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Remembering the auca

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Remembering the *Auca*: Violence and Generational Memory in Amazonian Ecuador

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Abstract

In Amazonian Ecuador and beyond, indigenous Huaorani people have received much attention for their history of revenge killings during much of the twentieth century. In pointing to the heterogeneous forms of social memory assigned to specific generations, the article describes how oral histories and public performances of past violence mediate changing forms of sociality. While the victim's perspective in oral histories is fundamental to Huaorani notions of personhood and ethnic identity, young men acquire the symbolic role of 'wild' Amazonian killers in public performances of the past. Rather than contradictory or competing historical representations, these multiple forms of social memory become specific generational roles in local villages and in regional inter-ethnic relations. The article suggests that, beyond the transmission of a fixed package of historical knowledge, memory is expressed in the multiple and often contrasting roles of historical representation assigned to particular kinds of people.

Introduction

In September, 2005 I returned to the Ecuadorian Amazon to visit the Huaorani communities where I previously carried out my doctoral fieldwork. A few days after arriving, I joined an old friend on a fishing trip a few hours downriver from his village to visit his parents' house. It was during the final night of my stay that several children in the house crowded around my friend's elderly father, Awanka, to listen to him tell stories. Awanka spoke about past times, when many babies died as a result of witchcraft, leading to a cycle of revenge killings with which his own generation is closely associated. He warned the children that they should be careful not to speak to a shaman at night when his body is inhabited by his adopted jaguar-spirit (*meñi*). He warned that if the children were even to joke with the jaguar-spirit as it speaks through the shaman's voice, telling it to scare people, a jaguar would go and kill the people they named. Even after a shaman dies, explained Awanka, his or her orphaned jaguar-spirit continues to live and kill people out of sadness and anger for its adopted father.

During my fieldwork, old people like Awanka often told me how their relatives and ancestors became victims of violence, be it from shamans, spear-killing raids or the shotguns of outsiders. In this case, Awanka was explicitly warning his grandchildren about their behaviour in reference to violent conflicts that occurred in the past. It is stories like this one that attracted my interest in the meanings past killings hold for the Huaorani today, and more particularly, the multiple ways in which they evoke the past in their homes, during treks in the forest, and on visits to urban areas in Amazonian Ecuador.

Taking recent anthropological approaches to memory as my starting point, in this article I seek to explain how oral narratives and formal performances of past violence at once mediate inter-personal relations and are mediated by particular cultural notions of personhood and sociality. In particular, I examine how historical narratives have become a key social practice by which Huaorani people attempt to create peaceful sociality in their communities in the aftermath of revenge killings. I describe how social memory is created and recreated by different generations of people in the face of changing cultural encounters both within and outside of indigenous communities. By focusing on the personal, social, and broader inter-cultural contexts of memory-making and its transmission in oral narratives and embodied performances, I seek to highlight how multiple and seemingly contradictory versions of the past emerge in different contexts ranging from daily household life to public folklore festivals in the regional capital.

Memories of past killings, a central theme in Huaorani story-telling, support the dominant idiom of self as victim that has been described as the core of Huaorani personhood and cosmology (Rival 2002). While imagery of past victimhood constitutes the central marker of moral identity in everyday life, formal public performances of history celebrate the image of violence and autonomy by which the Huaorani are imagined in Ecuador and beyond. In tracing social memory from the stories told by older adults in local households to formal public performances of the past by Huaorani youth, this article examines how emerging power relations in Ecuador create new spaces and symbolic values for the public commemoration of the past. In particular, I explore how the *auca* ('wild' Amazonian Indian) in popular Ecuadorian imagination has become a symbol through which Huaorani themselves engage in wider inter-ethnic relations.

Despite the expanding anthropological literature on memory, there remains relatively little attention to how generational and other social differences inform the ways in which people reproduce or challenge dominant cultural representations of the past. In this article I examine how the contrasting representations of violence in oral narratives told by adults and formal ceremonial performances by Huaorani youth both have an important place in Huaorani social memory and ethnic identity. While narratives of past violence appeal to the dominant Huaorani self-representation as victims in everyday life, embodied performances of the 'wild' *auca* killer engage directly with forms of social imagination rooted in colonialism and national identity. I examine how the colonial image of the *auca* constitutes both a specific generational role for young Huaorani men and the 'conventionalization' of popular Ecuadorian social memory. Building on recent anthropological work on the poetics of memory (Lambek 1996) and cultural performance in Amazonia (Oakdale 2004, Graham 2005), I suggest that expressions of the past embodied in urban folklore performances do not merely constitute a politically instrumental 'invention of tradition' in response to the dominant Ecuadorian social memory, but rather reflect the heterogeneous forms of historical representation that emerge between different generations. I suggest more generally that studies of social memory should account for the distinct roles of different generations in evoking the past, as well as the multiple meanings of memory performed at the interface of relations between dominant and non-dominant groups.

