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# The Shuar Writing Boom: Cultural Experts and the Creation of a “Scholarly Tradition”

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## Introduction

In recent articles, Stephen Hugh-Jones (2010, 2016, 2019) has suggested that there has been a unique “boom” in book series published “in the names of” indigenous authors, the *Narradores Indigenas do Alto Rio Negro* (NIRN). This boom, he continues, may stem from longstanding features of the society and culture of the Tukanoan speakers of the Upper Rio Negro (URN), in combination with their own history of contact with missionaries. Each book in the series provides an account of the origin stories, mythologies, and more recent history of a particular URN group, namely the Desana, Tukano, Baniwa, or Tariano, from the point of view of a clan (Hugh-Jones 2009:196). Although an important aim of the series is to preserve traditional knowledge as part of a general multicultural agenda, Hugh-Jones argues that to better understand the appeal of books to URN peoples, we must look beyond the growing importance to Amerindians of identity politics and cultural patrimonialization.<sup>1</sup> In this regard his analysis places at its center the high value the Tukanoans attribute to priestly esoteric knowledge and their organization in patrilineal clans whose identity depends on controlling material and immaterial ancestral property.

Just like names, songs, origin narratives, and other verbal property connected to sacred material valuables, books too—at once containers of immaterial knowledge and material objects capable of making visible ceremonial wealth—have come to be perceived as emblems of identity by the Tukanoans. Underlying this is the Tukanoans’ tendency to treat their own formalized knowledge and ritual objects as forms of property: this is thus a case of “fit,” or elective affinity, between local categories and essentialist (Western) understandings of culture as patrimony. To construct this argument, Hugh-Jones connects the Tukanoan adoption of book writing to the broader sociological context of the Northwest Amazonian regional system, which involves control over heirlooms, the relatively closed circulation of prestige goods, specialized craft activities, supra-local codes of respect, and an overall emphasis on hierarchy (Hugh-Jones 2013:367).

The Tukanoan multiethnic system depends on mutual recognition between the different ethnic groups of stories that are shared but also different. In the contemporary context, the origin myths and histories that the books contain legitimize an internal system of differences between specific patrilineal groups. The sequential appearance of additional publications as responses to earlier ones in a series appears to reproduce the way in which ceremonial recitations call for responses at ritual gatherings (*dabucuris*) (Hugh-Jones 2010:214, 2019:141). In relation to the external arena of indigenous ethnic and cultural politics, these books of myths and histories assert that, despite their loss of ritual paraphernalia due to missionization in the twentieth century, URN peoples do indeed possess an ancestral indigenous culture (Hugh-Jones 2010:213, 2019:141). If contemporary books direct messages about education and civilization to a nonindigenous audience, they also direct messages about their status as connectors of people, objects, and narratives to an internal audience. In them, “appearance, form, function and content” are brought together as one (Hugh-Jones 2010:213, 2019:139).<sup>2</sup>

In the spirit of comparative experimentation—one of the many charms of Hugh-Jones’s scholarship—in this article we would like to export his explanatory model to the tropical

Andean foothills of southeastern Ecuador to analyze the recent written creations of Chicham-speaking Shuar people (known formerly as Jivaro).<sup>3</sup>

Our interest in trialing Hugh-Jones's insights in a different context is twofold. First, in lacking corporate descent groups, centralized and institutional leadership, village communities, "vertical shamans," or ancestors (Hugh-Jones 1994), Chicham sociocultural organization lies at the opposite end of the Amazonian spectrum. Indeed, in the ethnographic literature the Chicham appear to be a group of people more preoccupied with producing unique individual destinies than with reproducing any form of collective identity. Or, in the words of Anne-Christine Taylor (2007:151), "Jivaroan [Chicham] culture as tradition is not an objectified body of knowledge or a set of explicitly held representations, nor is it concentrated in material things or institutions; it is primarily the means of achieving a certain kind of selfhood" (see also Brown 1984:34; Taylor 2014:107; Descola 1996:223). Chicham people practice an individualistic, performative, and morally ambivalent kind of shamanism to which, as Hugh-Jones (1994:33) noted in an early typology, a relatively unelaborated mythology corresponds, as "myths are often subject to idiosyncratic elaboration by different tellers" (see also Taylor 1993:658; for similar considerations about the Shuar outlook on tradition, see Harner 1972:195–6). Given the apparent differences between Tukanoan and Chicham sociological contexts we ask about the kind of writing that each group produces (see also Deshoulliere and Buitron 2019).

On its face, Shuar complicate the differences underlying this comparison. Even a quick look at the most readily available publications in Ecuadorian libraries by Shuar authors would reveal that they use writing to memorialize culture and create cultural patrimony understood as group property. In fact, it is their use of writing for patrimonial initiatives that has recently won them renown among other Amazonian peoples. According to the Desana leader Luis Lana (Tõrãmu Kehíri), who helped instigate the NIRN series and coauthored the first volume (Pãrõkumu and Kehíri 1995), he was inspired to start the series in the Upper Rio Negro while visiting the Shuar federation in Sucúa (Ecuador). There, he learned about the publication of Shuar myths, most likely as part of the *Mundo Shuar* collection written by missionaries in collaboration with Shuar teacher-researchers (Figalli de Angelo 2016:244–5).

This is not entirely surprising given that Shuar share with the Tukano a history of Salesian missionization, with its strong emphasis on promoting literacy and bilingual education as routes to "civilization" (e.g., Fleming 2009). Also, whereas the Shuar have traditionally been atomistic and dispersed, these characteristics no longer reflect their current social organization. A process of settler encroachment and forced evangelization since the beginning of the twentieth century has resulted in a shift to sedentary life in large villages or so-called *centros*. Centros were created largely during the 1960s and have incorporated Shuar territory into an extensive state-based, regional system.

Within this system, the official relations between groups are presently framed by the value of what is known as *interculturalidad*, the Ecuadorian equivalent of "multiculturalism" understood as mutual respect between distinct ethnic entities. Interculturalidad presupposes that group identity is exclusive. This exclusivity hinges on the premise that tradition equals cultural patrimony, that collective association within the group centers on internal similarities, that cultural transmission is based on the principle of ancestrality, and that history implies the gradual erosion of knowledge (and thereby an urgency to preserve culture). This regional system primarily materializes through displays of internal "cultural wealth" at public events as part of the civic and religious calendar of the nation. During these events, books play an increasingly significant role and are part of a dual movement characteristic of ethnogenesis: the creation of new identities and their legitimization via the re-elaboration and invention of tradition.

