their application for an ID so they could vote in the upcoming national elections. During the application process they were asked to provide a signature. When we returned to pick up the cards they were asked to identify themselves and produced their signatures with a flourish but the official refused to give them the cards. Despite the match in the photos, the signatures were completely

[346] Many Nahua men had forged similar relationships with influential *mestizo* men in Sepahua by adopting their names.

different! Eventually, the official handed over the cards but not before Jorge and Julio had received a lecture in the importance of maintaining a consistent signature.

Great care must be taken with the use of names but the Nahua are still coming to terms with a world that attributes greater power to the written rather than spoken word and a society that places its trust in signatures as markers and proof of identity. While Julio and Jorge are learning quickly, others are finding it harder to adapt. Over the years I have seen Curaca use at least ten different signatures on official community correspondence. One is a long flowing squiggle, another resembles a scrunched up spider while another is a single and carefully written 'J'.

'Real names' are not confined to Nahua names nor to the names associated with their 'traditional namesakes'. Instead, the quality of real names reflects the depth of their association with the person. All names, be they 'real', Spanish or nicknames are powerful but some are more powerful than others and the more secret a name the more power they hold.

Names are influential because they are a kind of 'super powerful word' that distill the identity of a person but they are also powerful because of their ability to establish relationships[347]. As McCallum puts it, "names are both an intimate part of oneself and a way of making strangers into kin" (2001:24).

Part 2: River names

In the Panoan ethnographic literature, personal names are thus seen as elements that generate continuity in spite of the discontinuity of death and are therefore stabilising devices in a system prone to chronic instability. At the level of the individual, names are described in terms of fixing a person's identity despite the volatility of their bodies. This emphasis on permanence and stability however did not seem to fit with Nahua use of personal names as they placed more emphasis on their elasticity and relational qualities. The objective of this section is to understand further this relational aspect to names through a comparison with the names the Nahua give to rivers.

[347] I thank Christina Toren and Ioannis Kallianos for helping to articulate this so clearly.

Apart from the occasional rock or beach, the vast majority of Nahua toponyms refer to rivers of which all but the smallest are named. These names were documented in their current territory on the River Mishagua and their previous territories on the River Manu (Map 4) and on the River Purús. Some of these names such as *potaya* ('with turbulent water') simply refer to a river's geographical characteristics, whilst others refer to the ecological features of the surrounding forest, such as *pacaya* ('with bamboo') or *canamefeya* ('with macaw clay lick'). Other names refer to Nahua use of particular forest products found in specific locations, such as *mapoya* ('with *mapo*' – a special type of clay used for making cooking pots), while others tell of hunting stories and other adventures, such as *inopisiya* ('with smelly jaguar' – where a Nahua hunter killed a jaguar and left it to rot). Other places are called *yoshiya* or *fakaya* ('with spirits') because they are inhabited by the spirits of the deceased[348].

More names tell of the first encounters of the Nahua with non-indigenous Peruvians and their tools and machines. For example, *nafafaiya* ('with the path of outsiders') refers to a crossing point between two river basins and probably the infamous *Istmo de Fitzcarrald*[349]. A*parakaya* ('with sleeping father') refers to the resting place of some heavy machinery, possibly a helicopter that was abandoned by Shell in the headwaters of the River Manu during the 1980s.

Finally, a few rivers bear the names of mythic beings whose actions in the past created the landscape's particular features such as a river full of huge boulders that the Nahua call *inafaxanoya* ('with grandmother of jaguar'). *Inafaxano's* body was brittle and hard as a rock until she was pushed into a fire by her sons and shattered into countless fragments. Other names refer to places still inhabited by these beings, such as *enenafanofaya* ('with spirits of deep water'). Such mythological geographies are not generally associated with Purús Panoans (Calavia Saez 2004) but have been documented by anthropologists working elsewhere in the Amazon (Santos Granero 1998) and are particularly common in Australasia where the features of the landscape

[348] Similar naming processes have been well documented for indigenous peoples in North America (Basso 1996), Australia (Morphy 1995) and in the Amazon (Santos Granero 1998).
[349] Carlos Fermin Fitzcarrald was a Peruvian rubber baron who, in the late 19th century, pioneered the use of an overland passage between the River Mishagua and the River Manu. This passage became known as the Isthmus of Fitzcarrald and permitted the exportation of rubber from the Madre de Dios region to the Ucayali River (a tributary of the Amazon).

are directly related to the actions of mythical beings during the dreaming (Morphy 1995).

Nahua ancestors only moved to the headwaters of the Manu and Mishagua some time after the collapse of the rubber boom. Neverthless, they began to name its rivers as soon as they arrived. Richard Montag documents a similar process for the Cashinahua in Peru who today live on the river Curanja but who were forced to flee from Brazil in the early twentieth century after a conflict with rubber tappers. Pudico, a Cashinahua man who lived through this migration, describes how they began to name the rivers as they arrived in this new and unfamiliar space. "Intending to name it I think what does it have? It is with sun; nothing is hiding it and the sunlight is coming, I have made its name real today" (Montag 1998:21).

Recycling or inventing names

When I compared the river names that elder Nahua remembered from the river Purús with those they use today in the River Manu and with Yaminahua river names from the river Piedras, two features struck me as interesting[350]. Firstly, like personal names there was a good deal of continuity between the names used by different Nahua local groups and secondly, the Nahua were able to locate specific mythical events in the Manu despite their recent migration.

My initial explanation for this second feature was that "through naming unfamiliar spaces with familiar names the Nahua create the impression of a stable familiar territory in the context of continuous movement and migration" (Feather 2009:84). My initial instinct was that Nahua river names just like their myths were historically flexible and capable of incorporating recent phenomena such as the introduction of metal tools. It seemed that place names and personal names, again like Nahua myths, were "instruments for the obliteration of time" (Lévi-Strauss cited in Gow 2001:11).

It was thus tempting to argue that naming new places helped the Nahua, a highly mobile people, familiarise themselves with new spaces and thus disguise their frequent

[350] Names from the River Piedras were described to me by a Yaminahua man who was living in Serjali, but who was born in the Piedras.

migrations, creating a geographical continuity despite spatial upheavals, an important stabilising force because of the highly mobile lifestyle of the Nahua[351]. This neatly paralleled the prevailing approach towards Panoan and Amerindian names whereby the recycling of personal names was thought to defy the social discontinuity created by death.

This analysis however always seemed quite tenuous. In retrospect it reflected my own assumption that migration was something inherently problematic and disruptive. Through listening more closely to the Nahua I now believe that I was confusing cause with effect. While the effect of Nahua naming transmission is to recycle names, it does not seem to be the explicit objective of such practices as it is for other Amerindian peoples such as the Barasana who explained to Christine Hugh-Jones: "If we did not take on our grandfather's names we would die out like a rotting corpse" (1977:189). Certainly, the recycling of personal names generates opportunities for establishing relations with distant kin yet, rather than emphasising the inheritance of names and association with moieties, the Nahua tend to change personal names to reflect a person's continuously transforming identity. This elasticity only makes sense once names are appreciated not as things in themselves but as instruments for creating relationships. This capacity is crucial in a world where these relationships constantly change as people die or move away.

Names establish relationships

I once asked Curaca how he became a chief. He explained that "After my father died I would invite people to eat in my house and they began to call me *niaifo* (chief)". Curaca did not become a chief through inheritance or a specific rite of passage but because others began to recognise his chiefly qualities by calling him chief; he responded in kind by acting in a more chiefly manner.

Naming thus affects the way people relate to others and visa versa. In other words, naming is a way of bringing something into existence. The name itself does not create

[351] There is a great deal of anthropological literature that makes a similar argument, see Turton (2004:276).

the person; instead it makes a particular kind of relationship possible with others (Keifenheim 2002: 27). This is why names, like kinship terms, can be used flexibly to refer to the particular relationship one wants to elicit. By referring to someone as *niaifo,* the Nahua emphasise their chiefly qualities. By referring to them as *feroyoshi,* they flag their vulnerability, by referring to them with the diminutive form they emphasise the affectionate dimension to their relationship and if they remove it then the relationship changes again. I always knew the Nahua meant business when they occasionally called me Cono instead of *conashta*, little cono!

The critical importance of the namesake relationship is perhaps the best evidence that names are about relationships rather than things in themselves[352]. As McCallum shows, it is relationships with other people that fix a person's fractured and partial sense of self (2001:167). This also means that what can be fixed can always be unfixed.

This relational dimension of names sheds new light on the significance of river names. Like persons, the capacities of rivers are multiple. The names do not refer to a fixed attribute of the river but a particular capacity that is elicited by the naming process[353]. Within anthropology, concepts such as landscape and space have often been seen as given and irreducible, a blank space on which social meanings are inscribed (Jimenez 2003). Such notions evoke similar ideas of the person as a blank biological slate on to which gender and other social meanings are written.

Just as Nahua persons and bodies are neither given nor fixed but something elastic and fashioned out of relationships so too is it difficult to speak of 'Nahua territory' as a given and fixed space. Like people, places change. The Nahua are engaged in a constant process of changing the way they relate to rivers and consequently transform the capacities of these rivers that are as fractal as the person's who navigate their reaches.