From Moral Practice to the Politics of Memory

In recent years anthropologists and other social scientists have had a great deal to say about memory. While this attention is partly due to the wide range of meanings attributed to the term, anthropological perspectives have made considerable gains in challenging conceptualisations of memory as a naturalised technical process that excavates accurate historical 'facts' or 'truth' (Antze and Lambek 1996, White 2006). This analytical turn recognizes memory as a moral practice linking personal experiences and narratives of the past to wider cultural symbols and collective practices in the present. Studies of social memory thus appear to follow linguistic anthropology (and studies of narrative) in examining how memories are mediated by specific cultural contexts, rather than constituting complete semantic containers of recovered truth. But to suggest that memory should be understood as a culturally mediated moral practice is not enough. As Maurice Bloch (1998) argues, to understand the meanings of the past in the present requires understanding how cultural ideas about personhood and kinship inform long-term social memory. For it is these ideas and symbols that mediate the relationship between personalised accounts of the past and collective memories.

The recent boom in anthropological scholarship on memory has in many ways followed Maurice Halbwachs's (1950) thesis that narratives of the past are given coherence and meaning in the present as part of collective memory. Paul Connerton has even suggested that social order itself presupposes a shared, collective memory, as narratives of the past are part of a wider inter-connected set of embedded identities (1989: 21). Within this framework, representations of the past are part of a wider cultural symbolism and moral order by which groups or even nations distinguish themselves (Anderson 1983).

While anthropologists increasingly view memory as a socially constituted practice, it is clear that the past is not represented in a uniform or uncontested way, even within the same social group. In challenging Halbwachs's seemingly Durkheimian conceptualisation of collective memory existing within a homogenous group, Jennifer Cole (2001) calls for more attention to how autobiographical memory is interwoven with social memory. In particular, she suggests that tension and change are to be found at the junctures between individual experience and social constructions of the past (Cole 2001: 23). Anthropological research has also drawn on Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia to describe how individual narratives compete with or even contradict dominant social memory in a dialogical fashion (Smith 2004). This work highlights how colonial and national representations of the past have been incorporated into the social memory of non-dominant groups, thus underlining the importance of recognising issues of power in the 'politics of memory' (Rappaport 1990, Kenny 1999). Whereas some describe the incorporation of dominant forms of social memory as unconscious 'habituation' (Connerton 1989), others point to the diverse ways in which people challenge or resist national and other dominant representations of the past (Rappaport 1990). For example, Cole adopts psychologist Frederic Bartlett's concept of 'conventionalization' (1932) in describing how colonial symbols are transformed into signs of ancestral power (Cole 2004: 118).

Anthropologists have also given increasing attention to how memory is embodied in ritual practice and non-linguistic forms (Connerton 1989, Stoller 1995, Cole 2001). There is no single narrative genre that encapsulates fully the different forms of historical representation or consciousness (Bloch 1998), as the past can be evoked and transmitted through myriad non-verbal forms, such as objects and bodies. Since orated historical narratives themselves are only one of the ways by which people recall and experience the past, my use of the term 'memory' here is not meant to imply the dominant North American psychiatric perspective described by Antze and Lambek (1996), which situates memory as a technical process of retrieving objective experiences. Since I can only assume there to be forms of memory and historicity not expressed in the narratives and performances discussed in this article, I have little basis upon which to suggest what is or is not being objectively remembered. However, even when limiting myself to how people evoke the past in a few specific contexts, there are markedly different types of historical representation to be considered. My focus is thus on the contrasting ways in which the past is evoked and re-created in language and in public ceremonial performances.

Few anthropological studies have addressed memory in terms of inter-generational relations. An important exception is Lison-Tolosana's (1983) ethnography of a Spanish Aragonese village, which suggests that different generations relate to the past in contrasting and often contentious ways. In distinguishing between 'structural time' and 'generational time' he recognised how a single event can hold different meanings for distinct generations in the same community (201). More recently, David Berliner (2005) has examined how gendered and generational relations shape the cultural transmission of religious heritage. In examining how youth acquire secret knowledge of the past in Guinea-Conakry, Berliner provides an important challenge to western assumptions about the 'crisis' of memory as a form of cultural loss. While Berliner's view of memory as cultural transmission illuminates the importance of recognising intergenerational relations in historical representation, his approach also raises the question of whether social practices that evoke the past are necessarily concerned with the transmission of historical knowledge.

In the following article I will examine Huaorani forms of social memory not only as the transmission of historical knowledge or as the basis of generational conflict, but rather as a social resource for expressing and remaking contemporary relations in Amazonian Ecuador. My analysis of Huaorani historical representation suggests that multiple and even seemingly divergent representations of the past constitute mutually legitimate generational roles rather than competing conventions of social memory.

Huaorani Violence and the Colonial Imagination

The Huaorani live on a legally recognised territorial reserve of more than one million acres between the Napo and Curaray rivers in eastern Ecuador, where their subsistence economy is based primarily on hunting, gathering and gardening. While most reside in relatively permanent settlements with airstrips and state-run schools, their long treks in the forest, residential movements between villages, and temporary migration for employment with oil companies operating within the reserve all lead to a mobile way of life. My fieldwork was carried out primarily in the village of Toñampari, which is located

on the Curaray River and is one of the largest of more than 30 settlements in the reserve with a population of 150-250 people.