As we shall see, in Ecuadorian Amazonia, the "intercultural" project builds on the legacy of the mission system's "civilizing" project, which transformed native culture into an element of reflection about collective identities. This is particularly true of Shuar alumni of missionary schools, whose appropriation of writing was heavily informed by "inculturation theology." In these educational contexts, Shuar came gradually to forge a sense of "culture for themselves" (and not just "in itself"), that is, a sort of metadiscourse on culture (Carneiro da Cunha 2009:3). As Manuela Carneiro da Cunha has noted, the notion of "culture for themselves" is particularly relevant in the "ethnicity regime," which we will render here as "the intercultural regime," where indigenous peoples are called upon to assert the specificity and difference of their

knowledge and perform it openly. Under this regime, "culture" is by default constituted as shared patrimony.

The comparison of the Shuar and Tukanoan appropriation of writing enables us to examine the ways in which lowland Amerindians participate in the intercultural regime and come to objectify and collectivize different forms of knowledge under the unifying term of "culture" (Turner 1991; Hugh-Jones 1997; Carneiro da Cunha 2004, 2009; de Vienne and Allard 2005; Chaumeil 2009; Fausto 2011; Carneiro da Cunha and Cesarino 2016; Ariel de Vidas and Hirtzel 2017). Here we ask: How have Shuar, who have not historically treated their traditions as a form of collective property and shared patrimony—unlike the Tukanoans—come to do so? What role does writing play in this process?

When compared to Hugh-Jones's argument about the cultural proclivity of the Tukanoans to engender the URN patrimonial writing boom, we argue that social structure and interethnic relations are stronger drivers of the Shuar writing boom. We also contend that history and interethnic relations have shaped Shuar society in a way that has brought patrimonialization and collective identities into prominence among post-missionized Shuar people. Whilst patrimonial writing is by no means the only writing in circulation in Ecuadorian Amazonia (see Deshoulliere and Buitron, this volume), it is certainly the most dominant, and this is in great part, as we explain below, thanks to the substantial institutional backing patrimonial writing receives from the state's "intercultural regime." Indeed, the gradual state integration of the Shuar and the "culturalist turn" that Ecuador has known since the 1980s have locally transformed the "acquisitional politics" of the Chicham ensemble—that is, the well-known preference for "predation" as a relational mode (Descola 1992; Surrallés 2003; Taylor 2006)—into something comparable in its effects at the level of interethnic relations to the "superordinate politics" of Northwest Amazonia or the Xingu area of central Brazil.<sup>4</sup>

This article deals with contemporary Shuar uses of writing that result in books, manuscripts, and academic theses but excludes bureaucratic, epistolary, and digital outputs. We will examine texts written in Shuar or Spanish by people who identify as Shuar. We focus on one set of texts that we have broadly termed "institutional." These institutional writings foreground ideas that were foreign to the pre-missionized Shuar, namely that collective identity and understandings of culture are group property. In this regard, the study of Shuar involvement with institutional writing helps us understand how Shuar have created a new sense of tradition. We argue that school plays a key role in creating a canon of knowledge and the idea that the tradition of the group lies in the hands of older people turned into "sages" (*sabios* in Spanish, which has no equivalent in the Shuar language). Canonical knowledge is presumed to be held by the elders and distilled by a new category of cultural experts—bilingual schoolteachers—who oversee selecting, systematizing, and publishing to transmit it to new generations. Shuar writers increasingly construe traditional knowledge as collectively owned and scholarly produced. Thus, as one of us argues elsewhere (Buitron 2016:225–47), the group's cultural patrimony becomes a "scholarly tradition."

We base our analysis on fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2013, in different areas of Shuar territory in Morona Santiago. Natalia primarily worked in a network of forest villages in the Makuma area, a territory of evangelical mission implantation. Since part of her research concerned the novel institutional life engendered by state-derived institutions (schools, village councils, and federations), she also conducted intensive stints of fieldwork in several other areas of Shuar territory historically connected to the Salesian mission, especially in Bomboiza and Sucúa. As a result, she spent many hours with Shuar educationalists and scholars, tracing the making of "the scholarly tradition" from thesis writing to curricula design and from teacher training to classroom teaching. Grégory primarily worked in a network of forest villages in Tuutinentza and the Upano Valley, two areas of Salesian mission implantation linked with the *Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar* (FICSH). Since part of his research concerned the Shuar conceptualizations of "tradition," he worked closely with FICSH officers responsible for education and other "cultural experts," tracing the spread of culturalist programs in Shuar communities. He also conducted long interviews with influential Salesian missionaries based in Sucúa and Macas. More recently, he has been involved in organizing, alongside the Shuar-led regional government of Morona Santiago, initiatives that promote symmetry between Shuar scholars and anthropologists in the production of scientific knowledge.

As soon as we set foot in Ecuador, we encountered a massive literary production by Shuar teacher-researchers and educationalists. We avidly read whatever material we could get hold

of in mission archives, local libraries, nongovernmental organization (NGO) and university web repositories, training seminars, and village schoolhouses. We also endeavored to discuss the texts we use in this article with their authors. Our analysis benefits from a combination of textual review, archival research, interviews, and ethnographic work with Shuar “cultural experts.” Before we flesh out the details of our argument through analysis of Shuar institutional writings, we explore the historical and institutional processes whereby Shuar have come to see culture as a separate object of written study and exchange.

### **Writing About Culture: A Short History**

Shuar came to see tradition as collective patrimony through engagement with a range of actors throughout the twentieth century. The missions kick-started the process by introducing writing and schooling as central tools of evangelization, and by promoting among Shuar pupils a self-conscious attitude toward their language, songs, habits, etc. At a later stage, the national indigenous movement, and a range of governmental and nongovernmental agencies, continued where missionaries had left off. These agencies aimed to build a plurinational state and therefore continued to promote indigenous education and patrimonial writing for the purposes of preserving the ethnically distinct patrimony of the nation. Overall, we thus have a historical process that has reinforced, through diverse institutional agendas, the mobilization of literacy and indigenous education for the construction of patrimony. We examine the main stages of this process as follows.

#### *Missions*

Patrimonial writing has deep roots in Ecuadorian Amazonia. Its inception, among Shuar, is inseparable from evangelization. Missionary agents, both Protestant and Catholic, placed a strong emphasis on understanding native culture, whether to eradicate it or co-opt it for evangelical purposes. The emergence of patrimonial writing among Shuar can be traced back to the second half of the twentieth century, when missionaries began to train bilingual teachers as experts in salvage research (see Gnerre 1983).