If it is assumed that an original meaning in the landscape exists beyond the relationships that people have with it then Nahua naming practices can easily be seen as 'inauthentic'. However, if contemporary place naming practices are seen alongside the

[352] Also see Erikson 1996:158-160.
[353] I thank Chris Hewlett who helped me think about these issues with greater clarity.

adoption of Spanish names as efforts to establish relationships then, like Myers we can see "contemporary aboriginal selfmaking and placemaking as continuous with earlier practices rather than abruptly disjoined" (2000:101). As Strathern explains, people only exist in their relationships with others. The reality is not in the body but in the space between bodies –the names – names have power because they correspond to the relationship (1992:271). For the Nahua, the specific meaning of the name is less important than the relationships it allows one to establish. There is nothing contradictory about changing 'real names' any more than ascribing a mythic origin to a 'new landscape'.

Thus, the objective of Nahua naming practices is less about the recycling of identities and more about establishing a namesake relationship between two people. An unintended function of this process is that encounters between apparently unrelated Nahua groups reveal shared names and facilitate the possibility of establishing relationships. Clearly, if this was an explicit objective of their naming project then this would not continually surprise the Nahua when they encounter others with similar names.

Similarly, the recurrence of names between old and new territories is not part of a political or intellectual strategy to exert 'ownership' over a place but is simply a result of people noticing similar features in rivers and making connections with ecological features or mythic characters. Just as there are many rivers in their old and new territories with the same names there are also many new names that reflect the specific experience of the person visiting that river. The naming of a river depends on the experience of an individual Nahua as they visit it for the first time and the consideration of the capacity of that river.

My initial instinct was correct. Naming places is like naming people but not in the way I had originally conceived. When a child is born, naming them is part of the process of fashioning their identity and enabling relationships with their kin. As a person ages their name may change to reflect these changing relationships and capacities. This is most evident at the moment of death when the name must be changed as part of the effort to sever this relationship. Similarly, when they move places they immediately name their new rivers.

It was initially tempting to think of Nahua place naming practices as an act of nostalgic commemoration or political strategy perhaps akin to the naming practices of Europeans in their new colonies. However each time they move, the Nahua are not recycling their territory but engaging in a new act of creation. The recycling of names between territories is an unintentional consequence of the importance attributed to establishing relationships rather than a deliberate strategy. At the heart of their naming practices is their desire to know these rivers and their capacities immediately on arrival in a new territory. Thus, as soon as they arrived in the Manu River at the start of the 20th century its rivers and streams began to be named.

In naming a person, the Nahua establish a relationship with that person. By changing those personal names they are redefining that person's capacity and the means by which others relate to them. In a similar fashion by naming a river the Nahua establish a relationship with a new place. In retrospect, it is the immediacy and speed with which they establish relationships with a new territory through naming, rather than the content of the name that is so interesting.

Although it may appear that the Nahua are endlessly recycling names and creating stability out of discontinuity, in reality they are engaged in a constant invention of people and places. The power of names derives from their intimate associations with their owners but they also enable people to establish relationships with new people and new places. In this sense, rather than a set of rules, naming is a technique of 'knowing the unknown'. The elasticity of their names provides them with the resilience to deal with the discontinuity in their social relations as people die or move away. To illustrate this more clearly the following section explores more typical domains of generating knowledge; shamanism and dream interpretation.

Part 3: Songs and dreams: Techniques of knowing

Seers

It was a typical afternoon and Aliya and I were lazing in our hammocks in Elena's kitchen chatting with Joaquin. Suddenly, the stillness of the day was broken by the shriek of a hawk (*tete*). Joaquin's eyes narrowed. "Someone will cry later" he remarked enigmatically. Two lazy hours later very little had changed except that we had shifted our hammocks two inches to the left to shelter from the sun. Suddenly, a cry came from nowhere, "*Pishki* has burnt. *Pishki* has burnt". A tumult of shrieking children rushed over. In the chaos I caught a glimpse of *Pishki*, Elena's tiny irritable pet parrot, who had fallen in the fire and had been reduced to a small piece of coal attached to a beak.

Elena was distraught and retreated to her house singing funereal laments (*fini*), *efe fake sharashta, efe fake sharashta,* 'my beautiful child, my beautiful child'. Her children and grandchildren however seemed oblivious to her pain and shrieked with laughter, throwing *Pishki's* charred remains playfully in the air. Meanwhile, Elena, in a replica of a human funeral, carefully wrapped up *Pishki's* bed, a small gourd and a piece of cloth, which she burnt. Joaquin explained to me later, "When the *tete* cries we know someone is going to die, the *tete* is *yofe*, it can see".

It is not only hawks that can see. Parrots see too. The chattering of small parrots is interpreted as an omen of hunting success, the '*peiya* (winged ones) are happy' they say. *Yofe* is also used to refer to shamans and sorcerers[354]. The condition of a shaman lies in their ability to see more than other people (Townsley 1988: 138). Both healers and sorcerers can be called '*yofe*' (literally seer) because of this capacity to see not only things that will come to pass (like birds) but to see things as they really are. In this sense, shamans and sorcerers are not defined by a status but by what they can do, to see.

[354] Perez Gil makes a distinction berween two main classes of shamans amongst the Yawanawa and Yaminawa. The first is *yuvehu* (Nahua equivalent of *yofe*) and the second is the *xuitiya* or *shinaya. The yuvehu/yofe* is more powerful and has the ability to control animal populations. *Xinaya*, she says, is a term used to refer to more powerful *xoitiya* although the terms are used varyingly in different contexts. For example, to discredit someone's powers they call them a *xuitiuya* rather than *xinaya* (2001:336-337).

This capacity is why shamans are often suspected of sorcery and thus why Curaca was anxious to downplay his own abilities and the capacity of contemporary Nahua shamans to commit sorcery. When I travelled with the Nahua to visit the Achuar he even went to great pains to avoid smoking his pipe where other people might see him and advised me to do the same. "They may think you are *yofe"* he said. Curaca may be right that his people no longer have the abilities of ancient shamans but the suspicion of sorcery is alive and well. The ability to see not only enables one to heal but also to kill.

Today, when Nahua healers take *ayahuasca* they say they can see if it is another person responsible for the illness in which case they can be identified and ordered to abandon their project. Shamans can also see and recall the spirit of the dead travelling to land of dead where it is being called by its former relatives. A shaman like Curaca is an expert at seeing such realities. Lucco explained this by reminding me of the time when several of us had travelled to Brazil and how only Curaca was able to spot other *yora*, their relatives in the small town of Assis[355]. In a world where appearances can be deceiving, all Nahua have to be on their guard but only *yofe* possess the qualities to distinguish appearance from essence. To illustrate the association between shamanism and knowledge the following section explores one ability, above all others that defines contemporary shamans, their capacity to sing *xoiti*, healing songs.

Xoiti

Most adult men can heal with tobacco and 'sucking'. Sucking appears to be more a mechanical capacity than anything else, some people are better at it than others and there is no special training required as it is an extractive process based on the principle that the patient's blood has been contaminated. As far as I am aware, tobacco healing also requires no special training or ability other than the capacity to blow and suck powerfully as it relies on the transformative power of 'tobacco' to do its work[356].

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[355] The Nahua said that these people were the Yawanawa.

[356] Most adult Nahua men, and some women, smoke tobacco pipes. Before they 'fell out of the forest', adult men kept a gigantic ball of tobacco in their cheeks; they would chew this especially when they were working in their gardens because they say that "tobacco makes the snakes sleepy. Today, they prefer to buy processed tobacco from Sepahua and smoke it in pipes. This has by no means dampened Nahua enthusiasm for using tobacco to heal aches and pains as well as to ward off spirit attack. When curing, they lean in closely over the body and for several minutes they blow tobacco smoke over the painful area

Healing with songs, with *xoiti* (literally blowers) is another matter entirely. The origin of *xoiti* is explained by a myth that begins when a man who was hunting with his brother was attacked and swallowed by an anaconda (*ronofa*). The brother killed the anaconda and the man was saved. That night, the man dreamt that people gave him guns and arrows. The next day he was able to sing *xoiti* and to know the plants which had medicinal properties (*nisa)*. Below is an excerpt from a tobacco *xoiti* that was sung by Curaca for a patient with persistent headaches.

Tobacco *Xoiti*

ika tete nefafo tsoa ano rao – To the power and dizziness of 'hawk wing' (*ika tete*) this is calling.

mia yama tenema hofani – Its power does not let you rest.

ineskafa mi fene mea afe yofe fescafafo – The man feels the pain of its power.

fene yora huikashma inihofana – It is making him feel bad.

fene fero fetama ima inihofana – The man's eyes hurt when they look above.

fene maposhakini tsoa ano rao, afe yofe itsafafe - Its pungent smell is inside his head.

afe isi orima imaikofana – It makes his head hurt.

afe yofe paefafe shina desimaki - Its power makes his heart beat.

efe yofe fanano – I am singing with my power to heal.

efe yofe kayano – My power is healing.

ika tete yofekia – I am singing to the power of 'hawk wing'.

fene mapo onofa oria arofifaiki – I sing to take its power from the man's head.

afe yofe ashokia – I am helping with its power.

ori afe tea – Over there I am frightening off its power.

efe yofe ifosho nowe rifi iwosho – I also am a shaman (*yofe*)

fene feso fepeki, fepe ini foaki - The man's head is blocked, I am opening his head.

