

# Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

---

Volume 16  
Issue 2 *Cosmology and Practice in Amazonia*

Article 12

---

12-15-2019

## Singularity on the Margins: Autobiographical Writings among the Shuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia

Grégory Deshoulliere  
*London School of Economics/EHESS-LAS*

Natalia Buitron  
*London School of Economics*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the Archaeological Anthropology Commons, Civic and Community Engagement Commons, Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Folklore Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Human Geography Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Latin American Studies Commons, Linguistic Anthropology Commons, Nature and Society Relations Commons, Public Policy Commons, Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons, and the Work, Economy and Organizations Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Deshoulliere, Grégory and Buitron, Natalia (2019). "Singularity on the Margins: Autobiographical Writings among the Shuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 16: Iss. 2, Article 12, 195-214.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol16/iss2/12>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

# Singularity on the Margins: Autobiographical Writings among the Shuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia

Grégory Deshoulliere

London School of Economics/EHESS-LAS  
UNITED KINGDOM/FRANCE

Natalia Buitron

London School of Economics  
UNITED KINGDOM

## Introduction

In “The Shuar Writing Boom,” we analyzed texts written by schoolteachers and academics whose objective is to create, transmit, and display a stabilized body of “culture,” “wisdom,” or “indigenous science” (Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019). 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. Hugely successful, this form of writing has made it into bookstores in Ecuadorian cities and features in the classrooms of many Shuar villages. As we showed, it is through patrimonial books that Shuar authors make themselves known to intellectuals, researchers, and politicians in their country and beyond. However, not everything Shuar people write corresponds to the patrimonial logic we described there; nor are all Shuar writers well-educated teachers and educationalists who rub shoulders with the “Doctors of Science” of national universities and publishers. There also is an original, if incipient, form of textual production growing on the margins of the great written tradition, even if this production has not yet stabilized into a recognizable genre and has very limited dissemination. Marginal texts circulate primarily within small circles of acquaintances in the form of unfinished, unpublished drafts. In this article we turn to this singular production on the margins. We must say at the outset that these texts are not only far from cohering into a stable genre but that they are probably very few indeed. While many men—and it is typically men—mentioned their desire to write their life history, we only ever came across a handful of such texts. One reason to analyze them together is that they are all to some extent autobiographical. What makes these texts unique, in addition to their exclusion from the mainstream publishing economy and the symbolic market of culture, is that their authors take entire responsibility for their writing. So why do these authors choose the first person singular? Let us begin with what we know about first-person narratives in Amazonia.

Oral narratives in the first singular person have important antecedents in Amazonia, and this is a theme to which recent publications have devoted significant attention (e.g., Basso 1995; Oakdale 2002, 2005; Déléage 2007; Chernela 2012; and chapters in Oakdale and Course 2014). Whether as a core argument or as a commentary in passing, all these works convey the idea that oral autobiographical narratives are privileged windows into culturally specific notions of personhood and individuality. Since the research of Greg Urban (1989) and Ellen Basso (1995:293–303), who were among the first to de-link first-person narratives from the idea that their authors pursue self-introspection, it has been well established that narratives of the “I” do not necessarily convey the form of reflexive individualism expected of “Western” personal narratives.

In Amazonian oral performances, this idea is illustrated in relation to the different agents to which the “I” of the speech refers. To borrow Pierre Déléage’s characterization (2007:3–4), the “I” of autobiographical narratives can take three forms: firstly, the “I” can refer simultaneously to the main character of the narrative and to the speaker, as in narratives of warrior achievements among the Kalapalo *tafaku oto* “bow masters” (Basso 1995:91–104); secondly, the “I” of the discourse is not the actual speaker but an “other” (auxiliary spirit, enemy, etc.), as in *jowosi* songs among Kayabi male leaders (Oakdale 2005) or in *mai maraka* shamanic songs

among the Arawete (Viveiros de Castro 1986:542–60); thirdly, even when the “I” is the actual speaker, the text can be entirely inherited from someone else as in Panoan Yaminahua *Caqui Caqui* autobiographical songs (Déléage 2007).

In our view, these differences in the narrative “I” draw attention to different paths of individuation (e.g., warrior, shaman, etc.) taken by their speakers, according to the contexts of enunciation. In fact, the narrative “I” can support multiple paths of individuation as it allows the adoption of a position of enunciator other than that adopted in everyday interactions. By individuation we mean the process by which persons distinguish themselves from others in their group, insofar as they embody not only a specific type but also a singular and concrete experience. As we shall see, first-person writing serves this social process of self-distinction.<sup>1</sup> This view recalls Hugh-Jones’s observation concerning Tukanoan understandings of ritual culture whereby “on a personal plan, the knowledge and mastering of various aspects of the formal culture grounds the individual status of leader, singer, dancer or *pajé* [shaman]” (1997:99).

In the texts we explore in this article, all three authors choose the first narrative “I” described by Déléage, which refers simultaneously to the main character of the narrative and to the writer. But they construct different paths to eminence and singularity. Importantly, mastering writing is essential to the path taken by each subject; that is, it is key to the way each author seeks to demonstrate exemplarity. By exploring three different paths in detail, our aim is to examine the link between first-person narratives and the distinct forms of individuation these narratives convey and achieve through autobiographical writings, all authored by Chicham-speaking Shuar people (formerly known as Jivaro).<sup>2</sup> But before we analyze the importance of first-person writing, a few words about oral autobiographies among pre-missionized Chicham-speaking people are in order.

Autobiographical narratives, as distinctive discursive performance, were primarily—if not uniquely—produced by “great men,” called *uunt*<sup>3</sup> (“old/big one”) who were *kakáram*, that is, powerful/strong persons. The autobiography of Tukup’, a famous Shuar *uunt* from the Transkutuku region, recorded in 1982 and analyzed by Janet Wall Hendricks (1993), offers the best documented testimony of these male autobiographies. Hendricks shows that the formal structure of the narration is not different from the ordinary telling of personal experiences, which is dialogic in form in that a listener-responder participates in the narrative through short stylized responses, comments, and questions (1993:95–7). But attention to the content of the autobiographies reveals that the narration produced a highly personal and confrontational account of the self, which became the means through which the speaker depicted himself as an exemplary warrior. Tukup’s narrative is almost entirely focused on vengeance-driven intra- and intertribal struggles, to the exclusion of interethnic conflict with colonists or evocations of the narrator’s life-course beyond his involvement in internal feuds. The disposition to engage in antagonistic relationships is specific to the kind of exemplarity sought by the *kakáram*, but it ultimately characterizes a quest for uniqueness unconstrained by the claims of any institutionalized form of supra-individual authority of all persons adhering to Chicham identity. It is in this sense that Anne-Christine Taylor stated that “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 . . . To be Jivaro [Chicham] . . . all you need is to believe that the world contains figures intent on becoming enemies. Nor do these figures necessarily have to be ‘Jivaro’ [Chicham] in the sense of belonging to a specific, bounded ethnic or cultural group; anybody willing to play the same game over a period of time sufficient to produce vindictory memory becomes *ipso facto* Jivaroan [Chicham]” (2007:151).<sup>4</sup>

It is this link between first-person writing and Chicham iconic individualism that makes for an interesting comparison with Hugh-Jones’s analysis of the Tukanoan writing boom (2010, 2016, 2019). 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 and a relatively closed circulation of prestige goods. Books, produced and owned by clans, become a new type of ritual good that plays a crucial role in the negotiation of hierarchies and rights in the region. They foreground understandings of culture as group property common to the Tukanoan speakers of the Upper Rio Negro. We would like to connect the experimental Shuar interest in first-person writing with their characteristic concern with forging individual destinies. Yet, as we show, the elective affinity between Shuar

quest for uniqueness and first-person narratives does not simply reflect continuity with the past. The texts we explore below are not a written replica of oral warrior autobiographies, nor can they be easily reduced to a single modality of individuation, the male kakáram type. Contemporary first-person narratives reflect new paths of individuation, in some cases paths imbricated in relations and institutions that have gained prominence in the post-mission context.

What is more, the marginal first-person texts we explore here partially respond to the “great tradition” of collective patrimonial writing that has hitherto dominated the publishing boom in Ecuadorian Amazonia as we show elsewhere in this issue. Our argument is therefore twofold: while first-person written narratives convey forms of individuation that have been documented in oral performances by previous ethnographers, they also underpin the development of new forms of individuation emerging in contemporary Amazonia, which are not necessarily related with the Ecuadorian intercultural regime and the latter’s emphasis on ethnic identity. These texts primarily seek to produce unique individual destinies rather than represent a form of collective identity—the authors thus do not focus on themselves as a way of affirming their ethnic groups, as do other indigenous writers, and especially leaders, in their memoirs (see Calavia Sáez 2007). For this reason, it is not possible to reduce these texts to common features, but one can describe possible paths, each exemplified by a text, as we aim to do below. While these paths are exemplary, the lack of stabilization of the written autobiographical genre should be read as a recognition of the singularity the writing seeks to convey—and precisely because of this, new forms of individuation and thereby written autobiography may always emerge. Before we turn to the three Shuar first-person texts that have inspired this article, we situate them within regional written autobiographical production.