Although the evangelical and Salesian missions have different theological stances, reflected in the policies they have implemented over time, both have introduced bilingual education as part of their efforts to evangelize Shuar people. The evangelical mission Avant Ministries (AM), formerly known as the Gospel Missionary Union, envisioned the Gospel as the true path to salvation and therefore strove to translate the Bible and promote literacy among Shuar people, creating the first school in Makuma in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Even though the state paid for some of the teachers—all of whom were colonists<sup>6</sup>—missionaries were in control of the formal education, which they envisioned as Christianization. As missionaries began to extend their evangelical work in different centros, they saw the need to train bilingual teachers who would be able to read Scripture and teach basic literacy.

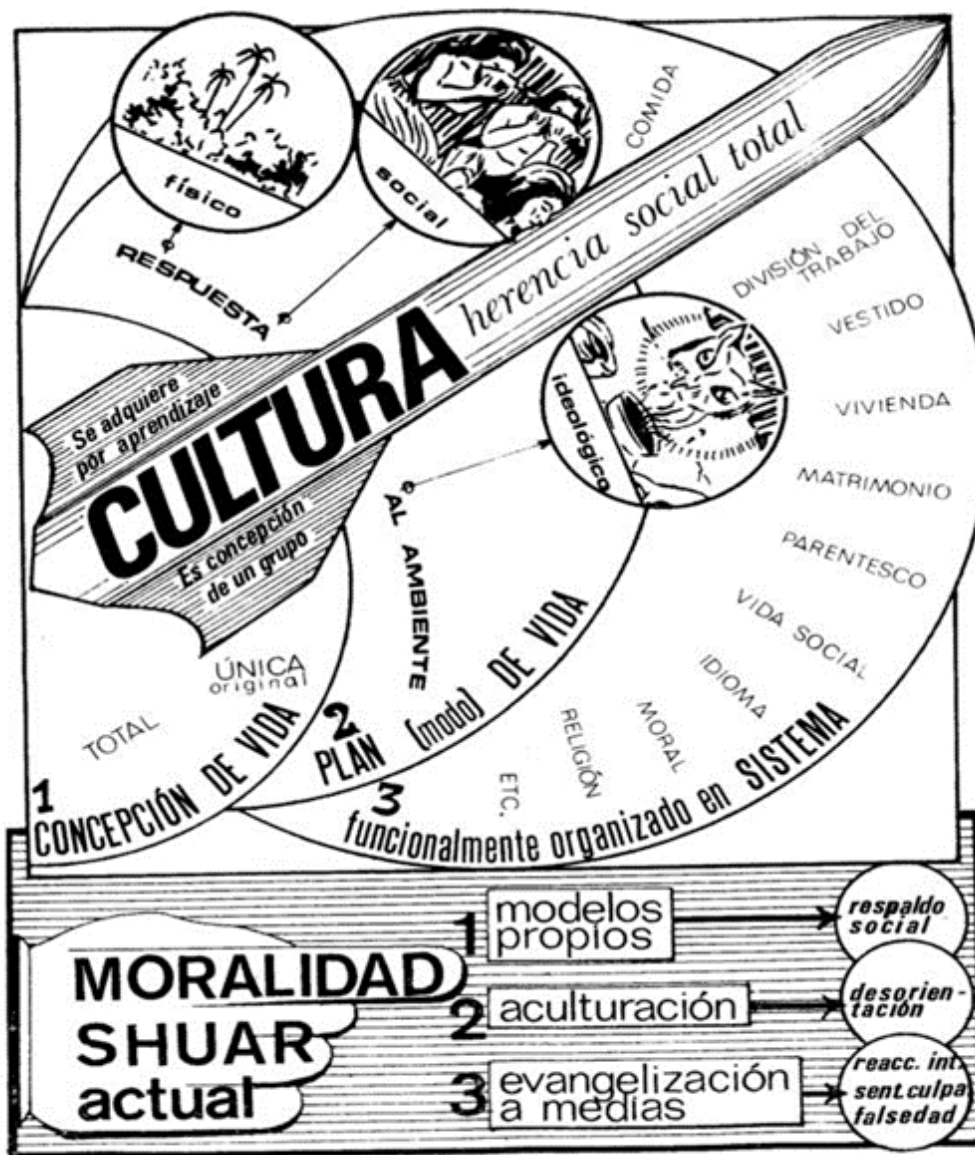
In 1963, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) introduced a system of bilingual education training for Amazonian indigenous peoples at the Pedagogical Institute of Limoncocha in Napo Province, where the first generation of bilingual teachers in Makuma were trained. During this period, missionaries worked with Shuar trainees on recording and transcribing myths and everyday life experiences as well as producing bilingual textbooks for primary schools.

Meanwhile, on the Salesian side, a similar if more influential approach to literacy training began to develop. Most of what Salesian missionaries did in terms of bilingual education from the 1960s onward came as a reaction to policies they had implemented earlier. During the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic missionary work was predicated on a policy of “conversion by acculturation” that targeted young generations from the Upano, Namangoza and Zamora valleys (Garzón Vera 2017). Children were separated from their parents and educated at mission boarding schools under an aggressive policy of hispanicization. The 1960s ushered in a sea change in the policies of the Catholic mission.

The spread of liberation theology in Latin America, and especially the culturalist shift that ensued from the Second Vatican Council (1962), greatly influenced Salesian missionaries of that time and made them reconsider the value of native languages and cultures to help spread the Gospel. This ideological turn was dubbed the theology of “inculturation,” based on the

idea that the transmission of the Christian message in a particular cultural context should find expression through elements relevant to the culture in question.<sup>7</sup>

Catholic preachers thus saw the need to train Shuar interns studying at boarding schools to gradually use the native language to convey novel formulations of Christian doctrine (Botasso 2003; Gnerre 2012).<sup>8</sup> However, as Salesian missionaries embarked on promoting an indigenized Christianity, they had to deal with the youths who, as they finished mission school, were reluctant to engage with the ways of their elders. Having worked for decades to “hispanicize” Shuar youths, Salesian missionaries had to reconvert their pupils to a self-conscious appreciation of their traditions. As part of the ideological experimentation implemented in the boarding schools, the Salesian padres promoted a view of culture as something that belongs “to the group.” Maurizio Gnerre (1989) famously recalls how around the 1970s, a Shuar leader, after reading a book by Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, told him: “¿Nosotros también tenemos nuestra culturita?” (“We do also have our little culture!”).