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massaging it with their fingers before sucking out the *chaka* (the badness). When they are taking *ayahuasca,* men will often blow on and around the temples and suck the crown of the head. Head blowing is also used when a patient has encountered a *yoshi*. One curious feature that I have struggled to understand is the insatiable desire of the Nahua for tobacco yet there unwillingness to grow their own thereby making them dependent on the tiny pieces that they can occasionally afford to buy from Sepahua or scrounge off their relatives or visiting anthropologists. In the late 1990's, the Nahua even received payment in tobacco for permitting a logging group to fell timber in their territory. Some Nahua said that this is because they do not have any tobacco seeds (also noted by Perez Gil 2004:182) while others say it does not grow as well as it did in the Manu although this is contradicted by the fact that one man occasionally grows tobacco in Serjali.

mefe fene shinara shina firi ashoki – I am healing his heart.
fene yora chinai – The man's body is like fire.
eke shoma ifofo, shoma ifofofasho – With the song of *shoma* (forest spirit) I am healing.
ika tete e yofeki, neno fana keneki - With the power and designs of 'hawk wing', with my power I am healing from here.
fene yora rapeki – I am cleaning the man's body.
rofetete e yofera, rofatete yofekia – With the 'hawk rock's' (*rofetete*) power.
nene e kachiori – You are beaten by me
mia fene yora pekaki – I am leaving you the man in peace.
fene mapo matzinai – I am cooling the man's head.
fene shina rofapa – The man's heart (shina) is beautiful.
fene shina shakonai – The man's heart is young.
fene shinai kaninai – The man's heart is strong.
ini sako inipa – I am making you smell the fragrance of this plant (*sako*)
fene yora toreki, fene yora pakeki – I massage the man's body, I clean the man's body.

When I first began trying to translate the *xoiti* I understood almost nothing. My young Nahua friends who were assisting me with translation confessed that even they did not understand. All I knew was that a shaman would spend hours chanting into a small cup of corn beer (*mama*) that the patient would drink.

After I had listened to several of these songs, a general pattern emerged whereby they first described the symptoms of the patient in great detail. A fever in some cases was described as a 'burning fire' and compared to gasoline. The songs would then continue to describe how their breath and power push away the fire and bring freshness and coolness. Many words however seemed to be untranslatable. For example what did *rofetete* (hawk rock) or *ika tete* (hawk wing) mean in the above excerpt? It was only when I myself was being treated for headaches and was translating them with Curaca himself that it became a little clearer. Curaca told me.

> *I helped you with tobacco (nafe), its dizziness, its headaches, its force (pae), every xoiti is a different path (faifetsa), tobacco is one, toé is another and the sun another; we helped you with those too. Tomorrow we will try kapa (squirrel) and iso (spider monkey). They too have bad headaches.*

The Nahua live in a world where animals, birds, plants, even meteorological phenomena are animate beings with forces (*pae*) of varying degrees that are manifested in their characteristics. The sun has the power of heat, tobacco of dizziness, and many creatures ranging from crabs and macaws to dogs and toucans have headaches and dizziness in varying degrees. The principle of *yora* means that such characteristics are easily acquired through their bodies' exposure to these forces. The job of the healer is to use the *xoiti* to acquire the force of such powers and use this to heal the patient rather than making them ill. Just as eating animals can result in the acquisition of their features so can the power behind their headaches be used for healing, a form of antidote. Thus, the *pae* of tobacco is best understood as a capacity to cause or cure a headache. This is a recurring principle for the Nahua for whom *rao* refers to both poison and medicine. What heals also harms and what kills also saves.

The capacity of the *xoiti* penetrates the body when people drink the corn beer, and 'works inside the stomach' recreating the process of the song. This is why washing or eating strong tasting and smelling foods after drinking *mama* was restricted. At best this is because this dilutes or contaminates the *xoiti,* but at worst they can offend the owners of these forces. Small wonder that conventional medical treatment is seen as such an attractive proposition for the Nahua, something I began to appreciate after spending 10 days confined to my house eating nothing but boiled manioc!

The power of names

What remained mystifying however was that Curaca had been singing the tobacco *xoiti* yet never used the word tobacco (*nafe*)? Instead, he used various metaphors such as 'rock hawk' and 'hawk wing'. He explained to me. "You cannot say the name of tobacco because it will get angry, this is why we say it with other names, and we say *ika tete* or *rofetete* instead". Care with names is thus not something exclusive to social relations with other people but is applied to all beings, animals, plants and even the sun. Thus, instead of saying *iso* to refer to spider monkey they say *chexe cama*, (black dog), toé is referred to as *romefichosho* (a white heron) because it resembles the flowers of toé while the sun (*fari*) is *daichi whoosh*, fire of the sky. Curaca explained. "They will kill us if we sing its name but they like to hear their nickname". As Townsley shows,

these nicknames are not random but are highly metaphoric and thus fish are referred to as white collared peccary because of the resemblances between their gills and white dashes on a peccary's neck while tobacco is 'hawk wing' because tobacco leaves resemble a hawk's wing (1993:460). The Yaminahua explained that they use this 'twisted language' instead of their real names so they do not crash into things (Ibid: 460).

Thus, "names are not just signifiers; they are integral parts of the things to which they allude" (Townsley 1989:150). The association between names and access to power is a common theme amongst indigenous Amazonians where shamanic power is based on the proper use and management of names (Overing 1981:156). This power was revealed very clearly one morning when I was waiting to go hunting with Julio. To pass the time I asked his father to tell me a story about *nimeramapoa*, a powerful forest spirit. He refused. It was a bad idea to invoke its name before going hunting as we might have an unexpected encounter[357].

Nahua healing songs are not simply symbolic efforts. Because of their intimate association with their bearers, names are means of acquiring and using the powers of their bearers and through songs and their consumption these powers are incorporated by the patient[358]. The theme that reverberates throughout the ethnography of Amazonia is the intimate relationship between knowledge and power (Overing 1981:160). To know something is to have power over it. The only spiritual entity that the Nahua call directly with its real name is *ayahuasca* (*xori*) itself. "*Xori* is a healer. It wants to help us". Like a human healer however *xori* gets angry and can refuse to treat their patients if the correct diets and restrictions are ignored.

Nahua healing practices, like everything else in their society, are not static but are as flexible as their bodies, naming practices and clothing choices. The subsequent section addresses some of these changes that serve to illustrate the principles at the heart of the power of names.

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[357] The Sharanahua were careful not to tell the myth of the moon in the presence of pre-pubescent girls as use of the moon's name could trigger precocious menstruation (Siskind cited in Belaunde 2005:262).
[358] In a similar fashion, the songs sung by the Cashinahua during initiation rituals invoke powers in the cosmos to form the child. For example, the harpy eagle is invoked to protect the child from soul loss as the eagle is a messenger of the Inka (Lagrou 1998:274).

Changes in shamanic practices

When I first visited the Nahua I naïvely assumed that the flourishing *ayahuasca* (*xori*) shamanism I encountered was a survival from the past. My illusions were quickly dashed; *ayahuasca* had been introduced by the Yaminahua barely 15 years beforehand replacing their use of a vine called *tsimo*.

For many indigenous Amazonian peoples, contact with whites has resulted in dramatic changes in shamanic practices. The Airo Pai for example completely abandoned the use of *ayahuasca* (Belaunde 2005). Such shifts have often been explained as the imposition of alien forms of knowledge. Tello, for example, attributes changes in Nahua 'traditional healing practices' to pressure from the Catholic mission (2004:147).

The limitation of these arguments however is that they fail to permit indigenous people any agency in their own lives or take seriously what they say. For example, the Airo Pai abandonment of *ayahuasca* and their subsequent enthusiasm for Christianity reflected their pre existing antipathy towards shamanic practices which were seen as necessary yet dangerous powers. The evangelical message which promoted the control of anger already had a sympathetic audience amongst the Airo Pai who adopted it enthusiastically as it prohibited the use of *ayahuasca* and allowed them to emerge from a cycle of hostility and vengeance (Belaunde 2005:158).

Shepard attributes the swift adoption of *ayahuasca* to the political influence of a Yaminahua man, José Chorro (1999:80). Nevertheless, while José's authority may have been a contributory factor, it is far less important than the properties of *ayahuasca* and *tsimo* and the context in which they were being used.

Tsimo (literally bitterness) was a highly bitter substance derived from a forest vine which, when consumed, enabled Nahua shamans to 'see' much more clearly. Only Nahua shamans and those who had observed the strict dietary and sexual restrictions could have visions when they used *tsimo*. It was this bitter quality that therefore made

it appropriate for healing. The problem was that it also made it very appropriate for sorcery.

Ayahuasca, on the other hand, is much less bitter and thus not associated with sorcery. The Nahua say that 'anyone can see things with *ayahuasca'* and they do not have to observe a strict diet. The comparative lightness of *ayahuasca* explains how the Nahua often use it up to three times a week and for recreational purposes, they compare *ayahuasca* to a visit to the cinema, only better! To stretch the analogy; taking *ayahuasca* was like watching an action packed film while drinking coke and eating popcorn, drinking *tsimo* however was like watching a horror film with only a glass of water for company.