Written first-person narratives are rare in lowland South America when compared to their wide propagation and the numerous studies devoted to autobiographic narratives in native North America (see, e.g., David Brumble’s 1988 book with its 577 bibliographical entries). In fact, presently, autobiographies are the main genre of literature written by Native Americans. The contrast with lowland South America should be clear enough: out of ten chapters devoted to biographies and autobiographies in the edited volume *Fluent Selves: Autobiography, Person, and History in Lowland South America* (Oakdale and Course 2014), only one concerns a written text (see Calavia Sáez 2014). As Oscar Calavia Sáez observes regarding Brazil, “The entry ‘autobiography’ simply does not appear in the bibliographic repertoires of Brazilian ethnology. It cannot be ruled out that in the midst of this vast production we may find some brief first-person narration, or gather up a few cumulative autobiographies, but it seems that no Brazilian Indian ever decided or was asked to report *his* life, rather than the myths or the history of his people. Even the recent generation of indigenous writers shyly gaining ground in the literary world ignores this genre—significantly, [this generation] is much more willing to write myths” (2006:181, our trans.).

When written first-person narratives appear in Amazonia, they have mostly been written and edited by, or in collaboration with, a wide range of outsiders. For example, in collaboration with missionaries, as in the autobiography of Gabriel Viriato Raposo (1972) edited in Italy by the Istituto Missioni Della Consolata; with activists, like the memoirs of Raoni Txucarramae edited by Jean-Pierre Dutilleux (2010); or with anthropologists, like Davi Kopenawa’s first-person experiences written in collaboration with Bruce Albert (2013), the life story of the Secoya shaman Fernando Payaguaje commented on by María Susana Cipolletti (2008), or the life history of the shaman Alejandro Tsakimp, written by Steve Rubenstein (2002), to name a few.<sup>5</sup>

A common criticism of an analytical focus on so-called life histories has been that it artificially projects established standards of writing onto different expressive forms, ignoring how these expressive forms are socially situated. Arnold Krupat (1985, 1994) and David Brumble (1988) both made this point when they called attention to the influence of anthropological interviewing techniques and Western literary genres on the production of Native American “life histories.” In calling for an understanding of the life history within the context of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, Vincent Crapanzano (1984:958) also observed that many “anthropological life histories read as though the narrator is addressing the cosmos” (see also Severi 1990). However, the texts we explore below have been written by Shuar authors without, to our knowledge, external mediation in the writing process. Also, their authors are not cosmopolitan, well-known leaders or religious personalities such as those

described by Calavia Sáez (2007), nor are they indigenous activists, as is the case of the testimonial writings of Jikiti Buinaima (1996) and Kaká Werá Jecupé (2002), both of which can be read as the authors' testimonies of "*virar indio*" (Calavia Sáez 2006).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, none of the authors we discuss are part of the burgeoning poetic literature that has emerged among the indigenous elite (significantly, by female authors) in Ecuadorian cities.<sup>7</sup>

The three narratives we discuss below were written by men who live in Shuar villages neighboring middle-sized settler towns and in small villages of the Transkutuku "interior" region.<sup>8</sup> All three are bilingual Shuar-Spanish (Shuar being their mother tongue) and none of them is an "expert of culture" in the sense of having been entrusted with the promotion and preservation of Shuar cultural patrimony by institutional agents (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019), though each of them has had relations with teachers and Christian missionaries, both Catholic and evangelical. Formally speaking, the authors experiment with different genres and none claim—whether in their texts or during our conversations—adherence to established genres, either oral or written. Although each author takes up different themes of preexistent oral narratives, they display semantic and stylistic innovations that reflect the tumultuous changes the region has undergone in the past century. To be clear, then, the richness of these texts does not derive from their "purity"; rather, it derives from their idiosyncrasy. These are texts situated in "grey zones" of contemporary cultural production. In this, perhaps the closest equivalent is *The Lascivious Life of Gabriel Gentil*, the unsolicited and unpublished autobiography of a Tukano *pajé* and researcher who lived in the city of Manaus; the text focuses on the sexual twists and turns of the author's life and is "scarcely sensitive to the trends of multiculturalism" (Calavia Sáez 2014:196–7, 202).

What do these idiosyncratic texts share? At least two features. Firstly, they are all autobiographical. By "autobiography," we mean that the narrators themselves experienced and wrote the actions recounted in the texts. We argue that in each volume, their respective authors style themselves as singular and exemplary subjects. They do this by fine-tuning and directing their voice or narrative "I" form to a specific audience—whether internal or external to the group of self-identification (Shuar)—and in relation to which, or against which, they construe exemplary subjectivity. Thus, common to all is the deployment of first-person writing in the pursuit of self-distinction. Second, all three authors live in social worlds in which writing has become a prime means to accrue power. Said differently, writing has become indispensable to the construction of individual eminence, so each of our three authors uses writing to narrate an exemplary destiny.

In what follows we detail three loose pathways to eminence to explain why and how autobiographical writing plays a role in the authors' self-making: "autobiography as counter-history," "autobiography as guide to an exemplary life," and "visionary autobiography as augural self." The first, "autobiography as counter-history," is exemplified by the work of Luis Tibipa, a schoolteacher who directs his message to missionaries and mestizos alike and self-styles himself in a dual manner, as both "civilized" and capable of warrior-like action. Tibipa makes a pamphleteering use of autobiography, which could not be more adequate: only through writing could he counter a missionary reading of history that assigns him "uncivilized" status, and only through writing could he hope to impress a literate mestizo audience. The work of Emilio Shakaim illustrates the second path: "autobiography as guide to an exemplary life." Shakaim is a "great man" who writes for an internal audience, the narrator's kin, to whom he aims to transmit "the way" to become an eminent leader through the realization of a personal vision, that is, by becoming a subject "who has seen" (*a wáimiaku*). Why entrust to writing what one can transmit through example and practice? Shakaim feels impelled to write to counter the prominence of schoolteachers and other cultural experts, whom he accuses of lacking exemplary qualities beyond their formal credentials and diplomas. While Shakaim promotes visionary over textual power, he must still write, for power today increasingly lies with the mastery of literacy. The writing of Iván Kunkumas exemplifies the third pathway, the creation of "visionary autobiography as augural self." Kunkumas, partly a teacher, partly a priest, and partly a shaman, who writes to announce his election by spirit entities. Unlike Shakaim, Kunkumas does not dwell on the "how" or "why" of his visions but rather on their imagery: he vies for future shamanistic recognition based on his relations with special celestial beings. By writing about his glorious encounters, Kunkumas depicts himself as an exceptional kind of ritual specialist: literate among illiterate shamans and a saint among those who transact with devilish powers.

We thus have the case of a teacher who asserts his civilized status and rewrites history, of a leader who counters the authority of schoolteachers through the power of his visions, and of a shaman who lays claim to sainthood through visionary literacy. In all three cases, autobiographical writing is key to the construction of the authors' singularity. Let us then explore each of their pathways in detail.

### Luis Tibipa's Text: Autobiography as Counter-History

Luis Tibipa, a middle-aged schoolteacher from the Chiguaza valley and alumnus of the Salesian mission, is the author of *Shuar Children in the Salesian Mission School* (2008), a book written in Spanish. Grégory came across the book in the local Culture House (*Casa de la Cultura*) in Macas, the capital of the Morona Santiago province, which also published it. The book, of which five hundred copies were printed, is a rare example of a contemporary indigenous autobiography that has, exceptionally, made it to a publishing house, though a very small and local one.

Although we were never able to meet Tibipa in person, we have corresponded with him on social networks. The title and the image on the front cover (which shows children presumably from the Brazilian Amazon!) were the only features chosen by the publishing house. The book describes the ill treatment he endured as a student at the mission boarding school, the *internado* of Méndez. Tibipa deploys a denunciatory tone to relate the suffering inflicted by the Catholic padres.<sup>9</sup> His first-person narrative is counter-historical in the sense that it inverts the victorious view of colonization developed by missionaries. Instead, it provides a testimony of resistance that defies the standard narrative of conversion even while keeping the story centered on situations of forced change at the behest of colonizers. In this sense, it appears as the negative mirror image of the life histories published by evangelical missionaries to foreground the positive transformations of "witchdoctors" or "blood warriors" into faithful followers of Christ (the best-known examples of the genre in the region are probably *Surrounded by Headhunters* [Klaus 1986], partly devoted to the Achuar warrior Santiak and *Tariri: My Story from Jungle Killer to Christian Missionary* [Tariri and Wallis 1965] in which the Shapra warrior Tariri is the protagonist).<sup>10</sup>

Following the canon of the Hispanic memoir, the text opens with an acknowledgement, a dedication, and a foreword by the president of the Culture House, Juan Merino. Though in his foreword Merino appears sympathetic to the emancipatory message Tibipa puts forth in his memoirs, he also undercuts the incendiary tone of the manuscript. He does so by reminding the reader that the author does not wish to offend the Christian faith or religious institutions but cares mostly about recovering the truth (2008:5).

Notwithstanding Merino's diplomatic overture, Tibipa does not restrain his recrimination of the missionaries. We have translated the following passages from Tibipa's 2008 book, indicating the pages where they can be found in the original. In this first passage Tibipa prefaces his memoirs with the following message:

A few words.