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**Figure 1.** “It is acquired through learning. Culture. It’s conceived by a group.” Figure from a pedagogical notebook edited by the Salesian missionary Alfredo Germani and used in the radio-based education system. (Germani 1977:12)

In collaboration with the first Shuar teachers, Salesian missionaries sought to instill a reflexive attitude in their pupils while promoting literacy through two distinct kinds of schooling

initiatives (Gnerre 2000a). The first was the radio-based education system (known as *Sistema de Educación Radiofónica Bilingüe Intercultural Shuar* (SERBISH), created in the Upano Valley in 1972) broadcast to Catholic centros. The radio system consisted of a “tele-master” in charge of writing the scripts for lessons that were broadcast daily from the headquarters of the federation to the centros, where “tele-assistants” oversaw the instruction of schoolchildren by coordinating the voice from the radio with textbook exercises (see, for instance, Germani 1993). The second initiative was the creation of pedagogical bilingual institutes, the first of which was the Bomboiza Institute created in 1983 in the Zamora Valley. These institutes trained pupils to become both bilingual teachers (for SERBISH) and researchers/saviors of their own changing cultures. Importantly, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, tele-masters and trainee teachers helped collect, record, and transcribe myths and narratives from elders (see Gnerre 1983, 1997, 2000b). The idea was to generate a standardized version of the Shuar language and culture, especially of myths and everyday customs.<sup>9</sup> This was so they could be sufficiently adapted to “Ecuadorian civic culture” and “modern areas of knowledge,” and therefore coherently implemented in the SERBISH bilingual, bicultural curriculum.<sup>10</sup>

To graduate from the institutes, trainee teachers also had to write monographs that usually consisted of the translation and interpretation of elders’ mythological, discursive knowledge and life histories. These monographs were in turn used to produce bilingual schoolbooks, and some of them were published in the *Mundo Shuar* series.<sup>11</sup> This editorial initiative brought forth an unprecedented wave of ethnological publications authored by Shuar students throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>12</sup> As we will see, Shuar graduates from state universities continue to use this practice, although missionaries no longer oversee it.

#### *State-Led Cultural Education*

The culturalist turn in educational institutions led by missions and the progressively autonomist stance taken by the leaders of the Shuar federations—themselves alumni of mission boarding schools and bilingual pedagogical institutes—strengthened the mobilization of ethnic organizations in supporting territorial and cultural autonomy in the Ecuadorian Amazon. These organizations coalesced into an Amazonia-wide indigenous body, the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana* (CONFENIAE). CONFENIAE was created in 1980 and eventually became part of Ecuador’s largest and most prominent indigenous movement, the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE).

In addition to land rights, the promotion of culturally meaningful education and control over literacy as a weapon of emancipation have been central pillars of the movement, in a quest for the state to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples as part of a plurinational political agenda. Indeed, the institutionalization of bilingual education in Ecuador was the indigenous movement’s first legal achievement. In 1988, in response to CONAIE’s demands, the Ecuadorian government created a bilingual education agency, the *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (DINEIB). Throughout the 1990s, most Shuar schools thus became part of the national Intercultural Bilingual Education System (IBE).

DINEIB became a powerful political organizational instrument for indigenous cadres (Van Cott 2005:110) who possessed the autonomy to appoint their own schoolteachers and produce and publish culturally relevant material for bilingual schools within their territories. Although President Rafael Correa’s<sup>13</sup> administrations significantly curtailed the autonomy of DINEIB during the different times he held office between 2007 and 2017 (Martínez Novo 2010:15–7; 2014:115), Shuar formal education, like all indigenous education in Ecuador, continues to be part of a differentiated administrative system overseen by the Sub-Secretary of IBE, a branch of the Ministry of Education mostly run by indigenous functionaries. Moreover, the Sub-Secretary has continued to run a variety of higher educational revivalist programs aimed at training teachers who oversee salvage research in their own villages with the support of local governments and NGOs. Revivalist programs of this sort aim to train schoolteachers to write about their own cultures.<sup>14</sup> The goal is to turn schoolteachers into “experts of culture.”<sup>15</sup>

#### *Interculturalidad*

Contemporary revivalist programs share the aim of promoting the plurinational character of the state sanctioned by the Ecuadorian Constitution since 2008. In theory, so-called minority groups do not need to be assimilated into the national society (self-represented as mestizo and



urban) to gain full citizenship. Most of these groups have acquired the status of a “nation” or “nationality,” as they are called in Ecuador, and each is assumed to possess a particular history and identity (language, heritage, culture, and, less consistently, a given territory); in sum, all the attributes typically abbreviated in the expression *usos y costumbres* (habits and customs). More specifically, the country’s Constitution recognizes the material and symbolic contributions of indigenous groups to the making of the state. The objective of many revivalist projects is thus to ensure that those specific *usos y costumbres* are represented in writing and do not vanish, meaning that they continue to be transmitted locally, especially in bilingual schools.

If the principle of plurinationality establishes how diversity ought to be understood in Ecuador, interculturalidad organizes the kinds of relationships occurring between the diverse groups or nationalities in the public sphere. Interculturalidad, or “multiculturalism ‘latino-style’” (Lehmann 2016:4), replaces in theory the assimilationist ideology of *mestizaje* (racial blending) with an ideology of mutuality. As part of this process, intercultural policies seek to constitute “indigenous cultures” as heritage or patrimony of the country: as national patrimony, indigenous cultures should not only be preserved but also displayed with pride, in the same way as landscapes, artifacts, and monuments. For this reason, in the local governments of regional administrations, the officer in charge of protecting local patrimony is also responsible for promoting tourism. The goal of protecting culture is identified with the exaltation and display of local riches, leading to the spectacularization and commoditization of culture.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 2.** “One of the ways to keep cultures alive is to read books that speak of their [indigenous] worldview.” Screenshot from the newspaper *El Tiempo* (10/28/2017) <http://www.eltiempo.com.ec/noticias/intercultural/27/423630/interculturalidad-en-las-perchas>. © *El Tiempo*

We have presented here a brief history of the processes that have gradually enabled Shuar to transform culture into an element of explicit work and reflection about collective and shared identity. Whilst various institutions have been involved in this process, we can see some continuity whereby indigenous cadres and state functionaries pick up and build on the work of the missions. Despite advocating different aims from those of missionaries, Shuar federation leaders fighting for the recognition of bilingual education by the state were able to identify and voice their goals thanks to their recently gained awareness of culture in the mission schools—in fact, the first federation leaders were all alumni of the mission. In the same vein, the cultural advocacy of governmental and nongovernmental agents has built on foundations—the training programs and educational material—laid by missionaries and native bilingual teachers. While the missions promoted a policy of inculturation inspired by nativist theology, the state pursued a policy of interculturality by customizing a global version of multiculturalism. The evangelizing goals of the mission gradually turned into the “civilizing” goals of the nation, but



throughout indigenous literati have been entrusted with the preservation of their oral patrimony. We now turn to the current work of indigenous scholars as they produce “culture for themselves” by turning oral narratives into distinct institutional texts.