Despite a total population of only approximately 2,000, the Huaorani have for many years held a prominent place in popular imagination in Ecuador and beyond. For much of the 20th century they were known primarily for their assumed violence, isolation, and resistance to contact with neighbouring indigenous peoples and other outsiders. Until recently they were merely glossed as *aucas*, a Quichua term (also adopted in Ecuadorian Spanish) meaning 'wild', 'savage', or 'enemy'.

While past killings are central to local expressions of cultural identity and social memory, 'indigenous' practices and ideas about past violence should be understood within the broader history of colonialism and state expansion in the Northwest Amazon. The intense cycle of revenge killings between rival Huaorani groups in the middle of the twentieth century, for example, should not be characterised as a timeless 'indigenous' phenomena independent of external influences, but rather as part of the broader violence that has accompanied political and economic changes in the region since the colonial period (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992, Cipolletti 2002). For example, the Huaorani experienced violent incursions by various outsiders, such as rubber barons who raided the area in search of slaves around the turn of the century and oil exploration by Royal Dutch Shell beginning in the 1940's (Cabodevilla 1999). Despite their reputation for isolation up to the 1960's, Huaorani ideas and practices have thus been and continue to be produced and transformed in part through their interactions extending well beyond local villages. In this context what I describe as past violence should not be seen as only a 'local' cultural product or the residue of a time prior to or independent of colonial power relations.

Internal revenge killings and violent conflicts with non-indigenous people, though far less common than fifty or sixty years ago, remain a reality for Huaorani people today. Spear-killings still occasionally occur both between Huaorani and against illegal loggers, oil workers and Quichua shamans accused of witchcraft. I describe the past killings expressed in Huaorani historical narratives as violence because, for the people who tell such stories, these events constitute a dramatic and illegitimate form of moral transgression associated with their kin's suffering in the past. The cultural meanings attached to these events by different generations of Huaorani illustrate the central role of violent death in Huaorani social memory and the changing forms of sociality in which memories of violence are evoked.

Their reputation for spear-killing brought the Huaorani international fame in 1956 when five North American evangelical missionaries were killed on the banks of the Curaray River in an attempt to make what was assumed to be 'first contact'. This event, which was subsequently labelled the 'Palm Beach' tragedy in missionary literature (Elliot 1957, 1961, Saint 2005), became one of the defining moments in 20th century evangelical missionary lore. The Huaorani became not only an icon of Amazonian 'savagery' and violence, but also the target of an intensive and highly publicised evangelical mission campaign by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the 1960's (Stoll 1982). The 'history' suggested in much of the missionary literature that followed refers to how the vast

majority of Huaorani almost completely abandoned both internal revenge killing and violence toward outsiders during the 1960's as missionaries established the now legendary '*auca* mission' (Yost 1981, Robarchek and Robarchek 1998).

While in Ecuador the term *auca(s)* referred specifically to the Huaorani during much of the 20th century, the image of the *auca* 'wild man' also holds an important symbolic place in many parts of South America. For centuries images of the wild, yet powerful, Amazonian Indian have informed shamanism, ritual and relations between highland and lowland people, particularly in the Andean countries (Salomon 1981, Taussig 1987, Taylor 1994). Michael Taussig (1984) has described how stories about the 'savagery' of 'wild' *aucas* in European colonial imagination became a powerful political force in conquest and the culture of terror wrought by the rubber boom at the beginning of the twentieth century. This colonial fantasy of the forest-dwelling 'wild man' projected onto Amerindian people the very practices of violence carried out by white people, thus becoming a tool for political domination. Taussig refers to how this colonial discourse became a fictional reality confirmed by the stories about *aucas* told by indigenous people themselves, as the imagined savagery of the mythical wild man 'functioned to create, through magical realism, a culture of terror dominating both whites and Indians' (Taussig 1984: 492).

In Amazonian Ecuador, the term *auca* became an important social category within regional inter-ethnic dynamics during the colonial period. This is clear in Anne-Christine Taylor's (2007) analysis of a three-tier system that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which people were classified as either *aucas* ('wild' Indians), *mansos* ('tame' Indians) or *mestizos* ('mixed' people). 'Tame' people consisted of indigenous people who were drawn to Christian missions in the wake of colonial expansion, becoming intermediaries between so-called 'wild' Indians and *mestizos*. By the twentieth century, due to their reputation for isolation and conflicts with outsiders, the Huaorani had become one of the archetypical 'wild' groups in Ecuador, and as a result are still commonly referred to by the name *aucas*. Taylor describes how so-called 'wild' and 'tame' groups constituted distinct positions in a mutually interdependent system in which 'wild' Indians were continually incorporated into relations with 'tame' Indians through trade and marriage. She suggests that despite sharing similar subsistence and other practices today, *auca* and *manso* groups can be distinguished by their contrasting ways of representing the past. In contrast to 'tame' groups, who emphasise their own historical transformation, so-called 'wild' people express the past as a continuous series of internal adversarial relations, thus creating an image of the past that marginalises historical changes[1]. While the past certainly remains a fertile ground for the construction of ethnic identities in the Ecuadorian Amazon, the following discussion illustrates how multiple and seemingly contradictory representations of the past co-exist today within Huaorani social memory.