Expressions used by the Salesian missionaries:

- ... to remove from ignorance and barbarity the numerous savage tribes
- ... earth populated by savages
- ... raw savage hearts
- ... the education of savage children
- ... savages of Méndez
- ... a few savages screamed at unison

For no reason will I allow that in their speeches and literary, historical or sociological writings my ancestors be called: ignorant, barbarians and savages. What power do they have to assign us equivocal names without our consent? Is it not the case that in Europe there has been more human ignominy than in the Shuar nation? If so, what kind of civilization did they [missionaries] want to entrust us with, if the civilized are more savage?

There is this expression: "our religious men were going to catechize our Indians in their homes."

But beware, among Shuar people there is no Indian. The Shuar is no INDIAN. Our parents never taught us that we were Indians. We are of Shuar origin, culture and language. The term INDIAN is a historical error. Living in acceptance of such a mistake would entail the loss of cultural identity. At least: I am who I am, my culture is the Shuar one.

Moreover, in their memories, they call us Jibaro.<sup>11</sup> But here there are no Jibaro. We are the strong and brave people who destroyed the cities of Logroño, Sevilla and Zamora, transforming them into cemeteries of the Spaniards to punish the latter's abuse and their behavior as patrons. Even the Incas who were powerful in their conquests were forced to back off when faced by the valiant Shuar.

We must understand that there is no culture superior to any other, but that some started their history before others. It is a crime to suggest that because they had a head start in the historical process, they can then look back and call those who face the horizon of the future: SAVAGES, BARBARIANS, IGNORANT, INDIANS, JIBARO. In short, every people have lived in a different time, but in the end, we were all born naked, we all once lived in caves and were rustic.

The pages I write are the concealed truths of those who wished to civilize us. Thousands of folks [*paisanos*] went through the Mission. They too will affirm [the content of] my writings. (7–8)

Tibipa's memoirs recount his disillusion with the internado. He does so in three parts. In the first, he recounts how, like his elder brothers, he was separated from his parents and taken to the mission school. He describes being scared and anxious but also full of wonder and expectation about the new things he would learn there. However, in the second part, his expectation soon turns to horror and condemnation as the misery of the mission school is revealed to him in all its ugliness. The food the children received was poor, the religious singing in Latin was a demonic delirium, the conditions of work abusive. In each of the book's twenty-one stories, Tibipa recollects episodes of hardship and suffering. In the final part, he narrates his expulsion from the internado under false promises that the padres would continue to support his studies. When these promises vanished in thin air, Tibipa managed to pursue his formal education thanks to the extraordinary efforts of his father.

Rather than turning him into an educated Shuar who could stand against the colonists (to whom he refers as "monkeys," 11),<sup>12</sup> the internado triggered a process of disempowerment and "whitening" for Tibipa (e.g., the episodes when he was "forbidden to speak Shuar" and when "the change of name" took place). He experienced the internado as a painful process of illness ("imported by the colonist," 31), punishment, the forced absorption of poisonous substances like "*el purgante*" (purgative, 33), and subordinate peonage. At the root of the sense of betrayal Tibipa experiences is a clash between two different views of civilization. If missionaries enforced civilization as a necessary process of "de-shuarization," Tibipa sought civilization to become better than the colonists, to become a Shuar who masters the instruments of colonial power.

In this, the text could also be seen as a counter-image of two edifying biographies of Shuar mission students written by an Italian missionary, José Carollo (1975, 1977), which have fallen into oblivion. Written in the 1970s, both biographies are optimistic about the success of the boarding school and the Catholic mission. In the texts, vaguely reminiscent of apostle Paul's conversion testimony, the valuable achievement of civilization and Christianization is depicted as the fruit borne of a personal struggle against the regressive forces of Shuar culture (language, shamanism, polygamy, etc.). As anthropologist José Juncosa writes, these biographies "silence the efforts of reaffirmation of themselves [the Shuar students] as active subjects of the transformations that occur in their lives, and which thus narrated, have nothing to say and nothing to do" (2017:152, our trans.).

Unlike the traditional autobiographical war stories collected by previous ethnographers, which are narrowly tied to internal cycles of feuding, Tibipa's memoirs foreground a process of transformation in which missionaries and colonists are central characters. In the past, the colonists were perceived to wreak havoc in an indeterminate, impersonal, and continuous way, and for this reason, warrior autobiographies excluded them from the kind of personalized contentious narrative developed therein, "which emphatically stress individual agency and the consequences of intentional acts" (Taylor 2014:108). As Taylor (2007:149) observes, "the Jivaro [Chicham] preserve no oral record of the history of their relations with Whites."

However, the omission of external drivers and actors of change transforms dramatically after the missionization of Shuar youths in the Upano Valley. For the first time in Shuar history, a generation of children were separated from their parents and raised in a totalitarian institution. This experience created a spatiotemporal break from the "lifeways of the elders," which became requalified as a world of savagery. At the internado, the colonists and missionaries are no longer impersonal forces far removed from Shuar lives; they become personal agents of change, and Shuar must endure their concrete acts of domination but also directly confront them. In one episode, for example, Tibipa hit back with a fist when a missionary tries to stop him from entering the dining hall: "I had to show that I was Shuar, the son of a warrior father" (35).

The alumni of the mission share a collective memory of orphanhood that creates a rupture in the construction of the person and foregrounds interethnic relations. As we have seen in Tibipa's preface, he mobilizes a historical narrative that recalls collective feats directed against the colonists, both Spaniards and mestizos. He conjures up a past in which Shuar continuously took up arms against the colonists, evoking powerful images of collective unity and bravery. The emphasis on bellicosity in a historical moment when war has been discontinued recalls the nostalgic representation of the "*Jivarito valiente*" (the brave little Jivaro) that grew out of the experience of colonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Descola 1982:235; Gnerre 2012:594).

It is precisely in voicing a form of split consciousness that Tibipa's autobiography succeeds. While he insistently denounces the savage-civilized distinction that mars the missionaries' view of history, his ongoing reliance on this distinction reflects just how much the experience of missionization has influenced his own way of thinking about change. His autobiography illustrates above all the shift in historicity<sup>13</sup> experienced by many Shuar living in the colonial frontier, and especially by the Shuar schoolteachers who studied in the internados.

Those students who trained with missionaries share a historical discourse that appropriates the idea of civilization. Yet, while some of them, like the scholar Manuel Mashinkias (2012), whose work we explored elsewhere in this volume (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019), use writing to develop a scientific take on culture (what we called there an "inculturation of science"), others, like Tibipa, opt for a denunciation of colonization in the first person.<sup>14</sup> Tibipa contrasts two different contexts (pre-missionized times and post-missionized era), whereas the project of inculturation advanced by Mashinkias harmonizes these contexts by deploying theological interpretations advanced by missionaries to produce a scientific account of Shuar vision quests. Note, for example, the difference in the way Tibipa describes Shuar education when compared to Mashinkias's attempt to "scientificize" it: "the development of children in the Shuar home was caring, but not in a scientific form" (2008:23). For Tibipa, the mission school was obviously never a place to acquire and learn about "Shuar culture"; rather, it was a place where he hoped to learn the techniques and knowledge of the rich colonists.<sup>15</sup>

For the same reason, Tibipa does not embrace the discourse of indigeneity mobilized by contemporary intercultural teachers. He discards the term "Indians" (*indios*)—because of its offensiveness—and the term "indigenous" (*indígena*)—probably because it is too generic—and denounces both as colonial constructions. By contrast, he explicitly refers to himself as Shuar when describing confrontational and morally loaded interactions with others (see Baud 2015:274–5 for similar discourses during the *baguazo* among the Chicham Awajun of Peru). In his narrative, Shuar is an identity that resurfaces combatively when the self faces processes of peonization. Tibipa's rejection of "Indianness," therefore, stands for the rejection of a pacified mode of exhibiting ethnicity, now celebrated in the intercultural project (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019).