### Literary Production Within the Intercultural Project

Among Shuar, we find two kinds of institutionally based written productions: a compilatory and a scholarly kind. Both are patrimonial productions sponsored by a range of national and international organizations, such as bilingual schools, universities, regional governments, the Ministry of Education, and NGOs.

Compilatory written productions include texts that aim to display, transmit, and preserve culture. Scholarly written productions, on the other hand, are devoted to the systematization and study of culture. Scholarly texts aim to go beyond the transfer of oral knowledge into written form by developing a reflexive discourse about it. Yet both authors of compilatory and scholarly texts aim to showcase the “cultural wealth” of their groups in the public settings that matter for regional interethnic relations, such as book fairs, libraries, public ceremonies, school events, and parades. As such, they cannot be analyzed as isolated pieces, detached from the political and intellectual projects that conceive them. Here, we propose examining them within their contexts of production and reception.

#### *Cultural Compilations*

Compilatory writings are booklets and brochures that aim to catalogue the traditions of specific localities. They have resulted from revivalist initiatives carried out by ethnic organizations with the support of NGOs and local governments.

Grégory came across an exemplary compilation during the anniversary of a Shuar community in 2012: the bilingual book *Customs and Traditions of the Shuar Culture of the Yunganza-El Rosario Parish* (GADM Limón 2011).<sup>17</sup> The compilation is typical of its kind in operating as a form of “cultural territorialization” by circumscribing the traditions of a group of Shuar people to the locality they inhabit (represented as state territorial divisions). Its publication resulted from collaboration between Shuar and colonist authorities. On the Shuar team, we find the president of the parish and a group of Intercultural Bilingual Education schoolteachers who acted as researchers, translators, and transcribers of the songs, narrations, and opinions in the book. On the colonist team, we find the coordinator of the unit for culture and tourism.

According to its compilers, the book aims to recover the “live patrimony of the parish.” As forms of live patrimony, the book features different sections that showcase elements of customs, rites, myths, stories, natural medicine, and gastronomy (ibid.:6). We can recognize in this list an “Olympic games version of culture,” as Hugh-Jones (2010:217, 2019:143) calls the conceptualization of culture as something “self-conscious, visible, ritualized, and identity defining.” The book turns a motley collection of individual authors—the narrators interviewed to produce the compilation, a total of thirteen elders—into “the Shuar culture of the parish of Yunganza-El Rosario.” Each myth, story, rite, recollection, or piece of information about the customs of the area in the book bears the name of an individual teller. Yet, at every turn of page, we are told that these contents constitute the invaluable “worldview” (GADM Limón 2011:8) and “patrimony” (ibid.:6) of the Shuar people, presented as a group who share the territory of the parish in peace and who live in pursuit of *sumak kawsay* (“living well,” here using the Kichwa formula, widespread in the Ecuadorian public sphere). These elders only appear as generic individuals, or anonymized “sages” (sabios). That the compilers emphasize peaceful living and territorial stability is particularly interesting in view of the fact that the elders, in some of their narratives (ibid.:10), dwell on their memories of mobility and feuding and emphasize the sense of distrust and antagonism that Shuar typically feel toward their fellows, that is, toward any person they do not treat as their close kin. A similar diplomatic move seems to take place in the Upper Rio Negro (URN) publications where authors take extra care to “avoid stirring up old quarrels when publishing the stories of past feuds and intergroup fighting” (Hugh-Jones 2010:213, 2019:140) so as not to upset the peaceful coexistence of intra- and interethnic politics.

Turning to the question of audience: Who is the readership of these compilations? What is the point in transcribing the “live patrimony” of a group of people? The short answer is that cultural compilations have no internal (Shuar) public and are not really meant for local

consumption, even if their sponsors and compilers claim otherwise. A widespread view among their compilers is that cultural booklets should return to the communities in which the research was conducted. Yet once archived in the communities of origin, these books are left to gather dust on school shelves and occasionally serve as toilet paper.

It seems more reasonable to assume that their audience is imagined as an external public of foreigners—the visitors who come to Shuar villages and are known to appreciate culture. Thus, on special occasions such as local festivities, villagers sometimes accompany their displays of “typical”<sup>18</sup> dances and more conventional offerings, such as handicrafts, with books about their traditions and locales, which are exchanged for support from development projects. To the extent that Shuar attribute significance to the materiality of books, we concur with Hugh-Jones that it is of equal if not more importance than their content or the operation of reading per se (Hugh-Jones and Diemberger 2012).

The fact that cultural compilations appeal to an external audience is compatible with the collective authorship the books construct. Narratives that for an extended period had had loose connections either to local groups or to the whole ethnic group are now associated with a sense of collective pride through civic festivities celebrated in centros and urban towns. During these festivities, displays of cultural tokens (dances, handicrafts and, more recently, compilatory books) are key to the promotion of ethnic distinctiveness. At the same time, such public displays reproduce a sense of culture as the property of bounded groups. In Northwest Amazonia, the NIRN series reveals the growing visibility of individual indigenous authors; and yet, as Hugh-Jones clarifies, each volume must be understood as a collective autobiography in the form of the origin history of the clan in whose name the book is published. In this sense, each book in the series fulfils a political role since to an internal, “indigenous audience, and in the context of a political system based on a play of similarity and difference, the books condense the words of the ancestors” (2010:213, 2019:140). Books, therefore, are “hybrid” objects which, while “projecting outwards the visible signs of indigenous culture,” also retain ancestral powers (Hugh-Jones 2010:220, 2019:145). Conversely, among Shuar people, it is only within the context of interculturalidad as an extensive regional system of interethnic politics that books about culture become relevant. While we do not know much about the actual use of books in everyday and ceremonial contexts among the Tukanoans, books clearly become heirlooms (*gabeuni*). Here lies a key difference. Despite the appeal of cultural compilations and scholarly theses to those who write them and exchange them outwardly (typically schoolteachers), most Shuar remain uninterested in the creation of “an estate comprised of ritual objects, names, titles, prerogatives, and reputation” (Hugh-Jones 2010:219, 2019:144) connected to ancestral power and transmitted within the group.

#### *Cultural Theses*

Like bilingual education in the context of the mission, contemporary revivalist programs seek to train indigenous students to combat so-called acculturation. Shuar educationalists—professionals working as teacher trainers or functionaries of national institutions such as the Sub-Secretary of Education—emphasize that, to excel at their jobs, IBE teachers must research and write about their own cultures and become “experts of their own cultures.” Reminiscent of the mission-led pedagogical institutes, Shuar interested in educational careers are required to write theses about their traditions to obtain higher-education diplomas in IBE.<sup>19</sup> They are thus encouraged to visit local communities and carry out research with elderly people.