The enthusiastic adoption of *ayahuasca* by the Nahua in place of *tsimo* thus reflected a pre-existing antipathy to bitter substances that were associated with sorcery. *Tsimo*, while considered extremely powerful was also difficult and risky to use because of the strict dietary and behavioural restrictions associated with its consumption. *Ayahuasca,* on the other hand, was also powerful but was much more practical and less dangerous to use, and after 1984 the Nahua could take advantage of Western medicine that further reduced their reliance on *tsimo*[359]. Finally, after they 'fell out of the forest' Nahua fear of internal sorcery seems to have reduced significantly. Today they attribute most sorcery attacks to shamans from Sepahua or Atalaya; their mistrust, like their category of otherness, has now been projected onto the outside.

The Nahua are no less convinced of the conceptual basis that made *tsimo* so powerful but circumstances have now changed so that its use is no longer necessary. The time when they needed to be able to wield such powers has ended and to maintain them makes no sense. The same flexibility is also evident in the ways that they can acquire new songs.

[359] Perez Gil describes how, today, the Yaminawa prefer the use of Western medicines to medicinal plants (*nisa*) because of the strict abstinence and food restrictions that are required in order that the *nisa* can function (2002:167).

Acquiring songs

The first *xoiti* were dreamt by a man who was swallowed by an anaconda. Today the Nahua learn healing songs by drinking *mama* into which an experienced shaman has sung. Nevertheless, *xoiti* can also be learnt in more surprising ways. On one occasion I played a collection of Culina songs to the Nahua[360]. Most of the songs were evangelical prayers; large choruses of men and women accompanied by a guitar. The Nahua were utterly disinterested. However, one song involved a solitary man who was chanting quietly. The Nahua were mesmerised. Many men asked to borrow my radio to listen to it saying repeatedly that they wanted to collect (*fi*) his *xoiti.* I was confused because none of the Nahua could speak Culina let alone understand the words.

How could it be that the Nahua could acquire a healing song without understanding the words? Initially, this was perplexing until I realised that the power of words, like names, does not come from their 'meaning', but from what they can do. In addition, the novelty of a *xoiti* itself seems to be a source of power while constant repetition lessens their effectiveness. Thus the Nahua often chuckle and say that the songs of their own shamans are no longer powerful because they have heard them so many times. Their over use means that the source of power cannot be easily manipulated if it sees the shaman coming. The metaphors are designed to get close to and confuse the agents of the illness in order to extract their power and use it for the patients benefit. The more they are used the more they lose their power. In contrast to their existing shamans, the Nahua say that the Chitonahua man (*Reteni*), who has only been in Serjali for two years, has the most powerful *xoiti*. Like names, the power of words is inversely related to how much they are used.

[360] An Arawakan speaking group living in Western Brazil.

Dreams

It is not only shamans who must confront the mysteries of the outside world. Every time the Nahua go to sleep their eye souls wander in an invisible universe and thus the night offers no escape from danger. Even while they are sleeping, Nahua lives hang in the balance.

As dawn breaks the Nahua wake and begin to discuss their dreams with each other in low murmurs. Some travel to distant towns where they enjoy a sip of *Inka Kola* and drive in cars, others travel to the land of the dead while some see hundreds of horses. Some wake shaken and traumatised while others are in a state of excitement. From their mosquito nets, people who are waking relate their dreams in the smallest detail and their companions will listen, murmur enthusiastically or sympathetically as required and perhaps offer an interpretation.

Juan explained to me, "When we sleep our *feroyoshis* go up into the sky, they can be killed by *yoshis* who have knives. If they stab us our *feroyoshi* falls back down to our bodies really quickly. We wake but feel ill'. A nightmare is referred to as a *fakamea* – literally 'to be touched by a *yoshi'*. To dream (*nama)* is a process in which the *feroyoshi* is liberated from the body, a dangerous exercise as it exposes the *feroyoshi* to attack or seduction. As a liberation of the *feroyoshi* from the body, dreaming is a low intensity version of death.

The interpretation of dreams

One night Tomas felt ill and asked Curaca to blow over him with tobacco smoke. That night, Curaca dreamt he was struggling with a Machiguenga man who eventually he managed to kill. His interpretation was that he was being affected by Tomas' illness but that after a struggle he had overcome this threat. The interpretation of dreams is vital because, like the intoxicating smells of forest spirits, dreams are revelations of what is happening at a level that would otherwise remain invisible; the "dream is a clue giving

access to a reality that is hidden" (Gell 1977:32). The ability of shamans 'to see' means that they can analyse patients dreams to know what is 'really' happening.

Many Nahua myths describe how dreams reflected unknown risks to which a person had been exposed. In one story, a child eats the *seeika* (a small forest bird) despite his father's warnings. That night the boy dreamt he was eating human fat and the fat of a giant armadillo. In another he dreamt he was eating human babies. Needless to say he woke with a stomach ache. In the story of *kapayoshifo* (squirrel spirit) an unfaithful wife unknowingly eats the flesh of her dead lover given to her by *kapayoshifo.* In her dreams she ate a person and a giant armadillo. She died the next day[361]. In the story of *xawekoshui* a man sleeps during a thunder storm and dreams that he had been attacked by a jaguar. "Come quickly" he said to his wife when he woke, "This was a bad omen (*rofaki*), we must leave here". The man was later attacked and killed by enemies.

Dreams have lost none of their significance for the Nahua. During a journey with the Nahua to Lima, Mario, one of my companions, visited the *abuelita* for a healing session but then ate greasy food in contravention of the diet he had been prescribed. The night he arrived in Lima he dreamt of an enormous hawk sitting on top of a tree smoking a tobacco pipe. The next day he fell ill and he only recovered later when he returned to Atalaya.

In a similar fashion, Lucco told me that a year before the death of Pandigon[362] they were working together in a timber camp when one day Pandigon who was in good health woke and told Lucco he had dreamt of his *feroyoshi* being buried and understood he was going to die. He died a year later. "Our *feroyoshi* sees what is going to happen" Lucco explained. Later, Lucco himself dreamt that he was wandering in the darkness

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[361] The story relates how two single women are fishing at a lake when they come across a squirrel. They say, "Why can't this squirrel be a man to be our husband". The squirrel duly appears as a man and miraculously dries out the entire lake with a special fire that he keeps in his eyes thus permitting the women to harvest all the fish from the lake. Squirrel man (*kapayoshifo*) returns with the two women to their villages and proves to be an excellent husband. He is a highly successful hunter and is able to make their corn plants become fully developed overnight. One day, however, he catches one of his wives having sex with her lover in a hammock. Squirrel man becomes annoyed and repeatedly bites through the rope of their hammock so they keep on falling down. The couple persists in making love however until squirrel man bites off the man's penis and he dies. The next day, squirrel man tricks the wife into eating the testicles of her dead lover and she dies. The father of the girl attacks squirrel man who takes his children and runs away, never to return.

[362] A middle aged Nahua man who died in 2004.

and he heard a voice calling but he did not approach. He woke and told his wife he would die soon. Fortunately, Curaca and *Auxini* cured him with *mama*, he dieted and did not succumb to illness.

In fact, when people are being healed by drinking *mama*, they often see the *feroyoshinafa* (spirits of the dead) in their dreams who offer them food. This is indicative of their state of ill health; their *feroyoshi's* are being seduced by the *feroyoshinafa* who are attempting to lure them to the land of the dead. Lucco explained, "When you dream of your mother or father giving you food it is a bad dream. The *feroyoshi* want you in the land of the dead"[363].

Enrique explained the art of dream interpretation.

> *If we dream of old friends it is because we will meet them again. If you see a city it means you will travel, if you hear music it means you are going to receive a message. If you dream of laughter it means you will cry. If you are sad you will be happy If you see lots of people it means you will see lots of animals in the forest. It is always the other way round!*

"An interpreter's success is based on whether one knows the intentionality of the thing you are trying to know" (Viveiros de Castro 2004:469). Dream interpretation in this sense is simply another shamanic technique, it concerns the ability to 'see' and ultimately to know.

The reality of dreams

For the Nahua, dreams are thus not expressions of unconscious concerns and anxieties but an expression of events being played out at an invisible level. When the Nahua are healing with *xoiti* they describe not only the patient's physical symptoms but also their dreams which they sing into the *mama*. Dreams are treated just as seriously as physically identifiable ailments. Nor are dreams simply a portent of the future but a

[363] For the Candoshi, if a sick patient dreams of being fed by the sky people they can die instantly (Surrallés 2003:152).

vision of what is happening to their soul in a parallel dimension. Just as sharing food with kin in their waking lives makes people similar to each other, to accept food from 'others' is to become 'other' oneself. This is why the dreams of Nahua killers, in which they are offered food by their victims, are so dangerous.

These ideas are shared with many other indigenous Amazonian peoples. For example, if a Juruna man dreams of peccaries running freely he fears being attacked by enemies and will do nothing for several days. "By immobilising himself in one world he immobilises himself in another" (Lima 1999:128). "Dreaming is about the two realities of a person, their body and their spiritual double" (Fausto 1999:940). This view of dreams is by no means peculiar to Amazonian people. For the Umeda (Gell 1977), dreams are never direct representations of events. A dream of sex with a woman reflects the success a man will have in a pig hunt while receiving food from their sister in dreams means they are going to have sex. "A transaction in one plane of reality means a consequence in another" (Ibid: 121).

Dreams however are not only indicative of the reality the Nahua are facing. Instead, the actions a person takes in dreams can influence events in the waking world. The most drastic example is after homicide when Nahua killers paint themselves with *huito* so that they are not impregnated by the blood of their victim. Juan explained, "If you do not paint yourself then you will dream of them. The *faka* (*yoshi*) of the dead man can take you away and kill you, it can make you dream. In your dreams they want to eat you, they try to make you bathe in *naifimi* (achiote), this is their blood".