## Shakaim's Text: Autobiography as a Guide Toward the Realization of an Exemplary Life

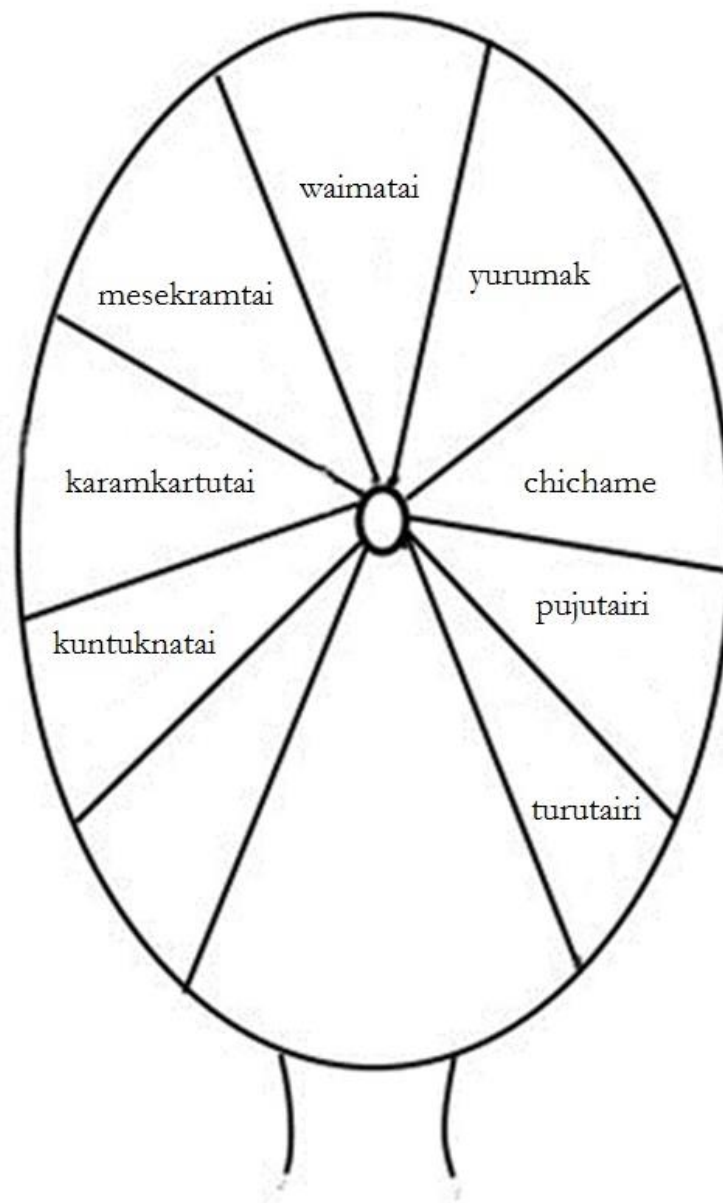
Shakaim's manuscript consists of seven pages written in Shuar in a leather journal. The text is unique in many ways. It is an unfinished manuscript that no one else has read except for Grégory, Shakaim's anthropologist friend.<sup>16</sup> We met Shakaim back in 2012 and have since maintained an affectionate relationship of mutual exchange. While we have permission from the author to discuss his text here, we cannot reproduce excerpts or reveal too extensively its content because Shakaim does not consider it complete.<sup>17</sup> We know of no other Shuar author who has attempted a similar autobiographical narrative, so we are unable to confirm whether this kind of writing is widespread.

This writing is exceptional in that it reconciles the traditionalist stance of institutional texts of common distribution in Ecuadorian Amazonia with the experiential focus of autobiographical writing. Shakaim writes words of personal advice to his children so that, like him, they can achieve outstanding lives. His autobiography illustrates the obstacles a Shuar man must overcome to achieve an exemplary life, to become a wáimiaku (one who has seen). Shakaim is a man in his fifties, without academic credentials, who lives in a small village to the east of Makuma in the territories of the interior, close to the Achuar territory of Pastaza. While this region has experienced processes of sedentarization and market/state integration since the implantation of the evangelical mission in Makuma in the 1950s, it remains far removed from urban towns and regular interactions with colonists.

Shakaim learned to write at the primary school of Makuma, where he met Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) missionaries Glenn Turner and Dorothy Walker, who trained him in linguistics. Undoubtedly, Shakaim has been influenced by this apprenticeship—in his text his use of a sign underscoring the nasality of some letters, for example, follows the convention missionaries use in their script. It is also likely that it was under missionary tutelage that Shakaim first experimented with writing personal experiences, as SIL missionaries sometimes asked students to write short stories of their own lives.<sup>18</sup> However, despite his personal engagement with evangelical missionaries, Shakaim was never an intern of the mission. So, unlike Tibipa and most other Shuar of his age living in colonial towns of the Upano Valley, Shakaim lacks the dramatic memory of separation from kin and suffering under missionary control that has become a leitmotiv in the personal stories of the alumni of Catholic boarding schools. Instead, his narrative centers on the visionary praxis of “great men” (uunt) and focuses on internal affairs and networks rather than educational and colonial institutions. In fact, much of what Shakaim writes about—the importance of attaining good visions and living the Shuar way—would be strongly condemned by the evangelical missionaries of Makuma.<sup>19</sup>

The title of the text is *Shakaim Jea* (*Shakaim's House*) and its subtitle is *Shakaim jeaka juiti; Shakaimsha enentaimtairi takamtsuk ênketka nuiti*, which can be translated as “This indeed is the house of Shakaim, and inside lie recorded the intact [undivided] thoughts of Shakaim.” As we shall see below, the subtitle suggests an emphasis on the unmixed character of the author's thoughts, which Shakaim contrasts with the mixed ways of Shuar schoolteachers and professional politicians who now lead the villages of the interior. The text is primarily written in the recent past tense with a style of exposition that mirrors oral speech. The narrative contains dialogues and (rhetorical) quotations. Indeed, the near-absence of typographical punctuation signs and the abundance of elliptic deixis that omit any mention of the subject/object of clauses make it hard for nonnative readers to penetrate the text (and probably for native speakers too), especially in the fragments that rely on reported speech. The manuscript is also unique in its linguistic purism: the author prefers to use complicated neologisms rather than Spanish terms, a choice that sits well with the antimixing stance the author takes.

The title page features a diagram in the form of a Shuar traditional house-roof (see Figure 1), with a lexical list that illustrates the thoughts contained by Shakaim's house: *kuntuknatai*, *karamkartutai*, *mesekramtai*, *waimiatat*, *yurumak*, *chichame*, *pujutairi*, *turutairi*. The list reveals the author's intention to focus on the importance of dreams, arutam visions (see endnote 18), and the customs of the Shuar house to achieve a good life:



**Figure 1.** Reproduction of Shakaim’s diagram from the title page of his book. See below for a full explanation of the figure.

*Kuntuknatai* refers to dreams related to hunting; *mesekramtai* is the act of dreaming that foretells ominous or dangerous events for the dreamer and/or his or her close kin; *karamkartutai* are dreams in which the dreamer vividly interacts with powerful entities; *waimatai* is the act of acquiring visions, especially of the arutam kind; *chichame*, (our language) refers to the Shuar language and the ability to speak well, the single most important quality a man must possess; *yurumak* refers to food or nourishment, on whose multiplication a family depends to achieve vitality, strength, health, and good relations with others; *pujutairi*, literally “that which is ours and is properly settled” or “that which is our being, seated in the proper manner,” is often the Shuar expression used to translate *cultura* (culture); *turutairi*, literally “that which is ours, done in the proper way,” refers to the typical ways of doing things. It is sometimes translated into Spanish as *costumbre* in the sense of custom.

In this list, Shakaim creates a set of semantic domains to describe Shuar ways of life, a stylistic choice analogous to that Shuar schoolteachers use when they index cultural contents in university theses. However, to discuss these domains, Shakaim takes a different route. Instead of giving an abstract explanation of the role of arutam in the education of Shuar children,

as do teachers like Mashinkiash (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019), he presents a personal and contextualized account of visionary selfhood. He starts by mentioning an arutam vision he had at an early age, which involved a trip to a faraway land. Shakaim recalls the strict, lengthy periods of fasting he underwent to have this vision. He mentions that the only person to whom he spoke about it—his father—was skeptical about its realizability. The very existence of the narrative is to confirm that the vision finally came true, so Shakaim uses it to vindicate his prowess, recalling the conflicts he overcame or deflected and the number of situations in which his oratorical skills and outstanding reputation—two skills that index the author’s visionary power—helped him influence his tribesmen and turned the tables in his favor.

During one of our conversations in his house, Shakaim spoke about his text in the following manner:

[The text comes] from me, what exists in my house, it’s my experience, from my dreams, my visions. It’s for my children. Among Shuar, no one who has dreamt has written. [I mean], people who have their vision, who have thought about the future. So, [the text] is for my children and grandchildren, and other youths, so that they understand the obstacles ahead to fulfil one’s vision, to stand out, to be able to defend oneself. So that they can appreciate, and compare, the conflicts that I’ve had to overcome.

Shakaim’s narrative takes the form of a parental lesson, a written *chichamat*, an oral speech through which parents seek to instill “straight” or good thoughts in their children. Through his personal story, Shakaim wishes to inculcate in his children the importance of discipline and sacrifice so that they too can have good visions and live well. The good life he illustrates is not romanticized, as often happens in intercultural pamphlets; rather, he gives voice to an eminently adversarial selfhood where success is measured by the effectiveness by which a man manages conflict, beats his enemies, and defends his close kin.

Shakaim’s text is a far cry from the abstract corpus of ideas that schoolteachers compile in textbooks to teach their pupils “how to be Shuar” in the classroom; rather, his narrative embodies a way of life. Likewise, he describes a system of customs embodied, not in the teachings of the dying sages, but in his own individual strategies and accomplishments. Given the title of the manuscript, Shakaim clearly envisions a return to the symbolic universe of the household, the core of sociality in pre-missionized society. His thoughts—which, as he writes, “lie recorded” in his house—give voice to a Shuar individualist ethos, suggesting that tradition, for people like him, is embodied in everyday practices and tied to the reproduction of kinship and Shuar homesteads.