Two goals underlie this initiative. First, it is believed that the knowledge teachers acquire, once properly transcribed and published, can be more easily preserved in written form and subsequently transmitted in schools, thereby compensating for what children no longer learn from their parents.<sup>20</sup> Second, by doing their own research, Shuar are believed to assume control over the public and scientific discourse about themselves while appropriating the powerful instruments used by cultivated mestizos and foreigners. The theses Shuar schoolteachers write are considered a key requirement to produce “indigenous science,” as public intellectuals call the writings that indigenous people produce about their traditions.<sup>21</sup> If the designers of revivalist programs help future “cultural experts” produce “indigenous science” via the writing of scholarly theses, they also expect that, once trained, cultural experts will transform their theses into educational materials that usually take the form of curricular guidelines to be used by teachers as a tool to transmit Shuar culture in the classroom.

For example, to obtain an IBE degree at the University of Cuenca, Alicia Cacepa and Marcia Jeenham, two middle-aged Shuar schoolteachers Natalia met in Makuma, wrote a thesis entitled *The Sacred Value of Prayers and Their Use by Women in the Agricultural Cycle of the Macuma Community*. After expressing their concern about the decline in *ánent* (ritual incantations) among young people, Cacepa and Jeenham described the research goals of their thesis as follows:

- To find out about the use of prayer-songs [*plegarias*, as the students call *ánent*, following the Salesian translation] and their sacred value in the agricultural cycle.
- To classify the prayers according to the different phases of cultivation of the swidden garden.
- To suggest recommendations for the survival of the prayer-songs and their insertion in the school curriculum. (Cacepa and Jeenham 2006:17)

By systematizing indigenous knowledge and adapting it to educational curricular form, the advocates of IBE programs claim to bring “indigenous science into the curriculum” (UNICEF n.d.). One of the most ambitious writing projects undertaken in Ecuador led to the publication of the series *Sabiduría Amazónica* (“Amazonian Wisdom”) in 2012, which included a vast collection of theses written by indigenous teachers between 2006 and 2010 as part of their graduation requirement for the master’s degree of Educational Sciences and Research on Amazonian Cultures that the University of Cuenca launched with the support of UNICEF. The overarching goal of the program was to provide theoretical and methodological tools to enable indigenous peoples to systematize “traditional wisdom” (UNICEF n.d.:3) while producing archives and didactic resources to develop culturally relevant syllabi for local schools. María Leonor Aguilar, the director of the Department of Intercultural Studies, which oversaw the degree, is quoted as saying “the research was compiled thanks to those they [indigenous teacher-researchers] call the sages or wise people, the elders of their respective communities in whose knowledge resides the history of the group. These texts are the only way there is to preserve this [knowledge, history] for future generations” (*Redacción El Tiempo* 2013). As is clear from the language Aguilar uses, the assumption here is that culture is a system of knowledge held by the ancients to be systematized by schoolteachers-researchers (see also Sacona and Segovia 2012:17). Schoolteachers thus invest their theses with an aura of traditionality by mobilizing the names of elders or sages (*sabios*) within the text. The elders chosen will generally be ordinary men and women over the age of forty whom the schoolteacher or specific local community regard as knowledgeable.

Of particular significance here is also that revivalist programs underlie a benign interpretation of indigenous practices, which has the effect of evacuating any predatory elements that might subvert the peaceful aims of the intercultural project. For example, of the 650 pages dedicated to the Shuar culture in *Amazonian Wisdom*, fewer than ten lines discuss the *tsantsa* ritual, which involved the production and incorporation of a shrunken head trophy after a successful head-hunting expedition. This complex ritual, which last occurred in the 1960s, occupies a place of primary importance in the creation of pre-missionized Chicham collective identities and involves a rich set of ritual songs called *ujaj*. The general process of this ritual, remembered by some elders who witnessed it or participated in it, is also well-known among middle-aged men. But the collection reduces it to a few lines (with no mention of the *ujaj* songs); it appears as little more than “gone history” of which only few elders’ memories remain. This pacification of culture (or its transformation into “gone history”) is even more significant since the collection includes none of the elders’ memories of ritual predation. Like the memories of feuding that received no official recognition in the cultural compilation above, the removal of *tsantsa* recollections from this scholarly collection is a deliberate means of editing out “savage” cultural practices.<sup>22</sup>

Let us analyze in more detail how a Shuar scholar approached writing a thesis. Manuel Mashinkias, a renowned schoolteacher in his forties, completed a master’s degree in educational sciences and research on Amazonian cultures. His thesis was considered of such high quality that he was hired to select and systematize the materials included in *Amazonian Wisdom*. By all standards he is thus “an expert of culture,” as defined by the program.

In his thesis, Mashinkiasht sought to study the Shuar model of education, or what he called "ethno-education" (Mashinkiasht 2012). As he told one of us (NB), he interviewed parents about the role of *arutam* visions in the education of their children. Arutam visions are widely practiced vision quests induced by psychotropic plants; they manifest themselves as individualized apparitions and enable the vision seeker to incorporate an arutam, a spirit of a prominent elder (sometimes anonymous). The arutam ritual endows the vision seeker with a magnified selfhood or "hyper-I" (Taylor 2014:101) experienced in part as a pronounced sense of clarity, invincibility, and the intensification of felt hostility, typically directed at enemy figures (see also Mader 1999:155–96; Mader and Gippelhauser 2000).

After the interviews, Mashinkiasht analyzed the opinions of parents about arutam and developed an interpretation of the phenomenon. As he explained during our conversation, he wanted to demonstrate that some of the postulations of innovative pedagogical theories, such as those of Maria Montessori and Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi, were already present in the traditional Shuar educational model. By providing a pedagogical interpretation of the arutam, he sought to bring to light the educational premises of a coherent education system that had so far remained latent. One way to interpret his analytical exercise is to see it as an attempt to "inculturate" pedagogical theories in Shuar material, that is, to represent external educational principles in terms of native practices and modes of understanding. Just as missionaries once inculturated native myths to transmit the Gospel, Shuar scholars now inculturate social science as they reconceptualize native practices in their cultural theses.

To unveil the pedagogical principles of Shuar education, Mashinkiasht, an alumnus of the Bomboiza Institute, relies on an earlier syncretistic tradition, the systematizations of Shuar culture produced in the Salesian institutes. He specifically draws on the work of Padre Siro Pellizzaro, the mastermind of inculturation theology among the Shuar. Pellizzaro devoted twelve volumes to the transcription and study of Shuar mythology (published in the collection *Mundo Shuar*), which are central in his attempt to adapt the message of the Gospel to the "values and intellectual experiences of Shuar people" (Cuturi 2008:39). The influence of Pellizzaro's syncretism is evident in the way Mashinkiasht writes about mythical characters such as Etsa, Nunkui, Shakaim, and Tsunki in his thesis. Echoing the Christian tradition, mythical figures appear as "hypostases" or "archetypes" of arutam, embodying the learning principles of the "pedagogy of *arutam*" (see Figure 3).