Remembering Violence: Huaorani Oral Histories

Even before I was able to understand their language, it was clear to me that much of Huaorani storytelling concerned past killings. In telling me stories about their deceased

relatives, my hosts would often mimic the body motions involved in killing with spears, the most common means of attack in the past. Parents and grandparents often tell these stories around the cooking fire in the evening as younger people sit quietly and listen to stories about relatives, many of whom they know only through such narratives. What is most impressive about these tales, apart from the remarkable and tragic events themselves, is the amount of detail with which they are told. They often describe the precise place where the victim was killed, what was going on in the home, what the victim was eating, drinking, or thinking, whether or not the person was awake, and in some cases even what he or she was dreaming before or at the time of the attack. Along with the detailed narratives, which often reveal trickery and surprise at the expense of the victims, orators make extensive use of sounds associated with the violent struggle.

While many war narratives have been told to me by men, women also describe the killings suffered by their families in the past. Most young people have extensive knowledge of the characters involved in well-known spear-killings, especially those involving their own family members. However, they usually lack the confidence, authority and detailed knowledge that adults exhibit in their own storytelling. Although this has much to do with differences in age and practice in telling stories, older generations have much more personal experience with the violence they narrate. Many adults have witnessed and taken part in the killings they describe, and even the stories that are one or two generations removed from the teller almost always involve his or her close kin. Even so, the narrators of these stories demonstrate a remarkable ability to describe and mimic the most obscure details of events they could not possibly have witnessed themselves[2].

Listening to these oral histories, it became clear to me that there was an exchange of valuable knowledge in these situations beyond merely learning who killed whom in the past. These stories have an important role in constructing moral narratives in relation to specific audiences (Basso 1995, Cruikshank 1998), and particularly in affirming the narrator's commitment to peaceful sociality in the aftermath of violence (High 2006). I generally accept that the events described in such narratives did indeed occur. However, it is not my concern here to attempt to determine any real 'history' or 'memory' in the sense of the actual sequence of events as they objectively occurred. Rather, my concern is with the meanings and uses of memory as a culturally mediated moral practice (Lambek 1996). The narratives I describe as 'historical' are presented by the narrators as real in describing specific people from no more than two or three ascending generations, as opposed to other types of narrative, such as myth, which generally are not presented as events that actually happened to known people. While the relationship between myth and history has been hotly debated in South American anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1981, Hill 1988, Turner 1988, Gow 2001, Whitehead 2003), there is little confusion among my Huaorani informants regarding the difference between the comic follies of mythical characters and the seriousness and anguish often expressed in what I call historical narratives.

Local oral histories of violence and victimhood assert a view of the past that is central to Huaorani conceptualisations of personhood. Laura Rival (2002) has suggested that this

'victim's point of view' expresses a shared Huaorani identity as 'prey' to aggressive outsiders. For example, when discussing past conflicts with 'outsiders' (*cohuori*), Huaorani elders explain that they until relatively recently assumed all non-Huaorani people to be cannibal enemies (Yost 1981, Robarchek and Robarchek 1998). This identification as paradigmatic victims appears to invert the common structure of 'ontological predation' described by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1992, 1996) as a general cosmological model in Amazonia. Whereas in many Amazonian societies personhood is produced through the necessary symbolic incorporation of outside 'prey' through hunting and warfare (Fausto 2007), Huaorani narratives offer a contrast to this model of alterity by insisting on their own position as victims of violence, as 'Huaorani lore values the killed, not the killer' (Rival 2005: 297).

If the victim's perspective is central to the constitution of personhood, men and women are positioned differently within Huaorani notions of sociality and alterity. As Rival states, 'Men and women, who share the same cultural identity, are equally vulnerable to predation; but men can turn into enemies of their own people in ways that are not available to women' (ibid: 301). While women, who marry uxorilocally, are associated with regeneration and interiority, men are seen as less attached to humanity and thus vulnerable to be overtaken by the non-human predatory desire to kill.

When asked why there was so much killing in the past, my informants often described how men were 'angry' (*pii*) that their own families suffered witchcraft and killings by other Huaorani[3]. As anger and revenge are certainly still concerns today, they often expressed the deplorable nature and lack of justification for past spear-killings. Killings are commonly described in morally charged terms, such as *ononki* (unjustified/deceptive), *wene* (bad/evil), or *wiwa* (bad/ugly). *Ononki* is both a light-hearted term referring to a mistake someone has made, perhaps simply going the wrong way on a path, and is also used to describe intentional behaviour that either aims at tricking someone or in reference to unjustified or unprovoked killings. The term *wene* can also be profoundly morally charged, to the extent that Huaorani translate it as the Spanish word *diablo*, meaning 'devil'. I employ the notion of victimhood here not because it matches particularly well any single word in the Huaorani language, but rather to describe their frequent criticisms of past violence. It could be argued that any person who is killed is by definition a 'victim'. However, I use the term more particularly to evoke the imagery of unjust suffering and moral transgression by which my informants describe past events.