In Chapter 2, *Raya* described how he dreamt that the spirit of his victim tried to make him eat certain foods that he refused. This refusal was not incidental but was critical in defining his waking life. If *Raya* had succumbed to the seductive offers of his victim's *yoshi* he would have risked total possession. His dreams did not only reflect a reality, instead the dream was another stage for the playing out of social life, a level of social life that is normally invisible but nonetheless fundamental to staying alive and living well. The Nahua are not helpless bystanders in this world of hostile spirits. They are capable of fighting their own corners even when they are sleeping.

Many dreams also involve the acquisition of knowledge. For example, the Nahua say that their knowledge of the land of the dead derives from *Maishato* (the famous shaman) who 'died' many times before his definitive death. In his dreams he travelled to the land of the dead which he later described.

When Curaca was learning to sing *xoiti* he had good dreams as people gave him guns and arrows.

> *In your dreams if you are going to receive the songs, people who look like mestizos give you machetes, guns, arrows and caps. They are beautiful people, all smart with macaw feathers, earrings, beads and armlets with vulture feathers. He gives you the bone of a vulture which you tie underneath your nose with cotton thread then you use this to sniff tobacco juice. These are the owners of the giant anaconda, the owner of the healing songs. He is giving you these songs.*

Curaca's personal experience parallels the mythic origin of *xoiti* where the man, who was swallowed by an anaconda, dreamt of the songs and of medicinal plants (*nisa)*. In this sense, they are comparable with the vision quests of the Achuar who acquire their capacities after visionary encounters with *arutam,* the ancestral spirits (Madde cited in Belaunde 2005:116).

It's good to dream

Every morning the Nahua wake and ask each other anxiously, '*ma mi meyame'*, do you feel it? They translate this as 'good morning' but what they are really asking is if their *feroyoshis* have returned to their bodies[364]. For the Nahua, waking up is a process of opening their eyes and feeling almost dead. Dreams are dangerous as the *feroyoshi* is exposed without the protection of its body but they also offer opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge.

[364] The Cashinahua also identify the *nama yushin*, 'dream spirit' as one which leaves the person's body through the nose or mouth during sleep. This is why one should never wake someone while they are dreaming or as they have just awakened as the dream spirit may not have had a chance to return to the body (Kensinger 1995:209). The Chacobo morning greeting also means 'are you alive' (Erikson 1999:4).

For many indigenous Amazonian peoples like the Machiguenga, dreaming is a wholly negative experience, the risks of which outweigh any possible benefits. After someone has died, the Machiguenga often stay awake in order to avoid dreams. Dreaming for the Machiguenga is considered an omen of illness when the soul leaves the body and goes far away where it can be abducted by demons or ghosts. "Sadness, dreams, illnesses and death are part of a continuum of states in which the soul detaches itself from the body in more and more permanent ways" (Shepard 1999:93).

For the Wari too, any departure of spirit from body is a premonition of death so if a person encounters their own spirit in the forest or sees their spirit in a dream then they can get ill and die (Conklin 2001:134-5). The Wari are reluctant to talk about dreams or even to admit to having any as they may have dreamt of another person's spirit, a sign that person might die.

For the Machiguenga, all dreams are nightmares as they represent the exposure of the soul to attack (Shepard 2002:18) but for the Nahua, many dreams are enjoyable experiences. *Amenafa* who had successfully frightened off a *yoshi* by showing it his arse dreamt the following night of a group of *yoshi* talking together. "Never have I seen an arse like this", one *yoshi* said to the other, "It seemed that it was coming towards me with a shining light". The other *yoshi* laughed. "We have never heard of such an arse, maybe he was keeping a light in there!"

Thus, while the Nahua acknowledge the risks inherent in dreams they also recognise the benefits of such journeys. Just as with travelling and taking *ayahuasca* they acknowledge the inherent risks of encounters with dangerous and unpredictable others (Chapter 1) but while they are more focussed on the potential benefits, the Machiguenga seem to be more focused on their risks. The attitude to dreams reflects the radically open perspective of the Nahua towards the outside world just as it helps explain the more cautious approach of the Machiguenga.

Conclusion

Knowing the unknown

Today the Nahua live in an apparently very different world to the one they experienced before they 'fell out of the forest'. Far from being fazed however by these novel experiences they seem to have taken it all in their stride.

Each time I have made the five day journey to Lima with Curaca he has spent the three days on a boat between Serjali and Atalaya in a constant state of doziness. The nine hour road trip at night through the Andes which crosses a 4300 metre pass before descending to the coast is a different story. Curaca spends the entire night pacing up and down the corridor of the bus while squinting out of the frosted windows. "Look at those hills, look at those hills" he points out enthusiastically to his companions. Green with motion sickness it is understandable that they are not overly responsive.

On another occasion when we flew to Lima he was even more impressed. As we flew over a large Andean city towered over by 6000 metre peaks Curaca pointed excitedly. 'Look look! The city of the hill spirits, the *mafayoshifo.* The ancient people spoke about this but I am the first person to see it is true!" He gesticulated to his nauseous companions to make his point. Hills are dangerous places where the Nahua rarely venture as the *mafayoshifo* capture and eat people[365]. "Are you sure it is not Huancayo (a major Andean town)?" I asked. Curaca scoffed, "Don't be stupid, how could people possibly get there?!" A perfectly reasonable conclusion to draw when one is flying for the first time at an altitude of 10000 metres. When clouds temporarily shielded the town from sight, rays of light appeared to be rising up though the clouds from beneath. "Look, look, the *mafayoshifo* even have power generators and light, look really closely, look really closely, now we know, now we know" Curaca informed his companions. When we returned to Serjali, the main talking point was not the

[365] While they were living in the Manu, two Nahua men went missing at the mouth of the Mishagua River where a large cliff rises steeply from the banks of the river. It was thought they had been killed by the *mafayoshifo*.

unprecedented agreement from the government to finance a Nahua control post but the incontrovertible evidence of the existence of the *mafayoshifo*.

Miguel, a Sharanahua man, had come to live in Serjali from the River Purús. He had brought with him his pride and joy, a torch that needed no batteries, a gift from a missionary. My friend Gregor described how he showed it to him one day when he was passing by with some Nahua friends. Miguel had placed it on the patio outside his house in full sunlight and he brought it to the group of visitors to explain how it worked. "Look, all I do is leave it in the sun all day and it charges, it's a solar powered torch" he explained knowledgeably to the nodding Nahua. He switched it on but nothing happened. Miguel was unflappable, "Oh sometimes this happens" and shook and smacked the torch vigorously. A technique that made perfect sense to the Nahua who are constantly doing the same with the cheap torches with chronically loose connections they buy in Sepahua. After shaking it violently he turned it on, it worked! Miguel was triumphant and the Nahua were suitably impressed. Gregor did not have the heart to tell him that he was leaving it in the sun for no reason. Miguel was the proud owner of a dynamo torch; designed to be recharged not by the sun but by vigorous shaking!

On one of my trips to Lima with Nahua friends we went out for a meal. It was the first visit of the Nahua to a *chifa* (Peruvian Chinese). A little overwhelmed they all chose the safe option and ordered soup. Just as I was about to start eating the soup I noticed that they were all in a state of suspension and were staring in shock at the soup spoon; examining it closely by turning it upside down and from side to side. "What is it?" Curaca asked me. "It's a spoon" I replied. He laughed, "No, we know a spoon" and pointed to one of the stainless steel spoons on the adjacent table. He ruminated for a few minutes longer and then realisation struck. "I know! It's just like the mouth of the *yafayafaika* (a species of duck that lives on the Manu River). The mystery had been solved, the unknown had become known and they began to eat with gusto.

Going to the zoo in Lima was also full of suprises, but not the ones I expected. I was excited to show the Nahua rhinos and elephants, lions and bears; animals they had never seen before. Instead, they spent most of their time fascinated by the ornamental goldfish that swam in the moats ringing the exhibits while they walked past the elephant, hippo and rhino enclosures with scarcely a glance. It was almost as if these

animals were too exotic even for the capacity of the Nahua for making comparisons, so exotic that they became invisible. The ostrich however was sufficiently recognisable and became known as the 'mother of the chicken'.

Mario explained further, "When we first came out of the forest we knew nothing and we were afraid, it is like the television, the first time we saw it we were afraid but then we knew it and we no longer fear it". Ignorance is a source of fear for the Nahua and thus they make a conscious effort to classify the unclassified and name the unnamed. Thus the ornamental fish and the ostrich were interesting for the Nahua because they were sufficiently like their own animals to permit comparison yet sufficiently different to inspire amazement.

To name something is to know something and to know something is to exert power over it. Ignorance as Mario explains is fear. To live in a changing world where appearances can be deceiving means the Nahua must learn to know the unknown. To know the mysterious is the defining characteristic of shamanic techniques such as healing and dream interpretation.

This is why Nahua *xoiti*, far from remaining static in the light of their changing illnesses, have transformed as their experience of diseases change. Like the Yaminahua (Townsley 1988, 1993), they now have songs that seek to appropriate the powers of gasoline and alcohol; they are sources of heat and bad smells and are invoked in songs for treating high fevers and introduced illnesses just as tobacco is invoked for treating headaches. Yaminahua shamanism, Townsley (1993) argues, is neither a religion nor a rite but a science.