A few months after Mashinkiasht defended his thesis, a group of Shuar educationalists working at the Sub-Secretary of Education transformed the text into a syllabus to be implemented across Shuar schools, a transformation that represents the ideal outcome of indigenous research programs. Once transformed into a curricular document, *The Pedagogy of the Arutam* (Anguash and al. 2012) elided all academic and fieldwork references to make space for legal specifications about bilingual education in Ecuador. Accordingly, the specific pedagogical principles Mashinkiasht had fleshed out in his thesis became "learning units" to emphasize the official nature of the educational document.

The shift from scholarly to curricular text meant that the academic author—Manuel Mashinkiasht—vanished from the curricular document. As Santiago Utitaj, the Shuar educationalist who produced the syllabus, told Natalia as we chatted about Shuar scholarly work, the thesis did not belong to Mashinkiasht but rather to "the whole of Shuar people." According to Utitaj, Mashinkiasht had not produced new interpretations of traditional practices; rather, he had simply transferred knowledge from an oral medium to a written one, acting as the spokesperson for Shuar people. With these words, Utitaj corroborated the widespread view among the designers of revivalist programs that indigenous researchers do not produce or transform knowledge; they are instead agents or intermediaries who help systematize and put into written form a set of preexistent views and understandings. In effect, for many Shuar scholars, academic writing *is* tradition. And through the same process, tradition becomes "scholarly," as intended by advocates of "indigenous science." Indeed, many schoolteachers now hold the view that to really learn about their culture, Shuar children must go to school and become acquainted with cultural textbooks and typical performances (Buitron 2016:225–47).



**Figure 3.** “The pedagogy of Arutam explains the form in which each of the mythical figures [now hypostases/archetypes] conveys forms of knowledge and expertise [saberes y conocimientos] to the Shuar.” (Mashinkiaish 2012:55)

This helps us highlight two key premises of patrimonialization in the educational domain. The first is that even though indigenous educationalists may produce specific interpretations of their cultures, a notion of collective rights governs their intellectual property in the academic domain. The second premise is that indigenous theses represent the knowledge (or “wisdom”) of the whole group. To the question, “To whom does knowledge belong within a specific indigenous society?” Shuar intellectuals opt for a model of corporate ownership: knowledge belongs to the whole of the indigenous nation.

It is clear that the process of patrimonialization that began in the missions and has gained impetus within contemporary academic institutions has created a situation where, for the first time in Shuar society, a group of specialists can make a profession out of reproducing heterogeneous forms of knowledge as unitary, uniformly shared collective patrimony. More recently, this process has given rise to the *Comisión de la Lengua y Saberes de la Nacionalidad Shuar*, a group essentially composed of bilingual teachers (most of them mentioned in this text), working within the indigenous branch of the Ministry of Education, the *Secretaría de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (SESEIB). Calling themselves *juakmaru*—a neologism for expert or connoisseur—the commission members are responsible for ensuring the transmission and continuation of Shuar language and traditions.

## Conclusion

The Shuar writing boom is dominated by schoolteachers and academics whose objective is to create, transmit, and display a stabilized body of knowledge understood as “culture” “wisdom,” or “indigenous science.” Shuar did not have something like the equivalent of Tukanooan priestly esoteric knowledge, nor did they treat specific kinds of knowledge as a basis to legitimize an internal system of differences between patrilineal groups. We have argued that in the absence of shared cultural wealth and devoid of established cultural experts, the Shuar interest in patrimonial writing can be explained through the history of missionization and the recent shift to intercultural exchange within the plurinational project of state-building spearheaded, among others, by the indigenous movement. We have also shown that bilingual schooling has played a central role along the way by supporting the evangelist, indigenist, and statist projects. Importantly, the masterminds of bilingual schooling did not so much rely on preexisting cultural expertise but instead created it. They did so by training specialists who could operate within a new field of scholarly investigation: “indigenous culture.” The role of new cultural

experts is to transfer heterogeneous oral narratives presumed to be held by elderly “sages” into unitary written form, a necessary step leading to the canonization of these texts as collective tradition.

While the evangelizing and intercultural projects have pursued different agendas, they share a concern with the recognition of native culture as an explicit object of elaboration, and with its preservation and revitalization. All such projects have interpellated native subjects to ostensibly represent their cultures through writing. As we have shown, the written representation of culture is connected to a wider genre of “typical” representations such as dances, food, and material culture. This institutional history has made it possible for Shuar gradually to come to perceive they have “culture for themselves” and not just “in itself.”

Like the Tukanoans, who have taken up writing as a way of showing their “civilized” status and their cultural persistence despite the loss of ritual paraphernalia, Shuar too perform civilization through patrimonial writing, though perhaps less driven by ancestral nostalgia and more out of a new desire for ancestry. In fact, despite the emergence of cultural experts and the canonization of culture, the Shuar writing boom differs from the Tukanoan one in one significant aspect: Shuar cultural books do not typically operate as emblems of identity in the sense of making visible *ceremonial wealth*.

Rather, Shuar compilations and theses are examples of “Do It Yourself” anthropology (or auto-ethnography)—an expression Hugh-Jones once adopted to describe the indigenous appropriation of writing (cited in Andrello 2010:24)—but with two caveats. Despite all the deconstructivist efforts of anthropologists, ethnographic writing aims at a certain degree of objectivity, typically sought by making room for the positionality and reflexivity of the ethnographer. But it is precisely this form of positionality and reflexivity that Shuar auto-ethnographers aim to subvert when they obscure their personal, theoretical contributions through a collective author and by stressing the shared and canonical quality of their writing. As we saw with the case of Mashinkias, the transformation of his thesis into a curricular document was possible by eliding his intellectual contributions. Mashinkias’s authorial voice shifted from “theorist of the arutam” to “scribe of the arutam.” That is, having begun by creatively adopting theological and pedagogical doctrines to interpret mythological and ritual phenomena, he ended up portrayed as amanuensis of a preexistent canon.

We can also say something similar about the pacification of culture that occurs in Shuar auto-ethnography. Shuar scholars do not “simply” transcribe elders’ knowledge; they actively transform its content, by purifying predatory or conflict-driven interpretations that continue to inform everyday interactions, to produce texts that conform to the standards of peaceful intercultural coexistence. This does not mean that auto-ethnography, the Shuar way, is devoid of reflexivity and accuracy. It just means that it has become an institutional realm of its own and deserves to be engaged with as such.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Hugh-Jones’s argument was developed in collaboration with Geraldo Andrello (2010).