While people have diverse experiences and stories of past violence, imagery of victimhood is also part of a wider pattern in Huaorani historical narratives. This becomes clear when stories are reproduced from one generation to the next. One well-known story among the family with whom I lived concerns the death of an ancestor called Inihua. It was first told to me by Ompure, a very old woman, as I attempted to piece together a genealogy of her family. Upon reaching Inihua's name in her own family history, Ompure launched into a lengthy story about *Inihua-huori* ('dead Inihua'), her maternal grandfather. Although she briefly mentioned his wives, children and other personal information, the focus of the story was the tragic way in which he died at the hands of

enemies. Inihua was involved in an ongoing conflict with his enemies downriver when he decided to build an enormous longhouse with the aim of bringing together the warring groups for a communal feast (*eëme*). Inihua was working to place palm leaves on the roof of the house when his enemies attacked, spearing him from below. As in other narratives of spear-killing, Ompure explained in detail how the struggle ensued, demonstrating with her hands where the spears entered Inihua's body and re-enacting the motions of his killers in this unusual attack waged from below.

In describing the context of the attack, Ompure emphasised that her grandfather was in the process of attempting to rebuild alliances with his enemies at the time of the killing, situating him firmly as a victim of violence and betrayal. Communal feasts are special events that involve one household inviting one or more others to share in abundant food, drink, singing, dancing, sexual liaisons and rituals to mark out marriage arrangements. The description of Inihua working on a new house for a planned feast evokes the moral place in which she situates her family. Upon questioning her further, Ompure admitted that Inihua himself had killed enemies before. However, this clearly was not relevant to the story she wanted to tell.

I later heard another account of Inihua's death from the mother of the family with whom I was living (Ompure's daughter). In this case I asked her directly about her great-grandfather. She had much less to say about Inihua than did her mother, but before long she too was describing and mimicking with hand motions how he was speared working on his rooftop. Ompure's daughter did not appear to know a very detailed story about Inihua, lacked the ability or confidence to fully tell it, or simply did not want to take the time to explain it to an imperfect speaker of her language. However, her short account did identify the treachery in Inihua's death, which appeared to be the key element that gives this story the moral charge it has for her family.

Ompure and other Huaorani who told me accounts from the victim's point of view certainly could have told stories about the enemies their ancestors killed, but this is not the perspective they generally took in their accounts of past violence. In attempting to explain why they narrated events in the way they did, it is important to consider how victimhood is part of the wider social memory by which Ompure's kin and neighbours lay claim to a common moral identity in relation to the past. Beyond the mere interest they show in stories about killing, the general emphasis placed on victimhood in these narratives is closely related to their efforts in recent years to denounce and prevent the intense violence that few members of the previous generations were able to escape. Being a victim thus constitutes a key aspect of Huaorani sociality in larger villages which today incorporate families with histories of violent conflict.

Given the presence of Christian missionaries between the 1960s and 1980s, evangelical discourses have significantly influenced contemporary Huaorani social memory and other practices. Many older adults lived for years at the mission and converted to Christianity[4]. Missionary ideology continues to have a strong presence in some contemporary contexts, including historical narratives and discourses of victimhood, which sometimes draw directly from a biblical narrative of Christian martyrdom (High 2008). One of the primary

goals of the mission was to suppress a Huaorani cultural logic in which anger following the death of one's kin required subsequent revenge killings (Robarchek and Robarchek 2005). The missionaries thus promoted an image of Jesus suffering violence for the sake of the group; a narrative of martyrdom that confers the moral status of the victim's perspective. While it is difficult to speculate about the actual relationship between missionary ideology and Huaorani notions of personhood[5], it is clear that revenge-killings decreased significantly in the years following the establishment of the mission and that the narrative of Christian martyrdom probably had an important influence on the present state of social memory.

From Victims to Killers: Performing the *Auca*

Despite the emphasis on denouncing and avoiding conflicts in much of village social life, Huaorani social memory is not entirely confined to the victim's perspective. In some contexts Huaorani project a view of themselves and their ancestors not as quintessential 'victims', but rather as 'wild' *auca* killers. Public performances, particularly by young men, thus provide a view of Huaorani history and ethnic identity that appears initially to contradict the emphasis on victimhood and peaceful conviviality generally expressed in common across generations and genders. Attention to generational differences and the contexts in which social memory is (re)created reveal both the multiple perspectives and unified cultural logic within seemingly contradictory representations of the past.

Aware of the sometimes famous deeds of their relatives and the meanings past killings have for other indigenous peoples, schoolteachers[6], politicians, tourists and anthropologists, young men in some contexts assert their identity with the violence attributed to their ancestors. Much of this imagery is promoted in local schools and at festivals organised outside Huaorani villages. However, young men themselves take a particularly active interest in performing violence and autonomy. Their public role as 'wild' *aucas* is also sanctioned and encouraged by the same older adults who insist on their own moral position as victims of violence in the historical narratives they tell within their households.