In other words, Nahua understanding of the world is not based on a system of received 'facts', codified rules or ancestral knowledge. Instead, it is best understood as "techniques for knowing", a form of science and a set of techniques for using and experimenting with knowledge (Townsley 1993:452)[366].

[366] For example, Yaminahua shamans now give human souls to aeroplanes to carry to the land of the dead rather than giving them to the king vulture (Townsley 1988:152).

The power of shaminasim lies precisely in knowing the unknown. To be a shaman is not the ability of a specialist to sing a fixed set of healing songs but in their creative ability to identify the mystery at the heart of the illness. "By analogically matching the new with the old, the shaman exerts a symbolic power over new phenomena. Simultaneously he exerts the extent of his knowledge, puts new things in their place and domesticates them by reducing them to the familiar and mundane (S Hugh-Jones 1988:149)[367].

This capacity of shamans to know the unknown is also evident in the facility with which the Nahua collectively interpreted the world after 1984 according to their existing world view. The detective work that defines being a shaman is also present in their ability to interpret dreams and assimilate new information and thus explain aerial views of 5000 metre snow capped mountains, rechargeable torches and Chinese soup spoons. Shamanism, as a set of techniques for knowing the unknown, is not confined to a few specialists. At a collective level all Nahua are shamans.

The preceding chapters have attempted to deconstruct the argument that the changes in Nahua society since 1984 constituted a loss of identity. These arguments are based on an assumption that 'culture' is seen as a set of rules, objects or rites. Given this assumption, 'change' can only ever be something that is 'inauthentic'. The Nahua however do not suffer from such nostalgia and this chapter has argued that what defines the Nahua is not what they know but how they know it.

[367] Similarly, Vilaça was amazed at how her Wari friends were unsurprised during their first visit to Rio de Janeiro and their use of myths to make sense of what they saw. They explained the ability of a mechanised digger to function with a myth that described how baskets used to carry maize on their own until they were ridiculed by women (2006:36).

Conclusion

An elastic people

Herding cats

In 2006 I arranged for six Nahua friends to make a five week trip to visit the Achuar in Northern Peru. The objective was to provide them with first hand experiences of the impacts of 30 years of oil extraction. If, at any time in the future, the Peruvian government decided to promote Nahua lands for oil exploration this would be an invaluable experience that they could use to make a more informed decision. It took several months to plan the visit and raise the necessary funds. Finally the long journey began but no sooner had we reached Lima when Mario began having disturbing dreams. He soon fell ill with a mysterious condition and he had to return to Sepahua with his nephew and one of my colleagues. On his arrival in Atalaya he visited the '*abuelita'* and his condition improved dramatically. Now we were four. After another week of travelling we arrived in the Achuar village that was most affected by contamination.

The following morning I woke to find Curaca in a despondent state. He had been gregarious the night before but this had evaporated after a bad dream and he was worried that one of his relatives was sick in Serjali. We tried to call but the radio was not working in Serjali and we went to a meeting that the Achuar had arranged on our behalf. Almost 200 Achuar were present and the four Nahua and I were seated at the front of the meeting room and supplied with a continuous stream of manioc beer in elaborately painted ceramic bowls.

We listened while Achuar leaders delivered long and powerful speeches explaining how the oil companies had exploited their innocence to gain access to their territory and the devastating results; there were no animals or fish to eat, the water was polluted, people were ill and had died and there were no positive long term benefits for the communities. They had barely finished this powerful discourse when Estella, one of my Nahua companions, stood up and told the Achuar, "Why are you complaining? It is your own fault the company has contaminated your water, you let them enter, good riddance to you that's what I say!" The silence was deafening, I do not think the Achuar had often been addressed in such a forthright manner, especially by a woman. To make matters worse, Curaca who was attempting to throw out the residue of manioc beer at the bottom of his bowl, somehow managed to lose his grip and the delicate ceramic shattered into a thousand pieces in the centre of the room. In the stunned silence that followed, a message arrived that a radio call had come for the Nahua. Without a word, my Nahua companions simply trooped out of the meeting leaving me to face the music. Twenty minutes later, when my diplomatic efforts had only just mollified 200 disgruntled Achuar and prevented us from being thrown out of the village, the Nahua returned. They announced that Curaca's wife was gravely ill and they must return immediately to their village. They even asked the Achuar if they could arrange for the oil company to provide a helicopter!

It had taken almost two weeks, months of planning and about $10,000 just to arrive and now they wanted to leave! I finally convinced them to be a little more patient and the next day the Achuar arranged to take us on a guided tour of the places most affected by oil contamination. At the last moment, two of my companions complained they were tired and stayed behind. It was at this point that I almost began tearing out my hair. Eventually, we skipped out the entire second part of our trip where we had planned to visit Achuar communities resisting the incursion of an oil company and who lived well in an uncontaminated forest and returned home. It had taken months of planning, thousands of dollars, hours of heartache and the result: an aborted trip.

Before the trip began I had imagined myself as a companion and guide, providing the Nahua with broader information about the oil industry and indigenous people's rights as we travelled. In fact I spent most of my time as a psychoanalyst and nurse, and as an

inter-indigenous ambassador; smoothing out diplomatic relations with our hosts and dealing with the neurotic relatives of the Nahua by radio.

Living with the Nahua was easy, conducting anthropological fieldwork was challenging but to work with them as an activist was a nightmare. As my colleague Gregor commented ruefully; "It would be easier to herd cats".

The frustrations of the visit to the Achuar were nothing extraordinary. One day, an official from the forestry authority (INRENA) visited Serjali in response to the community's request to provide them with information about their right to fell and commercialise timber. During the meeting, members of the community informed him of their suspicions of illegal logging in the headwaters of the River Tigre. A few days previously a Nahua man called Jimenez had been hunting in the area and had heard the sound of a chainsaw. The INRENA official suggested walking there the next day to investigate and, if necessary, decommission any timber. The Nahua were enthusiastic and 13 men agreed to meet at sunrise the next morning. When morning came however nobody was to be found. Amongst the absentees, Manuel had gone fishing, Curaca's legs were not up to it, Juan was ill while Jimenez our guide was in his hammock; *ma shani fichiya* he said, 'I have been grabbed by laziness'. The enthusiasm of the previous night had evaporated just as quickly as it had arisen. Eventually, Curaca persuaded Pedro, who apparently also knew the area, to lead the INRENA official and at the last minute; Rafael, Chaksho and Marin decided to come. The enthusiasm had returned and I too joined the expedition. We walked for thirteen hours in the rain without a break but found no timber. It eventually materialised that Pedro did not even know where we were going.

Journeys with the Nahua were constantly plagued by such unpredictability. On any hunting or fishing trip it was common for people to get cold feet and return home a short way into the journey after a wave of nostalgia or melancholy triggered by a bad dream or the sight of a shooting star. It was even common for them to change their minds more than once and I often found myself deserted by Nahua companions only to find them returning a few hours later. This was fine when all they needed to do was float back downriver the way they had come but became more complicated during our journeys to more distant lands for political or educational purposes.

In politics too the Nahua were just as unpredictable, a mildly traumatic experience if one is trying to help them with their claim for a land title or a permit to fell timber. Since 2001 the Nahua began to talk about claiming a community land title in place of the reserve they lived within. Between 2001 and 2006 I must have helped them write at least ten letters to the Peruvian government regarding this demand; in each one they changed their position[368]!

Living with the Nahua I learnt to expect the unexpected. What I initially perceived to be fickleness eventually I simply took for granted. I was shocked to find out that not all Amazonian indigenous people seem to agree. When we visited the Achuar I was overwhelmed to find a reception party for us at the port, and meetings scheduled. Not only did the Achuar do what they said they were going to do, they did it on time!

Nahua inconstancy also confused the neighbouring Nanti whom the Nahua visited in 2002. One morning the Nahua headed off into the forest with their guns, their Nanti hosts asked them where they were going and they explained they were going to look for spider monkeys. A few hours later the Nahua returned on a boat carrying a large alligator. The Nanti were confused and said "You told us you were going to hunt monkeys". The Nahua shrugged and said they had changed their mind. The Nanti remained bewildered (G.MacLennan pers comm).

When I first arrived amongst the Nahua they were embarking on a process of ejecting loggers from their territory and I began to support them in this effort. Initially I was impressed by the strong anti-logging discourse of the Nahua yet this soon gave way to frustration. One minute they were denouncing a logger and the next they were asking them to help repair their motor or for a litre of gasoline so they could travel to town. It seemed obvious to me that by cultivating a dependency on loggers the Nahua were playing right into their hands but clearly the Nahua did not agree.

[368] Whether they were in favour of, or against the land title, there was always a consensus. It was either one position or the other but never both at the same time.

Learning lessons

Many of my frustrations undoubtedly reflected a great deal about my own values as a particular individual coming from a particular society at a particular moment in history. The idea that the Nahua should strive to limit their dependency on loggers if they were to seriously remove them from their land reflected a youthful naivety on my part. I soon realised, through painful experiences of being stranded on the river by a broken motor or an empty fuel tank, that in the jungle one cannot afford to have enemies. The Nahua in fact had no problem in denouncing the loggers on the one hand while still accepting gifts or asking for favours. Ultimately, after a long struggle the loggers were finally forced to leave Nahua territory[369]. Despite the loggers' efforts the Nahua no longer permit their entry yet they continue to cultivate relationships of friendship.