An overarching goal of Shakaim’s narrative is to counter the goal of modernization promoted by Shuar professionals, most of whom have trained as schoolteachers. He worries about the challenges facing his people in the contemporary world and thinks Shuar must study to confront them. However, he believes that professionals are mistaken to consider that the solution to the Shuar problems lies in aping the ways of the colonists. The answer for him lies instead in guiding children to achieve good visions so that they can prepare for a future of controlled openness to the outside. In other words, his personal narrative offers a proposal for self-customized development. If Shakaim wishes to record his way of life on paper for his children to read in the future, this is not to memorialize past teachings in danger of extinction; rather, he puts his unique and personal destiny at the service of the future generations because, in his view, this is how he can best contribute to the preservation of tradition. In so doing, Shakaim also paves the way for an alternative mode of transmission to that envisioned by “the experts of culture” (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019). While entrusting everyday knowledge to writing, Shakaim takes it upon himself to transmit his personal stories and knowledge to the younger generation, thereby bypassing the mediation of Shuar schoolteachers and academics.

Thus, alongside the appropriation of the mnemotechnical features of writing, to better understand what motivates Shakaim to write it is useful to see his narrative as competing with the scholarly texts we analyzed in “The Shuar Writing Boom” (Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019). For him, people “who have not seen” write school texts, that is, people who lack exemplarity. In a context where youths spend increasingly more time in school than in their

parental homes, Shakaim's manuscript could be seen as a way of appropriating writing for domestic purposes.

### Kunkumas's Text: Visionary Autobiography as Augural Self

*My Dreams When I Was Young* is an unpublished collection of short dreams and visions by Iván Kunkumas, or "Mesekratín" ("the Dreamer"), as he has asked to be called. Kunkumas is a man in his thirties from the village of Saíp, in the Upano Valley. The nineteen-page collection is written in Spanish using the first person singular. It was written in one continuous flow without pagination and with no punctuation other than a few commas, exclamation marks and periods at the end of each its seven episodes. The content consists of astonishing encounters Kunkumas had in dreams and visions induced by *natem*, a decoction based on *ayahuasca* and other plants. At the end of each page, he includes a short biography introducing himself as the text's author.

The text is an autobiography of vision in which the author narrates experiences only he has had. The visionary autobiography can be compared to the paintings of shamans that depict visions induced by psychoactive plants. Like oral life histories that focus only on those war-related events narrators regard as essential to their lives (Hendricks 1993:24), narratives of vision focus exclusively on the striking encounters their authors consider essential to their self-image. Kunkumas wrote in the hope that his uniqueness be recognized by others in the future, hence the augural quality of the text. Chicham people are known to avoid recounting their visions unless these have already been realized, that is, once the visions lie in the past (see, e.g., Taylor 1993:439; Rubenstein 2012). If Kunkumas had intended to reveal the unfulfilled content of his personal visions, his visionary autobiography would have been very surprising, to say the least. In a way, however, the author's visions were never meant to be fulfilled in the future. They are understood as remarkable experiences already undergone by the self. In writing them down, Kunkumas seeks to establish himself as someone who has been transformed by the uncanny interactions he recounts, interactions which have thus far remained invisible to others. Therefore, the purpose is less to foretell their realization than to reveal the effects they have had on their author.

The circumstances through which this text came to our knowledge will aid understanding what motivates Kunkumas to record his dreams and visions. One day, Kunkumas was helping Grégory translate the shamanic songs of his father and grandfather, two celebrated shamans of the region to whom he feels very attached. It was late at night, at the end of an exceptionally long exegetic session about the visionary origin of specific shamanic powers, when Kunkumas handed over a roll of papers, accompanying this with a short, formal speech describing himself as someone who had not merely prepared to become "a professional" but also as someone who had been devoted to the "study of things from the heart."<sup>20</sup>

In his narratives, Kunkumas offers intimate testimony of his encounters with mysterious, celestial, awe-inspiring beings, most of whom are clearly associated with the Christian tradition—the baby Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Pope John Paul II, and so forth. All the oneiric-visionary episodes related in the text were new to us except for the first, which Kunkumas had previously told us in shortened form, while highlighting its exceptional character. In the compilation, he entitles this episode "My Marriage to a Mysterious Woman." Given the salience of this dream for the author and the limitations of space, here we focus only on the first dream.

Kunkumas starts by describing himself as a great devotee of the Virgin Mary, to whom he prays so that he can overcome his weaknesses and achieve great things in the future. He then recounts the dream itself, where he climbs a hill and has four encounters with celestial beings, whose otherworldly origin is evident from his elaborate description of their beautiful garments, melodious voices, and exquisite odor.

The first encounter is with a gentleman who addresses him thus: "You asked me for my daughter's hand in marriage and I gave her to you, I want you to take good care of her, to love her and make her happy."<sup>21</sup> After hearing these words, the man goes away, leaving Kunkumas befuddled, or, as he writes, "without answers." He then has other encounters with people who mention his marriage, including a woman who presents herself as the mother of his bride.

Kunkumas is utterly surprised by the announcement and asks the woman about her daughter's whereabouts. The woman points him to a beautiful house with a garden, where Kunkumas decides to hide under some shrubs. A very charming woman, "wearing a pink dress

like a bride,” suddenly comes out of the house, looking in his direction and calling him by his name. Hesitant and astonished, Kunkumas approaches her and tries to kiss her on the cheek, but the woman turns to kiss him on the mouth very sweetly like “thousands of very expensive perfumes.” Kunkumas describes the sensation of this kiss “as if he was flying in a sky so blue and starry with inexplicable joy.”

He then wishes to introduce his bride to his parents, but she interjects with, “My beloved husband, go tell your parents and I will wait for you here to love you for eternity.” Kunkumas returns to his community, where the villagers are celebrating at a party that leaves him feeling indifferent. Instead, he goes directly to meet his parents, who appear to be “in the know” already. He immediately returns to the mysterious woman, but when he crosses the shrub where he had previously hidden, he trips on a branch and wakes from the dream.

At the end of the narrative, Kunkumas gives the reader a clearer idea of this encounter’s impact on his life. For instance, he admits that after the dream, he feared getting married, and that after he did marry an earthly woman, he was unable to have such wonderful dreams again. He also writes that when his earthly woman makes him suffer, the mysterious woman appears, in dreams or visions induced by *natem*, to feed him, leaving him sated for several days.

The rich, oneiric imagery of the episode defies easy categorization. While Kunkumas builds on Shuar oral narratives of dreams and visions, he also takes inspiration from different traditions. The story, which is written in fluent, colorful Spanish, recalls the fantastic storytelling genre, in the sense of Tzvetan Todorov (1975), where the protagonist hesitates before “the uncanny.” But there is a key difference: Kunkumas’s encounters are not fictional; they are intimately autobiographical. The epistemic status of the text is clarified at the beginning of each episode; for instance, at the start of the fourth episode, Kunkumas writes: “Once again, I will share with you the vision I had when I drank the *ayahuasca* brew [*natem*], many say that during the trance one can see all one can think of, I, who have experienced this reality, say that this is a lie.” Another way of putting Kunkumas’s remark is that visions are not mere hallucinations, produced by the subject’s mind, but real apparitions and encounters that happened to him. What one sees in psychotropically induced visions has an independent reality from the subject who perceives it. The truth of the text is also established by the register Kunkumas uses to narrate the exchanges in his dreams: it is one of surprise, to guarantee to the reader that his interactions have not been desired or premeditated. They should therefore be considered real.

His dreams, he tells us, have had important consequences in his life. For example, they affect his relationship with his earthly wife. They also enable Kunkumas to refer to himself as someone who “saw.” Just like shamanic songs that attest to the visionary powers of the shaman-enunciator, Kunkumas’s narratives potentially affirm his renown as a visionary person. Moreover, Kunkumas records his dreams with the intention of influencing those around him. When we asked him why the mysterious woman in the dream was so important to him, he referred to the interpretations of his father and grandfather, two people with whom he had shared his dream. According to his grandfather, *Tsunki*—a mythical being usually associated with beauty and shamanic practice, though not exclusively—had given him a daughter, a fact that, in his view, explained his good luck whenever Kunkumas went fishing. According to his father, the dream showed a direct relation with a *supay*, a powerful auxiliary spirit associated with the lowland Kichwa. The fact that Kunkumas had established this relationship meant that he could probably bypass an expensive apprenticeship under the direction of a Kichwa shaman.

Visionary narratives are often renditions in the first person of well-known mythical stories. In such renditions, the narrator shifts from referring to a third person to using the first person, assuming the personae of the mythical characters, as is common in lowland rituals and personal accounts of visions (see Urban 1989:39; Graham 1995:194; Déléage 2009:45–80). As Kunkumas’s grandfather observed, Iván’s marriage to a mysterious woman thus follows the template of the *Tsunki* myth.<sup>22</sup> The myth recounts how a Shuar man came to live during the day with his earthly wives, returning at night to the riverside to meet his new *Tsunki* bride, a classic example of the widespread theme of spiritual marriage.

But in his dream Kunkumas operates a series of inversions on this myth. For instance, the mysterious woman does not come from the bottom of the river but from the heavens; she is closer to an angel or a mestizo woman than to a snake, which is the animal form that *Tsunki* takes to disguise herself from the man’s earthly wives while visiting her husband’s homestead

on earth. Kunkumas, in fact, appears unconcerned with “acculturation” or with mixing elements from different traditions. We mention this detail because this attitude is rare among the Shuar scholars who control the “great tradition” of patrimonial writing, as we elaborate elsewhere in this issue. For instance, when we presented a draft analysis of Kunkumas’s text at a graduate seminar at a university in Quito, two Shuar students who formed part of our audience—and who logically went on to work in the education sector and publish scholarly material on Shuar “culture”—commented critically on the “acculturated” and “mixed, confused” character of Kunkumas’s work.