While relatively few Huaorani live outside their territorial reserve, many young people, and especially young men, make regular visits to regional cities during school vacations. They are normally received by the families of Huaorani political leaders who work at the indigenous political organisation[7] in the regional capital. Students also make occasional trips to cities organised by their local schools. These trips involve organised performances and competitions designed to give young people the opportunity to represent their 'culture' in front of large Ecuadorian audiences. Village events are normally organised by schoolteachers and presented to local audiences and visitors from other Huaorani communities, while major city events involve a greater degree of preparation by parents and students, including the production of costumes and objects which Huaorani associate with acting 'like the ancient ones' (*durani bai*). These public performances provide a stage for Huaorani self-representation both within their own communities and to wider *mestizo* (non-indigenous) audiences. In both of these cases, young people are expected to represent Huaorani history and cultural identity by performing images of violence. The past is fundamental to these performances, as they

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are judged in terms of their perceived degree of continuity with an imagined past of nakedness and warriorhood popularised in accounts of 'wild *aucas*' in the region.

Young men have more experience with city life than do their parents and female siblings and are familiar with the often blatant prejudices that mestizo Ecuadorians and foreign nationals have toward indigenous Amazonian people, and particularly the Huaorani. While racism in Ecuador has received considerable attention itself (Rahier 1998, Cervone and Rivera 1999), my interest here is in how Huaorani people, and particularly young men, are rewarded for performing the symbol of 'wild *aucas*' in popular Ecuadorian historical imagination. Schoolteachers have an important role in promoting representations of violence and other aspects of Huaorani 'culture' as they see appropriate. Rival (1992) has examined the ways in which school education discourages much of what non-indigenous teachers associate with local customs. Today, however, teachers also have a role in promoting what they see as 'typical' Huaorani culture. In Ecuador and especially in the Amazonian region, stereotyped images and practices associated with the past are often described as *tipica*, a Spanish word best translated as 'stereotypical' or an object or practice associated with one's 'heritage'. Huaorani themselves have adopted this word and use it in similar contexts to the expression *durani bai* ('like the ancient ones') in their own language. In talking about such imagery and their public performances, they often make an explicit reference to the past and the practices of their ancestors.

Most events in which students dress 'like the ancient ones' take place at school-related activities organised by schoolteachers. Teachers choreograph one of the most explicit images of the *auca* warrior for the annual '*juramento*' (oath), where students line up and march in a single-file line before kneeling to kiss the Ecuadorian flag and pledging allegiance to their country. All over Ecuador this ceremony is meant to inspire sentiments of national pride and bravery in defence of the Republic. In the Amazonian provinces the ceremony takes on particular significance as a result of the armed military conflict over border disputes between Ecuador and Peru since 1941. Male students march with spears and feathered crowns to communicate that they are prepared to defend their country with the stereotyped weapons of Amazonian warriorhood. The spears are similar to those sold at tourist shops in regional cities, measuring about 1/3 the length of the 2-meter spears used for hunting and very rarely in cases of warfare. However, the potent image of the *auca* warrior is clear to both the viewers and participants. On these occasions female students are asked to wear feathered crowns and hand made palm-fibre bags (*digintai*) meant to symbolise the traditional Amazonian woman. Although these events are orchestrated by teachers, the parents of local students attend and take very seriously the *juramento* and other school activities involving images of warriorhood. Given that this event is seen as an essential part of completing an Ecuadorian education, in this case young men are explicitly rewarded for representing imagery of past violence and historical continuity.

Huaorani students, much like their teachers, describe this imagery of the *auca* as '*tipica*' or in some cases '*la cultura*', which in local usage refers more to the past than to a sense of contemporary practice. Students themselves explain that they are acting 'like the

ancient ones' in these performances, drawing specifically on the past as an ideal image of warriorhood and cultural identity. In everyday life, Huaorani refer to various practices, such as hunting with blow-guns, climbing trees, long treks in the forest, and especially sharing abundant food with kin as being characteristically *durani bai* activities associated with their ancestors. However, it is the image of the *auca* warrior that takes centre stage in public performances of Huaorani ethnic identity and history. Young men joke about the fear and respect this warrior imagery evokes among *cohuori* (outsiders).

In contrast to official events organised at the school, ritual and dance at village feasts organised by Huaorani themselves do not usually involve spears or other stereotyped *auca* body décor. Rather, they initiate their own rituals, such as weddings, wearing the same 'street clothes' used on their occasional visits to the city. In these contexts Huaorani themselves are not so inclined to 'dress up' *durani bai* or mimic past violence for each other. This general lack of interest in performing past violence at village feasts and in everyday interactions is consistent with the critical views of past killings and the often expressed value placed on 'living well'.[8]

Generational Roles and Memory

These performances of the historical *auca* have a significant role within Huaorani communities beyond young people seeking approval from their schoolteachers. Parents themselves take an active role in supporting youth performances at school and in urban folklore festivals outside the Huaorani territory. The same elders who speak critically of past violence in their own oral histories take pride in carving spears and crafting costumes so that their children and grandchildren can embody violent images of their ancestors. Many students, especially young men, enjoy dressing up as 'wild Indians' for its entertainment value and, in the case of urban festivals, for the positive attention their performances receive from the wider Ecuadorian public. They express particular interest in events outside the villages where they represent their 'culture' in front of larger urban audiences. In contrast to the costumes used in school events, they wear beautiful palm-fibre necklaces, feathered headdresses and other regalia produced by their families in anticipation of a big event in the city. For the most important events, such as a protest in the capital against oil development or an urban folklore festival, they rehearse for weeks and arrive to dance and chant fully clad with their long spears, faces painted red with achiote dye, and necklaces full of peccary teeth.