My frustrations however also say a great deal about the Nahua and in part this thesis is an effort to understand these misunderstandings from a Nahua point of view. This conclusion attempts to bring together some of these lessons to understand the challenges facing an activist attempting to herd cats in the Amazon.

Some of these frustrations were easier to explain than others. Nahua unwillingness to visit the sites affected by oil contamination in Achuar territory in part was simply down to laziness but also reflected the idea that potent smells are vectors for illness. Similarly, what I perceived to be rudeness on the part of Estella when she accused the Achuar of being culpable for their own situation reflects a broader idea that indigenous Amazonian peoples, despite what outside observers consider to be the reality of asymmetrical power relations, actually assume responsibility for their own lives. Nevertheless, Estella's behaviour did embarrass the Nahua who attribute her highly untypical bursts of anger to the fact that she was burnt as a child and has thus literally incorporated the qualities of fire.

Meanwhile, Mario's mysterious illness that prevented him from making the journey to the Achuar was because he had disobeyed the food restrictions after receiving a shamanic healing treatment in Atalaya and he was subject to the 'vengeance' of his

[369] For more information see Shinai 2004.

food. The importance of dream interpretation in the case of Mario's own ill health and Curaca's concern for his relatives reflect the Nahua understanding that dreams are revelations of a parallel but invisible reality.

A temperamental people

Most of my frustrations however were not so easily explained and concerned what I, and many outside observers including neighbouring indigenous peoples, perceived to be the temperamentality and unpredictability of the Nahua. For the most part, the Nahua do not value qualities of perseverance or determination which means they do not endure difficult or traumatic situations with a stiff upper lip and succumb easily to the effects of nostalgia. In part, my frustrations reflected my own Western European prejudice in which constancy is valued and inconsistency is considered a weakness. For the Nahua on the other hand, the expression of such emotions contributes to an environment of compassion and mutual affection.

Depictions of Amerindian peoples as inconstant are nothing new. Viveiros de Castro describes the initial delight of missionaries in the 17th century at the ease with which they converted the Tupinamba to Christianity compared to their less yielding subjects in the old world. They were dismayed however when the Tupinamba abandoned Christianity as quickly as they converted (2002:184). The conversion of their old world subjects was compared with the sculpting of a marble statue; a painfully slow process but one that yielded long term results. The conversion of Amerindian peoples however was compared with a process of pruning a myrtle bush; it was easy to do but as soon as they were shaped in one way their branches soon grew in another directon (Ibid:183). The prevailing image of the indigenous people of the America's was thus one of being "false and unfaithful, inconstant and ungrateful" (Varnhagen cited in Ibid:187). As Campbell summarises, "you can convert them to Christianity with one fish hook and then convert them back again with another" (1995:146). Vilaça describes a contemporary case of such inconstancy amongst the Wari who converted en masse to Protestantism Christianity in the 1970's but abandoned it almost as immediately.

At a deeper level however, this temperamentality or inconstancy seems to be another aspect of the general state of existential restlessness of the Nahua. At a collective level this restlessness is manifested by the oscillation between *nafa* and *yora* and the chronic instability of local groups that are continually splitting up and recombining. At a personal level it is expressed by their spontaneous journeys and their ability to switch rapidly between states of happiness and sadness, remembering and forgetting, animal and human, alive and dead, self and other.

Initially, I was not only confused and frustrated by Nahua unpredictability but disappointed that they seemed so radically open to the outside world and so quick to discard what I perceived to be everything that made them different. Of course my disappointment revealed my own intellectual heritage whereby 'culture', especially indigenous cultures, are objectified and associated with a certain form of material culture, a certain ritual, language or territory. The result of such objectification is that there is no space to deal with the ceaseless transformations that characterise all human societies (Toren 2006:207).

Soon however, my disappointment became astonishment at Nahua ability to rapidly adapt to what I imagined would be the traumas of a very recent 'first contact'. Not only did they incorporate recent historical phenomena into myths but they seamlessly incorporated new foods, new clothes, new peoples and new experiences such as Chinese soup spoons, solar powered torches and aerial views of the Andes into an existing world view. In large part this flexibility is a characteristic typical to many indigenous Amazonians but some are more flexible than others and the Nahua sit at the restless extreme of this spectrum.

This thesis has explored both the cosmology of the Nahua as well as their techniques of the body that make this flexibility possible. The following section briefly reviews these principles.

A transformational universe

The problem that I initially set out to explore was how to understand the changes in Nahua society after 1984 that were characterised by external observers either as a loss of culture (deculturation) or as a transfer of cultural traits between cultures (acculturation). When applying these ideas to the Nahua I encountered several problems. The first is that it assumed that change was something new to the Nahua and that at some point their 'culture' existed in an original state. Instead, the Nahua, like other Amazonian indigenous peoples, do not conceive of ontological barriers separating things in the universe; "All things transform into one another, they are all transformations of themselves" (McCallum 2001: 57), or as the Yaminahua told Zarzar after the 'first contact' of the Nahua, "the Nahua are going to be like us" (1987:106).

Thus, ethnic identities that might be seen as coherent discrete units are in reality fluid and dynamic and the Nahua claim that they are becoming *mestizos* is a new manifestation of this longstanding principle. This transformability is not confined to the fluidity between groups, but to the fluid relations between the living and dead, humans and animals, victims and assassins and *yora* and *nafa*. Similarly for the Wari, the boundary between themselves and white people is also fluid. This is why the Wari now not only live alongside the whites and continue to call them 'enemy' but are becoming whites themselves (Vilaça 2006: 501). As Gow points out, indigenous Amazonian worlds "are not characterised by their self identical reproduction but by their transformational exuberance" (2001:301).

Choosing change

This thesis has attempted to critique the idea that 'first contact' signalled a rupture between the past of the Nahua and their future. Instead, on closer inspection, these changes, although apparently radical are not so radical after all.

If we see Nahua identity as based on a set of tools rather than things in themselves, in other words, if we can avoid objectifying what it means to be Nahua then we can see a continuity between their use of aromatic plants and soap, between their warfare and

traveling and between their hunting in the forest and shopping in the market; they are all different tools that achieve the same objectives.

The assumption that many observers have made is that the Nahua changed immediately after 'first contact' under pressure from a dominant national society. The point I have stressed throughout the thesis is that the Nahua were choosing these changes for their own reasons. This is why the notion that I might have changed the Nahua always amuses me.

The Nahua abandoned warfare when they realised they could have a productive relationship with a powerful 'other' through peaceful means. Travelling, shopping and logging are thus transformations of warfare and hunting; means of acquiring the power of the other. They did not put on tee shirts and shorts or use soap because they felt inferior but because these were means of transforming the body in order to transform their point of view. 'Genuinely impersonating' the *nafa* enabled them to act like *nafa*. Similarly, they were not forced to abandon *tsimo* and adopt *ayahuasca* because of the influence of the Yaminahua but because it enabled them to see more clearly without having to undergo arduous dietary restrictions and reduced the possibility of sorcery. Their enthusiasm for western medicines was not because their belief in plants and healing songs had been undermined. Instead, the two forms of medicine existed alongside each other without contradiction. The potency of injections made perfect sense given the analogy they draw with wasp stings which are considered to be powerful mechanism for healing. In my experience, the Nahua, like the Tupinamba, "did everything they were told except what they did not want to" (Viveiros de Castro 1992:219).

Nevertheless, the comparison between the old and the new, such as warfare and shopping is not one of simple analogy. Shopping and moisturising cream are transformations, rather than structural equivalents, of warfare and wild basil. Nor can it be argued that nothing has changed. The Nahua adopted clothing, *ayahuasca*, settled in a new village and abandoned warfare for their own reasons but the effect of these changes were new social forms, transformations of previous manifestations.

What distinguishes the Nahua is thus not a fixed territory, language, or material culture but a continuous capacity for reinvention. If we do not understand this "we miss the profound continuities in their mercurial transformations…. attributing to all the changes a portentiuous historical significance that they do not" (Gow 2001:310). The Nahua world did not fall apart after they 'fell out of the forest', the changes made sense to them because their world was inherently transformational.

Embodied acculturation

The transformations in Nahua ways of life have often been dismissed as 'acculturation' yet while there is no doubt the Nahua are changing there is a sutble difference between their model of acculturation and that being used by their observers. For the Nahua, the site of their personal transformations is the body. The reason why they are able to switch so rapidly between states of happiness and sadness, remembering and 'not remembering', self and other and *yora* and *nafa* is because these are embodied states. Just as the differences between people and animals lie in the body and therefore can be blurred through consumption of meat and fish so are the differences between *nafa* and *yora* blurred through cohabitation with *mestizos* and the use of their clothing.

In contrast, Viveiros de Castro points out that the locus of difference for Western European society is the mind (1998a:66). Thus, missionary efforts to convert indigenous peoples, like other forms of Western education, focus on changing the mind through teaching and learning, whereas indigenous people place much greater emphasis on physiological interventions and imitation. This explains why, when the Nahua came to Lima to meet government officials, I wanted to spend our time discussing indigenous rights legislation while the Nahua wanted to go shopping. Dressing like a white man was clearly more important than reading his books. As Vilaça describes, the problem with acculturation studies is that they see indigenous groups as 'social groups' rather than physiological entities. The frontiers between people are bodily frontiers, thus 'contact' should be considered as an exchange of bodily substances (2006 509-510). For indigenous Amazonians, 'acculturation' in the sense of becoming similar to people through physical intimacy is nothing new.