Further, unlike narratives of warriors, narratives of shamans are populated with references to the world of white people. Accordingly, what is at stake in Kunkumas’s text is the establishment of a relationship with powerful external beings. This is precisely what differentiates the kinds of subjectivities that Shakaim and Kunkumas shape through their respective writings, even if both place visions at the center of their identity and destinies. We might say that Kunkumas takes on a shamanic mode of subjectivity that differs in some crucial ways from that of the eminent man, wáimiaku, “the one who has seen” (via arutam quests), which best describes the experiences Shakaim puts into writing. Instead of establishing confrontational relations with human and nonhuman Others, “shamans cultivate ongoing ‘amicable’ (usually kin-based, more precisely affinal) relations with specific classes of Others” (Taylor 2014:99). As a result, shamans develop “a kind of Janus-like dual identity, predicated on their affiliation to two distinct species or groups, that of their own kin-based local group and that of their supernatural affinal relatives—typically aquatic animals” (ibid.). This is evident in Kunkumas’ narrative; he transforms the underwater environment of shamans—which abounds with references to the colonists—into a heavenly setting for empowering encounters.

But why is Kunkumas not content to simply encounter Tsunki and instead goes all the way to heaven to meet a Virgin Mary–like bride? We suggest this is because although Kunkumas’s visions can be read as the visionary journey of an *uwishin* (Shuar shaman), he also wished to “update” his visions, or even claim a different status as a ritual specialist, through this revelatory account. This is clear from the abundance of references to Catholic figures and Kunkumas’s stated devoutness. For instance, the last episode in the collection offers a testimony of fervent devotion: after receiving shamanic darts from his father and his grandfather, Kunkumas falls gravely ill because he has broken his period of sexual abstinence, a prerequisite to secure his newly acquired shamanic darts. His father and grandfather try to heal him in vain. Finally, “a dead person wearing the clothes of the friend Pope John Paul II” (who had died recently) descended to operate on him during a vision induced by ayahuasca. The Pope finished the operation by stating, “In the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost, SAINT!”.

Through these narratives, Kunkumas distances his work from the corpus of mythical and visionary narrations of the oral tradition embodied by his elders (narratives with which he is very familiar). Instead, he styles himself as a protagonist of Christian narratives of the revelation of faith and Marian apparitions, a tradition in which Don Bosco, the founder of and eminent figure within the Salesian order, took part with his own writings. The cult and figure of Don Bosco is prominent in the settler towns and ecclesiastic institutions of Morona Santiago, the province where Kunkumas grew up. As Kunkumas surely knows, when Don Bosco set out on his religious career, he wrote his dreams and narrated them to his close entourage until the Pope recognized in him a special devotee worthy of sainthood.<sup>23</sup>

Kunkumas’ fusion of Christian imagery and shamanic narratives to produce a genre-binding narrative may be explained by the fact that he is situated at the intersection of at least three different domains of expertise: the shamanic, the Christian, and the educational. Like his father, Kunkumas studied within the Salesian bilingual system during his primary schooling. Later in life, he became an acolyte of Padre Siro Pellizzaro, under whom he prepared for some time to officiate as a priest. As we showed in “The Shuar Writing Boom,” where we examined the thesis of the Shuar schoolteacher Mashinkias (see Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019), Pellizzaro is well known for his syncretic approach to evangelization. He also developed an apprenticeship program, where he sought to co-opt the role of the uwishin or Shuar shaman for Christian purposes, conceptualizing it as the Shuar priest before the arrival of Christ. This peculiar theological culture has clearly played a role in Kunkumas’s ritual trajectory, though he has developed his own brand of hybridization, which he is keen to publicize through his visionary autobiography. Later in life, Kunkumas gave up a strictly religious career and enrolled

in the University of Cuenca to pursue an undergraduate degree in intercultural bilingual education that would allow him to work as a schoolteacher. However, after a few months in Cuenca, he was forced to interrupt his studies. At this point, he became an apprentice under his father and grandfather, hoping to become a powerful shaman.

So, each of Kunkumas's careers—priest, teacher, and shaman—came to an unfortunate or dramatic halt. He could not access priesthood because he was unable to give up ayahuasca or tobacco and continued to share his bed with women. Kunkumas could not qualify as a schoolteacher because he did not have the means or time to study away from home. Finally, his journey as a shaman apprentice was also frustrated, as he found abstinence from erotic encounters too difficult to abide.

But why does Kunkumas write? Why not simply recount his hybrid dream-visions orally? Kunkumas grew up in a region where written materials have increased in diffusion and importance. His father, Pedro Kunkumas, is both a well-known schoolteacher who designed educational materials and a shaman who draws from the religious syncretism promoted by some Salesian missionaries. On the other hand, Kunkumas's grandfather, Kunkumas Pinchupa, is illiterate but obsessed with grimoires. For some time, Shuar shamans have had to compete with the rise of powerful ritual specialists in colonial towns, the most important of whom are wizards (*magos*) and mestizo healers. What characterizes the practice of "magic," which Shuar insistently differentiate from shamanism proper, is that while the latter is based on the use of shamanic darts and the ingestion of natem, magic is based on reading books, and specifically grimoires. Magic books are one of the latest ritual artifacts on the esoteric "market," which some shamans have sought to appropriate (Mader 1995; Perruchon 2002). Shuar understand magic to be linked to the occult power of the colonists and consider that the ultimate owner of the content of books is the devil.

So, in contrast to his grandfather's experimentation with a ritual specialty of demonic origin that appears too morally ambivalent to most Shuar, devout and Christian-inspired Kunkumas chooses to claim a different kind of special, yet widely accepted, status by recounting stunning encounters with beings who elect him "a saint." By writing a visionary, spiritual autobiography, Kunkumas appropriates literacy to defy the wicked power of magic books—thus outdoing his grandfather—while moving beyond the ordinary literary knowledge of his father. Through the figure of the *santo*, Kunkumas supersedes the figure of the *mago*.

Kunkumas has yet to be recognized as a saint by his fellow men. Here lies the main difference between the texts of Kunkumas and Shakaim, the latter being also closely related to visionary power. Shakaim does not dwell on his vision in his text—he devotes only five lines to it—whereas Kunkumas dedicates his entire text to narrating in detail his dreams and visions. The reason for this is Shakaim is less interested in establishing the real status of his vision. He is already socially recognized as a *wáimiaku*. What matters to him is not providing a sensorially rich description of his vision so that others might believe it; rather, he wishes to leave his younger kin an example of how to attain visions to live a worthwhile life. Further, the audience of Shakaim's text is Shuar, whereas Kunkumas's text targets high-ranking priests, colonist intellectuals, and foreign anthropologists. Like Don Bosco, it is the augural property of his vision Kunkumas wants to capture in his writing. Not surprisingly, Kunkumas welcomed with great delight our intention to write about his texts for a journal with an international readership. His text seeks to convey that he is not just "anyone," or as Chicham people call these unsophisticated characters, "a person for nothing" (*nankama aénts*). For someone who repeatedly failed to sing as a true shaman or to quit drinking ayahuasca and sleeping with women, as would a true priest, this innovation is an original attempt at surpassing personal failures in the pursuit of exemplarity.

## Conclusion

We have explored writing produced by individual authors working without external institutional mediation, even if they have all had established important connections with Christian missionaries. Unlike the institutionally based patrimonial writings of the "great tradition" we explored in "The Shuar Writing Boom" (Buitron and Deshoulliere 2019), which display and canonize a stabilized body of knowledge described as "culture," first-person writings are idiosyncratic. Their authors portray themselves as singular individuals by narrating exceptional pathways: the story of a confrontational schoolteacher who resists peonization and excels at

the margins of the publishing boom; the visionary accomplishments and advice of an exemplary “great man”; and the genre-binding dream-visions of an almost-shaman who claims sainthood. Autobiographical writers demonstrate other qualities than ethnic affiliations and forms of knowledge in the pursuit of eminence. And eminence is sought by narrating an exemplary personal destiny rather than by representing “culture” in the collective mode, as is the case with patrimonial writers who excel in producing cultural compilations and theses. In other words, if Shuar compilations and theses are examples of “Do It Yourself” anthropology (or auto-ethnography)—an expression Hugh-Jones once adopted to describe the Tukanoan appropriation of writing (cited in Andrello 2010:24)—Shuar first-person narratives appropriate writing as a way of “Doing One’s Self.”