In May 2003, I attended the Indigenous Nationalities Day festival of Pastaza Province in the regional capital, which included performances by a group of about 20 Huaorani. Most were teenage students who came from the same village where I had watched them practice their dances and chants on several occasions in the weeks preceding the event. They competed on stage against several other indigenous *nacionalidades* (nationalities) to demonstrate what the festival presenters described as 'typical culture', such as cooking practices, hunting, the production of manioc beer, dancing, singing and shamanic curing. In some respects the Huaorani troupe were the underdog in competition with much larger Quichua and Shuar groups. In other respects, however, the mixed audience of several hundred indigenous and mestizo Ecuadorians were clearly impressed by the Huaorani performances. While men from all participating nationalities appeared on stage wielding

spears, it became clear that the Huaorani were particularly successful in winning the audience's gaze as 'authentic' *aucas* through their semi-nudity, long spears, aggressive dancing and chanting, and lack of confidence in speaking Spanish.

In public performances like these, indigenous Amazonian nationalities compete not only to represent continuity with the past (*la cultura*), but just as importantly, to reproduce the symbol of 'authentic' Amazonian Indians within popular Ecuadorian imagination. And it is here, in the *auca* symbolism and historical continuity expressed in Huaorani public performances, that we encounter the intersection of Huaorani social memory and the dominant national memory. For members of some other indigenous nationalities (especially Quichuas), this symbol affirms their historical narratives about *aucas* killing their shamans and relatives with spears in the past. For Ecuadorian audiences more generally, it confirms the place of 'wild' Amazonian Indians in social memory; an idealised image through which they contrast themselves culturally and temporally as 'civilised' Ecuadorians. As Huaorani themselves are aware of the responses this imagery provokes, urban festivals become an ironic cultural interplay in which one group performs the role of wildness and violence in part to achieve a degree of social acceptance in another.

In these festivals bodily practices, ornamentation, and material objects have an important role in communicating the *auca* historical symbolism central to regional inter-ethnic relations. The body is a key locus for establishing social identity, perspective and difference in Amazonia (Turner 1995, Viveiros de Castro 1998, Vilaça 2005), where body painting, piercings and feather work have been particularly successful in winning the attention of wider publics as markers of 'authentic' indigeneity (Conklin 1997). The relative nudity, hardwood spears, and aggressive movements that characterize Huaorani performances achieve a degree of perceived authenticity in the arena of public folklore festivals. Spears have a particularly powerful symbolic value in these contexts for participants and audiences alike due to their impressive length and the legacy of Huaorani spear-killing in the region. While Huaorani associate blowpipes (used for hunting monkeys and birds) with household sharing and the perpetuation of the endogamous group, spears are traditionally used only for peccary hunting and warfare and are associated with men and the drawing of social boundaries between Huaorani people and predatory outsiders (Rival 1996: 158). As such, spears have an important role in masculinity and relations of alterity beyond the context of urban festival performances.

In recent years social scientists have given increasing attention to how bodily practices, whether described as 'incorporating practices' (Connerton 1989), 'embodiment' (Stoller 1995) or the 'carnal' aspects of embodied experience Wacquant (2004), constitute 'potent conveyors of meaning and memory' (Stoller 1995: 30). Whereas Connerton and others describe how memory is 'habituated' in ritual practices, bodily postures, movements and pain, embodied memory in Huaorani cultural performances suggests that the body is also a key site upon which people appear to contradict the narrative of victimhood that takes centre stage in everyday sociality. But are young men in these contexts merely occupying their allocated position within the national imagination, or perhaps rebelling against the social memory articulated by older generations? I suggest that, rather than merely

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adopting popular Ecuadorian stereotypes of 'wild' forest Indians or challenging the social identity expressed in Huaorani oral histories, young men can be seen to embrace a generational and gendered role that is to some extent sanctioned by their parents and non-Huaorani people alike. Performing *durani bai* simultaneously articulates their accepted position as 'wild' Amazonian Indians within popular Ecuadorian imagination and conveys the autonomy and strength of their ethnic group – a claim supported by older generations of Huaorani.