- <sup>2</sup> We quote the new version published in English in this issue (Hugh-Jones 2019) and also provide page numbers corresponding to the text originally published in French (Hugh-Jones 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> We follow the new convention using “Chicham” (or “Aents Chicham”) to refer to the linguistic family, which also includes the Achuar, Awajun, Shiwiar, and Wampis, see Deshoulliere and Utitaj 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> A distinction Hugh-Jones (1996; 2013:367) himself made, borrowing from Mary W. Helms (1993). In our analysis of recent changes, we agree with Steven Rubenstein’s (2001:263) argument that colonialism hinges on the transformation of sociospatial boundaries more than on the movement of people from one place to another. Such transformations were critical not only to Shuar ethnogenesis and so-called pacification, but also to Ecuadorian state-building, in the sense that colonialism involves “a dialectical reorganization both of state and its new citizens.” Nevertheless, we do not claim that the concept of predation is no longer useful to understand the current Shuar context of ethnic boundaries—presently, mestizo Ecuadorians play the role of enemies very well. Our view is however that in the “intercultural regime,” civic diplomacy and the appropriation of capitalism by Shuar leaders call for renewed descriptions of dominant relational schemas, a task that goes beyond the scope of this article.
- <sup>5</sup> Founded in 1892 in the United States, the AM was the first evangelical mission to enter Ecuador and begin translating the Bible into Kichwa and Shuar. The AM established its first outpost in Macas around 1903 and subsequently created other outposts in Sucúa in 1919 and Makuma in 1945 (Karsten 1935:21; Harner 1972:35; Drown and Drown 2002:22–3).
- <sup>6</sup> We use the term “colonist” to translate the Spanish *colono*, which Shuar use routinely to refer to Ecuadorian mestizos. In Shuar the term used is *apach*.
- <sup>7</sup> For analyses of Salesian “inculturation” policies among Shuar, see Colajanni 2008:155–87; Gnerre 2008:193–224; and Meiser 2015.
- <sup>8</sup> Around the late 1970s, the evangelical mission also underwent a “culturalist or nativist turn” of sorts, though different from that of the Catholic mission. For a discussion of this process, see Belzner 1981:149; Cova 2014:141–51; and Meiser 2015:264–84. For a discussion of the equivalent process among the Awajun in Peru (also Chicham), see Greene 2009:101–34.
- <sup>9</sup> For discussions of the standardization of Shuar language and bilingual education in the 1980s, see Gnerre 1986, 2006, 2012; and Bottasso 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> This new standardized Shuar introduced punctuation standards for writing and included a series of grammatical innovations and neologisms to express concepts for new ideas, for example the Gregorian calendar that had been introduced by the federation FICSH (see Gnerre 1986, 2012). An impressive example is the Shuar dictionary *Chicham nekatai*, a volume of 714 pages (see Descola 2000; Gnerre 2011; Instituto Normal Bilingüe Intercultural Shuar 1988).
- <sup>11</sup> These monographs were also produced by the federation FICSH, which published numerous books divided into the following subseries: “rediscovering our world, research about a changing world”; “process of handicraft making”; “linguistic outputs”; “ethnohistory”; “mythology”; “songs”; “bibliography”; and a collection with various titles of anthropological and historical interest (Gnerre 1983). A decade later, the Salesian founders of *Mundo Shuar* created Abya-Yala, a renowned publishing house based in Quito, which covers a broad range of indigenous, religious, and public affairs in Latin America.
- <sup>12</sup> Among the ethnological publications authored by Shuar Salesian students, the best known are Mashinkias 1976, about traditional and contemporary education; Tsamaraint, Mashumar, and Pellizzaro 1977, about festive songs (*nampet*); Chumpi 1985, 1986, about sung invocations (*ánent*); Chinkim', Petsain, and Jimpikit 1987, about the individual quest for spirit souls called *arutam*; Rueda and Tankamash 1987, about myths; Mashinkias and Tentets 1988, about ecological knowledge; Ujukam, Antun', and Awananch 1991 about festive and ritual songs; Antun' and Chiriap Inchit' 1991, about shamanism; and Jimpikit and Antun' 1991 about onomastics.
- <sup>13</sup> DINEIB [now called Secretaría de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (SESEIB)] recovered a degree of autonomy under the government of Lenín Moreno.
- <sup>14</sup> Examples of these programs include the Project Sasiku (2007–13) that ran with the support of the Agencia Catalana de Cooperación al Desarrollo (ACCD) and EIBAMAZ (Intercultural/Bilingual Education in the Amazon, 2006–12), sponsored by the Finnish government and UNICEF.

- <sup>15</sup> Similar revivalist programs in Ecuadorian Amazonia have been described by Anne-Gaël Bilhaut (2013) in Zapara schools, where newly appointed teachers decide what counts as cultural knowledge (see also Rival 1997).
- <sup>16</sup> For an example of the commoditization of cultural practices (in particular, shamanism) in Morona Santiago, see Deshoulliere 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> The smallest political-administrative unit of Ecuador.
- <sup>18</sup> "Typical" is a term widely used in Ecuadorian Amazonia to denote tokens of traditional indigenous culture. Shuar currently dub as "typical" a variety of staged cultural representations that show an object or facet of social life they consider customarily Shuar. For discussions and examples, see High 2009:728 and Buitron 2016:226.
- <sup>19</sup> The idea that indigenous students should be interested in writing about "their own cultures" is so entrenched in the Ecuadorian university context that even those few students who pursue degrees other than IBE end up writing cultural theses (Buitron 2014:184).
- <sup>20</sup> In our view, the designers of these programs pay little attention to how writing and schooling do not necessary guarantee the continuation of practices that historically have relied on different means of transmission. For instance, see Jackson 1995 for a discussion of the dilemmas of teaching Tukanian shamanism in schoolroom-like settings.
- <sup>21</sup> This is part of a broader project of "interculturalizing the academe" advocated by some Latin American intellectuals who promote the decolonization of knowledge through the pursuit of a critical or "epistemic" form of interculturality (see, e.g., Walsh, Schiwy, and Castro-Gómez 2002; Castro Gómez 2007; Walsh 2009:136–8; Fernández 2010).
- <sup>22</sup> For other examples of the editing out of diversity through the elevation of everyday cultural knowledge to the status of canon, and the tension between indigenous writers' personal itineraries and the idea of collective ownership that patrimonialization entails, see Bilhaut and Macedo 2012, especially the chapters by Mataliwa Kulijaman and Zamorano Villareal. See also our review of the book (Buitron and Deshoulliere 2013).

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