But, as we said at the outset, precisely because autobiographical writing pursues singularity, we cannot exclude the emergence of new forms. It is possible that Shuar authors will emerge who fuse both kinds of writing: an “auto-biography” and an “auto-ethnography,” of which perhaps Shakaim’s work is already an undomesticated and idiosyncratic version. In fact, this could well be the kind of text that becomes more common in intercultural Ecuador, taking the form of “testimony” (see Calavia Sáez 2006 for a similar conjecture in Brazil). A recent example<sup>24</sup> from Ecuadorian Amazonia’s Orellana Province is Santiago Santi’s 2016 work, *I Know Where I Come From ... I Don’t Know Where I Go: Narratives of a Naporuna from the Eden Community* (*Sé de dónde vengo ... No sé a dónde voy. Relatos de un naporuna de la comuna de El Edén*). In the book, written in Spanish and published by the renowned publishing house Abya-Yala, based in Quito, the author—a health agent who has collaborated since the 1990s with national and international social scientists—mixes personal narratives (starting from childhood), descriptions of the “Naporuna culture” (e.g., myths, handicrafts, medicines), and reflections on the cultural and environmental changes he has witnessed in his village El Eden. The author portrays himself as knowledgeable about his “culture” (“*Sé de dónde vengo*”) as well as a witness of the alterations “culture” itself has endured, an experience he describes in mostly negative terms (“*No sé a dónde voy*”). In this case, the eminence of the author is based above all on his ability to represent a collective subject (hence an alternate use between “we” and “I” in the text). Thus, Santi uses a genre that focuses on the self to affirm the collectivity. The path of individuation Santi pursues is that of becoming a subject of “Naporuna culture” while taking a reflexive look at it—a path which amounts to adopting an external perspective on oneself and one’s peers. This path fits well with the intercultural project even if, as we have tried to convey to our readers, it cannot be considered the only way to narrate one’s exemplarity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Our analytical proposition thus centers on what Magnus Course and Suzanne Oakdale (2014:17–8) call the “centripetal process of singularization,” which according to the authors refers to the “way in which singular, encapsulated identities emerge at points in time, from the continual flow of perspectives and invoked social positions how, to use Marilyn Strathern’s phrase, the network is cut, and a recognizable entity, a named person, emerges.” As they add, “the copresence of models of the person as multiple, relational, and ‘dividual’ and models of the person as singular, unique, and ‘individual’ are not necessarily contradictory or opposed but rather can also be mutually constitutive” (ibid.:18).

<sup>2</sup> See Deshoulliere and Utitaj 2019. We follow the new convention using “Chicham” to refer to the linguistic family, which includes Achuar, Awajun, Shiwiar, Shuar, and Wampis.

<sup>3</sup> Literally “big” or “great,” the word *uunt* is traditionally a term of respect used as a term of address rather than as a term of reference to denote a mature man with moral authority over the male members of his kin. Uunt were typically prestigious warriors. Currently the term also denotes eminent men who fill formal roles of authority in villages or local governments.

<sup>4</sup> The Chicham people’s quest for exemplarity through antagonistic relationships formulated as “individualism” has been noted by most researchers who have worked in the region. See, for example, Brown 1984:34; Hendricks 1988:219; Descola 1996:223; Perruchon 2003:105; and Greene 2009:199–200.

<sup>5</sup> While all these well-known life histories concern only men, there are some texts devoted to female life histories: that of the Shipibo Ranin Ana (Valenzuela and Valera 2005) and Luisa Cadena’s “lessons” of a “Quechua strong woman” (Nuckolls 2010).



<sup>6</sup> In a way, these works are the mirror image of nonindigenous autobiographies narrating the native turn of their authors. See, for example, Cognat 1977.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, we do not discuss here the poetry of Maria Clara Sharupi and Raquel Y. Antun', Shuar female poets who have participated in international book fairs, as this would entail developing an analytical vocabulary to understand the rise of subjectivist productions within the “intercultural regime” (see Buitron and Deshoulliere, this volume).

<sup>8</sup> Administratively, the majority of Shuar live in Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe, the southeasternmost provinces of Ecuadorian Amazonia. In these two provinces, state integration has given rise to a prominent geopolitical and, to some extent, sociocultural distinction between “interior” and “frontier” Shuar territories. Although the difference “interior”/“frontier” does not map precisely onto a rural-urban dichotomy, there is a sense in which Shuar living on the colonial frontier have experienced a far more invasive process of missionization through mission boarding schools and settler encroachment than those in “the interior.”

<sup>9</sup> Tibipa's critique of boarding schools recalls the text by Jose V. Jintiach, the second-ever Shuar to enroll in University in Ecuador. In his thesis published in the collection *Mundo Shuar* (1976), Jintiach reflects about the difficult process of adjustment that Shuar youths experienced in Salesian boarding schools (see also Rubenstein 2001:271–3). These testimonies are strikingly different from the eulogistic tone of the observers at the time, as in Juan Bottasso's work (1993:181–200).

<sup>10</sup> On the role of written (auto)biographies in Protestant evangelical missionaries' practice, see Vanessa Elisa Grotti and Marc Brightman's (2016) analysis of Tëmeta's “testament,” a Trio shaman who gave up his powers to embrace Christianity.

<sup>11</sup> Shuar people, especially those living on the colonial frontier, reject the term “Jivaro” as an insult referring to the way white and colonist people have used it to connote a savage, brave, or wild person.

<sup>12</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>13</sup> Tibipa's autobiography encapsulates an important shift in the discursive regime of historicity associated with Chicham (Jivaroan) identity, which Taylor contrasts with that of Kichwa-speaking groups. See debate between Taylor (2008) and Norman E. Whitten Jr. (2008) in *Tipiti*.

<sup>14</sup> However, it is worth noting that Tibipa trained at the internado of Méndez, whereas Mashinkash attended the bilingual institute of Bomboiza during the latter's culturalist phase of mission-led education, which was characterized by less aggressive policies toward Shuar youths. The Bomboiza Institute emphasized the importance of “Shuar culture” rather than its elimination in the educational process.

<sup>15</sup> See Buitron 2016:225–72 for an overview of these two goals of education in earlier and contemporary intercultural bilingual schools.

<sup>16</sup> The reader may wonder if Shakaim could have been influenced by the writing practices of the anthropologists. Shakaim, however, started writing before their arrival.

<sup>17</sup> For the same reason, we use a pseudonym for our friend's personal name.

<sup>18</sup> In the 1960s, missionaries began working with Shuar students collecting Shuar myths and life experiences during the holiday courses offered by the SIL in Limoncocha (missionary Jim Hedlund, pers. comm. to Natalia, October 2012). In a chapter entitled “Training Native Authors in Writers' Workshops,” the SIL missionary Martha A. Jakway gives a detailed account of the writers' workshops developed among the Awajun (Chicham) of Peru during the same period (Larson and Davis 1981:297–314).

<sup>19</sup> 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). Evangelical Shuar reject arutam quests as associated with devilish powers due to their central role in warfare and negatively compare them with the goodness of God's power. This rejection notwithstanding, the skills and powers acquired through visions continue to play a significant role in the socialization of children and the way adults understand efficacy even if arutam has undergone a semantic re-signification and subordination to God's power.

<sup>20</sup> The process of developing self-control is represented as taking place in the heart (*enentai*), the center of individuality where one's self-reflexivity, intentions, and the ability to act appropriately reside. For a detailed study of the place of the heart in a Chicham-like society, see Surrallés 2003.

<sup>21</sup> We have translated all the parenthetical citations used in this section, which correspond to Kunkumas's collection, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>22</sup> Full bilingual versions of the Chicham myth of Tsunki can be read in Fast 1976:32–9; Pelizzaro 1980; Rueda and Tankamash 1987:181–96; and Chumap and Garcia-Rendueles 1979:650–4.

<sup>23</sup> Note, however, that we have not found any publications of the dreams of Don Bosco in Morona Santiago. Among the many editions of Don Bosco's dreams, we have consulted *I sogni di Don Bosco* (2011), edited by Pietro Zerbino, who presents it as a compilation of the saint's oneiric stories. None of these stories appears similar in form or content to the dreams related by Kunkumas "The Dreamer."

<sup>24</sup> See also Díaz Peña 2017, whose author is a Bora schoolteacher from Peru.

## References

- Andrello, Geraldo  
 2010 "Falas, objetos e corpos. Autores indígenas no Alto Rio Negro." *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 25:5–26.
- Basso, Ellen  
 1995 *The Last Cannibals: A South American Oral History*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Baud, Sébastien  
 2015 Abandon et résurgence. Du sens de soi parmi les Awajun (groupe jivaro, Pérou). In Karen Hoffman-Schickel and Éric Navet (eds), *Résistances culturelles et revendications territoriales des peuples autochtones*. Strasbourg: Editions Connaissances et Savoirs, pp. 261–85.
- Bottasso, Juan (ed)  
 1993 *Los salesianos y la amazonia. Actividades y presencia*. Quito: Abya-Yala.
- Brown, Michael F.  
 1984 *Una paz incierta. Historia y cultura de las comunidades aguarunas frente al impacto de la carretera marginal*. Lima: Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica.
- Brumble, H. David  
 1988 *American Indian Autobiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Buinaima, Jikiti  
 1996 *L'esprit de la forêt. Mon combat pour l'Amazonie*. Paris: Les Editions de Paris.
- Buitron Arias, Natalia  
 2016 "The Attraction of Unity: Power, Knowledge, and Community among the Shuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia." Ph.D. dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Buitron Arias, Natalia and Grégory Deshoulliere  
 2019 "The Shuar Writing Boom: Cultural Experts and the Creation of a 'Scholarly Tradition.'" *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 16(2):175–94.
- Calavia Sáez, Oscar  
 2006 "Autobiografía e sujeito histórico indígena." *Novos Estudos*:179–95.  
 2007 "Autobiografía e liderança indígena no Brasil." *Tellus* 7:11–32.  
 2014 The Lascivious Life of Gabriel Gentil. In Suzanne Oakdale and Magnus Course (eds), *Fluent Selves. Autobiography, Person, and History in Lowland South America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 187–208.
- Carollo, Luis  
 1975 *Una orquídea perfumada de la selva. Rosa María Hilaria Kajékáï*. Sucúa: Vicariato Apostólico de Méndez  
 1977 *El primer shuar salesiano. José Vicente Wamputsar*. Sucúa: Vicariato Apostólico de Méndez.
- Chernela, Janet  
 2012 "Mascarading the Voice. Texts of the Self in the Brazilian Northwest Amazon." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 68:315–38.