This embodied sense of acculturation means that the processes are reversible rather than fixed. Stephen Hugh-Jones thus explains that for the Barasana, their present inequality with white people is a transformation of an original state. This situation can revert to type hence the importance of contemporary messianic movements (1988:150). Similarly, Gow critiques the idea of the 'ex-Cocama', a phrase coined by Lathrap to describe the people who used to be called Cocama in the Peruvian Amazon but who now say they are Peruvians. This process however is by no means new as the Cocama adopted the Tupinamba language in the 17th century; it seems the Cocama have always been becoming 'ex-Cocama' (2007:210). Today they are returning to see themselves as Cocama, a continuation of a transformational logic in which they are constantly becoming Cocama, ex-Cocama, then Cocama again (Ibid:213). This is not an example of acculturation as a collapse of an original indigenous identity but "sits easily within framework of an indigenous social logic that is fundamentally transformative and dynamic" (Ibid:206).

Given this emphasis on the body it is no surprise that the Nahua describe their flexibility using the idiom of a 'soft body'. Just as the Nahua describe those individuals who are more subject to transformations as soft it might be helpful to think of the Nahua at a collective level as 'soft' especially if we compare them to their 'harder' neighbours, the stoical Machiguenga.

Controlling transformations

The 'soft bodies' of the Nahua enable them to acquire the capacities of others. Under certain circumstances this presents an opportunity to acquire powerful knowledge but at other times, risks losing their sense of self. The Nahua use a variety of techniques to regulate these changes ranging from the concealment of a person's 'real name' to dietary and other behavioral restrictions as well as the appropriate expression of emotions. In this sense, temperamentality can be seen as a shamanic technique, a capacity to switch rapidly between seeing things from different points of view. However, what distinguishes shamans from non shamans is precisely their ability to control these switches. Shamans are defined by their transformability and thus can become boas or jaguars after they die. They are even on occasions able to cheat death itself as exemplified by *Maishato*, the legendary Nahua shaman who returned from his

visit to the land of the dead. This may explain why I found that those Nahua who had undergone periods of great self-discipline and control such as shamanic training, tended to stress the control of their emotions more than others. The difference between the disciplined Machiguenga and the hedonistic Nahua is paralleled by this difference between Nahua shamans and non shamans.

What positions the Nahua at the more flexible end of the Amazonian spectrum is thus the relative lack of control they exercise over themselves and their bodies. They do not expend great effort to fix their identities through naming practices and body design as the Cashinahua do. Nor do they discipline themselves like the Machiguenga in terms of the restraint of their emotions or their bodily desires. Instead, the Nahua attitude towards the outside world is one of hunger rather than fear. The Nahua have opted for a strategy of radical openness toward the outside in which they are engaged in "a continuous and unstable acquisition of external substances" (Calavia Saez 2006: 336-7). This is why, groups such as the Cashinahua are able to use the techniques of hyper visibility with their feathers and body paint to great effect in order to gain political recognition and territorial rights compared with the disasterous political strategies of the Yaminawa who simply appear as white people! (Calavia Saez 2006:336). Although they share the attitude of many indigenous Amazonians that the outside world is a source of danger the Nahua prefer to privilege the opportunities it presents; they want to travel, they want to take *ayahuasca*, they wish to dream and they want to meet new people.

Techniques of knowing

The second key principle that explains Nahua flexibility is that rather than being surprised by new ideas and phenomena, they are able to insert them into an existing understanding of the world. What it means to be Nahua is thus not a particular cosmology or set of ideas but is better understood as a set of techniques for interpreting the world. To know something is to establish a relationship of power, while ignorance reflects fear and weakness. In this way, the Nahua can make sense of the mysteries of the world of spirits and dreams as well as the world of Peruvians whose zoos and Chinese restaurants are only bewildering for a moment.

In other words, they are scientists who are engaged in a continuous process of evaluating their knowledge. As Gow shows, the source of Piro inconstancy is the lack of faith in their own knowledge of the cosmos "and the relentless manner in which they evaluate and re-evaluate what they are told by others and what they thought themselves in the past" (2001:252). As Townsley showed for Yaminahua shamanism, the changes in healing techniques reflects the fact that shamanism is not a system of knowledge or facts, but rather an ensemble of techniques for knowing (1993:452). Their cosmology is far from a complete and ready constituted system of things; it is always a system in the making, one that is never finished and always provisional (Ibid: 466).

The constant search of the Nahua for knowledge thus explains the historicity of their myths. Furthermore, these techniques are what enabled the Nahua to 'know ' the Chinese soup spoon as the beak of a duck, the ostrich as the mother of all chickens, an Andean town as the domain of the hill spirits, gasoline as a source of fever and a wind up torch as solar powered.

This apparent lack of conviction about the world and the speed with which they changed their opinions was one of the aspects I appreciated so much about the Nahua for whom everything is always in a constant process of evaluation. Unfortunately, this also translated into a constant source of self doubt. Despite knowing the Nahua for almost ten years, I still feel a tinge of insecurity each time I return to the village. It's like an amorous relationship from which one never quite emerges from the initial phase of flirtation.

Elasticity and resilience

The changes in the Nahua world since their 'fall from the forest' may appear to be a case of capitulation in the face of a brutal and powerful outside world. These changes however are better seen as one more illustration of their flexibility. At the level of their 'soft bodies' this flexibility works in two directions; it enables them to adapt to an outside world and even become other themselves but it also underpins their ability to incorporate others and convert *nafa* into *yora*. Their softness is harder than it seems. At the level of their cosmology, their thirst for knowledge is the secret of their flexibility,

contributing to their own sense of retaining power over the universe and their centrality in it. Their flexibility is thus simply another strategy of exerting control over their own lives. It provides them with the resilience to deal with phenomena that one could easily be forgiven for thinking were overwhelmingly traumatic or disruptive. In the words of Calavia Saez about the Yaminawa, their "constant inventions are the best guarantees of continuity" (2004:169).

Thus, their ability to switch easily between memory and oblivion allows them to deal with the grief of death or the departure of a loved one. This in part explains their astonishing ability to recover from the epidemics that wiped out almost half their population in the space of six months. Similarly, their system of inventing, rather than recycling, names for people and places allows them to deal with the social discontinuity created by a person's death or the geographical discontinuity created by their continued migrations and displacement.

Their ability to become like those whom they imitate, equips them with the skills they require to engage with Peruvians - they do not need knowledge of books or law to deal with Peruvians; they can simply dress, act and talk like them. The danger of this imitation is that it can go too far and they can literally become like these others but it also enables them to transform others into selves and retain their own identification with their kin as long as they live together. Finally, their facility to insert new phenomena into an existing understanding of the world allows them to cope with ideas that might otherwise be seen as undermining their sense of self and position in the world.

If we imagine the outside world as a hammer that is attempting to beat indigenous peoples into shape then one possible strategy of resistance is to be hard like a rock. A rock however is brittle and may shatter if beaten hard enough. Instead, the Nahua are more like a supple piece of leather or elastic that can be effortlessly shaped but never destroyed. They can be easily shaped in one direction but, like a piece of elastic, they can revert to type or be pulled in another. The secret of Nahua resilience is precisely their elasticity.

The inconstancy of the Nahua that frustrated me so much as an activist was the other side of the coin of their elasticity. The frustrations of 17th century missionaries at their

myrtle like savages and those of 21st century activists are perhaps not so different after all.

You are going? Piss off!

This thesis began with the experience of arriving amongst the Nahua and it ends with the experience of departure because leaving the Nahua can be as shocking as arriving. To arrive is to be overwhelmed by noise and affection but to leave can be deafeningly silent. The few that do gather to watch may ask with an expression of sadness or barely feigned resentment, *mi ana ofekaime?*, 'will you ever come back?' Most people watch silently but the more vociferous may tell their departing relatives who are heading off to the Manu that they will be killed by Mashco Piro or, when visiting Lima, that they will be captured and made into cans of tuna.

When I first arrived amongst the Nahua I was so overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the reception that my response felt inadequate. As I left I was in good spirits but my host's mood had changed. *Inimashta,* with whom I had shared such a congenial relationship over the previous three months, stood with his arms crossed and an expression on his face that could have killed. *E kai epashta,* 'I am going brother', I said to him in a high pitched tender tone proffering my outstretched hand. *Katafe* he replied, 'go, and piss off'.

Since then, my departures have never been treated with such apparent resentment and are quietly affectionate, yet the contrast with the arrival is stark. The silence of the Nahua and their morbid comments reflect a point of view in which becoming other is a continuous risk and is inherent to the process of travelling where one may no longer remember one's kin. *Inimashta* did not want to be forgotten.

This thesis has been an effort to describe my impressions of the Nahua over a relatively short period of time. Nevertheless, it has also been an attempt to situate the Nahua historically, especially focusing on their own version of history. Despite this, I cannot foresee their future and still less how it might be interpreted. Benjamin Franklin

said that the only certainties in life are death and taxes. He would have been confused by the Nahua; some of whom can cheat death and none of whom pay any taxes. The only thing that is fixed for the Nahua is their constant doubt, the only thing that is continuous is their constant transformations and the only thing that I can say with any certainty about their future is that anything is possible.

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