- Cipolletti, Maria Susana, and Fernando Payaguae  
2008 *La fascinación del mal. Historia de vida de un shamán secoya de la amazonía ecuatoriana.* Quito: Abya-Yala.
- Chumap Lucía, Aurelio and Manuel Garcia-Rendueles  
1979 *Duik múun ... ' Universo mítico de los Aguaruna.* Lima: CAAAP.
- Cognat, André.  
1977 *Antecume ou une autre vie.* Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont.
- Crapanzano, Vincent  
1984 "Life-Histories." *American Anthropologist* 86(4):953–59.
- Déléage, Pierre  
2007 "A Yaminahua Autobiographical Song: Caqui Caqui." *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 5(1):79–95.  
2009 *Le chant de l'anaconda. L'apprentissage du chamanisme chez les Sharanahua (Amazonie occidentale).* Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie.
- Descola, Philippe  
1982 Ethnicité et développement économique : le cas de la Fédération des centres shuar. In GRAL (ed), *Indianité ethnocide indigénisme en Amérique Latine.* Paris-Toulouse: CNRS Éditions, pp. 221–37.  
1996 *The Spears of Twilight. Life and Death in the Amazon Jungle.* New York: The New Press/Harper Collins.
- Deshoulliere, Grégory and Santiago Utitaj Paati  
2019 "Acerca de la Declaración sobre el cambio de nombre del conjunto Jívaro." *Journal de la société des Américanistes* 105(2):167–79.
- Díaz Peña, Hilario  
2017 *No estoy viajando callado. Historia de vida de un maestro bora.* Lima: Fondo Editorial PUCP.
- Dutilleux, Jean-Pierre  
2010 *Raoni: Mémoires d'un chef indien.* Paris: Editions du Rocher.
- Fast, Gerhard (ed)  
1976 *Cuentos folklóricos de los achual.* Lima: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- Gnerre, Maurizio  
2012 Los salesianos y los shuar construyendo la identidad cultural. In Lola Vázquez, Juan Fernando Regalado, Blas Garzón Vera, Victor Hugo Torres, and José Juncosa (eds), *La presencia salesiana en Ecuador. Perspectivas históricas y sociales.* Quito: Abya-Yala/Salesianos Don Bosco, pp. 567–628.
- Graham, Laura  
1995 *Performing Dreams.* Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Greene, Shane  
2009 *Customizing Indigeneity. Paths to a Visionary Politics in Peru.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Grotti, Vanessa and Marc Brightman  
2016 "Narratives of the Invisible: Autobiography, Kinship, and Alterity in Native Amazonia." *Social Analysis* 60(1):92–109.
- Hendricks, Janet Wall  
1988 "Power and knowledge: discourse and ideological transformation among the Shuar." *American Ethnologist* 15(2):216–38.  
1993 *To Drink of Death. The Narrative of a Shuar Warrior.* Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press.
- Hugh-Jones, Stephen  
1997 "Éducation et culture. Réflexions sur certains développements dans la région colombienne du Pirá-Paraná." *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 27:94–121.  
2010 "Entre l'image et l'écrit. La politique tukano de patrimonialisation en Amazonie." *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 63–64:195–227.  
2016 "Writing on Stone; Writing on Paper: Myth, History and Memory in NW Amazonia." *History and Anthropology* 27(2):154–82.  
2019 "Patrimony, Publishing, and Politics: Books as Ritual Objects in Northwest Amazonia." *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 16(2):128–50.

## Autobiographical Writings among the Shuar

- Jintiach, José Vincente  
1976 *La integración del estudiante shuar en su grupo social*. Sucúa: Mundo Shuar.
- Juncosa Blasco, José Enrique  
2017 “Saber para prevalecer. Civilización, educación y evangelización en el territorio Shuar.” Ph.D. dissertation, Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar.
- Klaus, Sandra  
1986 *Surrounded by Headhunters. The True Story of Frank and Marie Drown, Missionaries to the Jivaro (Shuar) Indians of Ecuador, South America*. Kansas City: Gospel Missionary Union.
- Kopenawa, Davi and Bruce Albert  
2013 *The Falling Sky. Words of a Yanomami Shaman*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Krupat, Arnold  
1985 *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
1994 *Native American Autobiography*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Larson, Mildred L. and Patricia M. Davis (eds)  
1981 *Bilingual Education: An Experience in Peruvian Amazonia*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Mader, Elke  
1995 “Dia attake der Grüner Magie. Interkulturelle prozesse im Schamanismus der Shuar.” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 120:177–90.
- Mashinkias Chinkias, Juan Manuel  
2012 *Etnoeducación shuar y aplicación del modelo de Educación intercultural bilingüe en la nacionalidad shuar*. Serie Sabiduría Amazónica, vol. 8. Cuenca: Universidad de Cuenca, DINEIB, UNICEF.
- Nuckolls, Janis B.  
2010 *Lessons from a Quechua Strongwoman. Ideophony, Dialogue, and Perspective*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Oakdale, Suzanne  
2002 “Creating a Continuity between Self and Other: First-person Narration in an Amazonian Ritual Context.” *Ethos* 30(1):158–75.  
2005 *I Foresee my Life: The Ritual Performance of Autobiography in an Amazonian Community*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Oakdale, Suzanne and Magnus Course (eds)  
2014 *Fluent Selvas. Autobiography, Person, and History in Lowland South America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Pellizzaro, Siro  
1980 *Tsunki. Mitos y ritos de la pesca*, Serie F, no. 2. Sucúa: Mundo Shuar.
- Perruchon, Marie  
2002 “Magia en camino. Chamanismo entre los Shuar de la Amazonia del oeste.” *Anales* 5:143–64.  
2003 *I am Tsunki. Gender and Shamanism among the Shuar of Western Amazonia*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Rubenstein, Steven  
2001 “Colonialism, the Shuar Federation, and the Ecuadorian State.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19(3):263–93.  
2002 *Alejandro Tsakimp: A Shuar Healer in the Margins of History*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.  
2012 “On the Importance of Visions among the Amazonian Shuar.” *Current Anthropology* 53:39–79.
- Rueda, Marco Vinicio and Ricardo Tankamash  
1987 *Setenta mitos shuar*. Quito: Abya-Yala.
- Santi Avilés, Santiago  
2016 *Sé de dónde Vengo ... No sé a dónde voy. Relatos de un naporuna de la comuna de El Edén*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

- Severi, Carlo  
1990 "L'io testimone. Biografia e autobiografia in antropologia." *Quaderni Storici* 75:894–918.
- Surrallés, Alexandre  
2003 *Au cœur du sens. Perception, affectivité, action chez les Candoshi*. Paris: CNRS Éditions and Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Tariri and Ethel Emily Wallis  
1965 *Tariri: My Story. From Jungle Killer to Christian Missionary; As Told to Ethel Emily Wallis*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Taylor, Anne-Christine  
1993 "Des fantômes stupéfiants. Langage et croyance dans la pensée achuar." *L'Homme* 33(2–4):429–47.  
2007 Sick of history: Contrasting Regimes of Historicity in the Upper Amazon. In Carlos Fausto and Michael Heckenberger (eds), *Time and Memory in Indigenous Amazonia: Anthropological Perspectives*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, pp. 133–68.  
2008 "On Whitten's 'Interculturality and the Indigenization of Modernity.'" *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 6:37–40.  
2014 "Healing translations. Moving between Worlds in Achuar Shamanism." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4:95–118.
- Tibipa, Luis  
2008 *Los niños shuar en el internado de la misión salesiana*. Macas: Publicaciones Tejiendo Palabras.
- Todorov, Tzvetan  
1975 *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Urban, Greg  
1989 The "I" of Discourse. In Benjamin Lee and Greg Urban (eds), *Semiotics, Self, and Society*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 27–51.
- Valenzuela, Pilar and Agustina Valera  
2005 *Koshi Shinanya Ainbo: el testimonio de una mujer shipiba*. Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos / Fondo Editorial de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales.
- Viriato Raposo, Gabriel  
1972 *Ritorno alla maloca: autobiografia di un indio makuxi*. Roma: EMI.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo  
1986 *Arawete. Os deuses canibais*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Ed.
- Werá Jecupé, Kaká  
2002 *Oré Até roiru'a ma : todas as vezes que dissemos adeus*. São Paulo: Fundação Phytoervas.
- Whitten, Norman E., Jr.  
2008 "Interculturality and the Indigenization of Modernity: A View from Amazonian Ecuador." *Tipiti: Journal of The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 6:3–34.
- Zerbino, Pietro  
2011 *I sogni di Don Bosco. Collana scritti di Don Bosco*. Roma: Editrici Elledici.