It would be misleading to suggest that this is an example of a non-dominant group simply adopting or conforming to the social classifications or social memory of the dominant national society. As Suzanne Oakdale (2004) suggests, 'indigenous people actively refashion national-level identities that they know to have been attributed to them, as they put these identities to use for their own locally specific purposes' (P. 61). Laura Graham (2005) similarly warns that anthropologists should be sensitive to the potentially instrumental roles such performances have in 'the achievement of significant indigenously defined goals' even when they 'appear to lack an explicit political aim that is readily apparent to outsiders' (p. 626). While these performances are often choreographed specifically for inter-ethnic audiences, indigenous people themselves do not necessarily view them as 'inauthentic' self-representations (ibid. 633). For example, *auca* performances by young men draw in part on the historical narratives of violence that have such an important role in everyday life, even as they invert their own position from victims to killers. In doing this, they are not simply reproducing a racist colonial stereotype of 'Amazonian savagery', but rather asserting Huaorani autonomy and strength in the face of powerful outsiders. This becomes clear in protests against oil companies in which they block roads and appear with spears wearing little or no clothing to demand various gifts and services from oil workers. This engagement with the image of 'wild' Amazonian Indians has proven successful in immediate negotiations with the oil industry (Rival 1996) and has become part of Huaorani self-representation in indigenous politics (High 2007). The broader political significance of this imagery became particularly clear in the 1992 when thousands of indigenous people marched from Amazonian Ecuador to the capital bearing spears and other objects associated with ancestral warriorhood in a successful campaign to secure land rights from the state (Whitten, Whitten and Chango 2008).

What is at stake for Huaorani people in performing as *aucas* is not a claim to 'authenticity' according to western criteria of indigeneity, but rather their relationships with a growing range of 'others' with whom they interact on an increasingly regular basis. In this sense, we can see how expressions of violence cannot be understood merely as a 'local' cultural product (Whitehead 2002, 2004). As Oakdale (2004) has demonstrated, indigenous Amazonian narratives of past events also involve generational strategies and conflicts between young and senior indigenous leaders. However, the contrasting forms of Huaorani historical representation I have described do not constitute an example of generational conflicts between 'structural' and 'generational' time described by Lison-Tolosana (1983) or a passive acceptance of the dominant social memory. Rather, they illustrate specific generational roles and strategies in memory-making that relate both to indigenous constructions of personhood and the broader

national imagination in the context of changing inter-subjective and inter-cultural relations.

Conclusion

I suggest that, despite appearing to contradict the emphasis on peaceful sociality in everyday life, the performance of ancestral warriorhood has become a specific generational and gendered role assigned to young men within Huaorani communities. While in everyday life adults tend to place themselves unambiguously as victims of past violence, the autonomous *auca* killer is no less an important part of Huaorani historical representation. Rather than contradictory forms of memory, the victim and killer perspectives illustrate that different generations have distinct roles in representing the past. This is not to suggest that young men avoid engaging in discourses of victimhood altogether or that elders never participate in oil protests with spears in hand. Rather, it is young men, more than women and elders, who increasingly mediate relations between Huaorani and other Ecuadorians both at village schools and in urban areas. Within this context, the symbolic role of the 'wild' *auca* both communicates Huaorani claims to autonomy and conforms to broader Ecuadorian social imagination.

The stories of past violence told by adults and images of the *auca* performed by young Huaorani men illustrate how multiple forms of historical representation, including spoken and embodied memory, coexist (Connerton 1989, Bloch 1998) and take on distinct social roles. Despite the tendency in studies of memory to draw out the contrasts between 'official' and 'unofficial' histories, even the most 'official' versions of the past promoted by governments, textbooks and monuments do not necessarily constitute a unitary view of the past (Eidson 2005). While an image of past warriorhood, as I have suggested, is produced at the intersection of Huaorani and wider Ecuadorian social imaginations, it would be misleading to describe this as a case of competing historical representations or ideologies. Rather, both the 'victim' and 'killer' perspectives I have described constitute culturally legitimate social positions that mediate different kinds of relationships in the diverse sociopolitical conditions in which Huaorani people live. What this example suggests is that cultural performances of the past may simultaneously incorporate or conventionalize a seemingly 'dominant' or 'official' form of national historical representation without contradicting or subverting more localised, non-dominant forms of memory.

These multiple forms of social memory are only contradictory if seen through the lens of memory as the objective recovery of past experience or as a singular, culturally homogeneous construction. By viewing memory as a moral practice that creatively mediates relations between different generations and ethno-linguistic groups, this article has illustrated that the 'victim' and 'killer' perspectives on past violence both have specific roles in Huaorani communities and in their relations with other Ecuadorians. Narratives of past victimhood conform to specific cultural ideas about sociality, personhood and ethnic identity, and thus mediate relations between former enemy households in the aftermath of violence. Embodied performances of warriorhood by young men conform to popular social memory in Ecuador while at the same time constituting Huaorani claims of autonomy and strength in the face of powerful outsiders.

My description of Huaorani engagements with the past suggests that generational and gendered differences are central to understanding the multiple forms historical representation takes in Amazonian Ecuador and elsewhere. Berliner's (2005) study of memory as the transmission or 'passing down' of cultural representations is significant in recognising the generational and gendered relationships through which historical knowledge is negotiated. However, my ethnography suggests that, beyond the transmission of knowledge about the past, specific generations and genders also acquire distinct roles in reproducing and communicating social memory. As Antze and Lambek (1996) and others suggest, memory is not simply the transmission of historical knowledge from one generation to the next. Rather, it is expressed and re-created in the multiple and often contrasting roles of historical representation assigned socially to particular kinds of people. In the case of young Huaorani men, the historical narratives of victimhood they hear in everyday life ensure the transmission of extensive knowledge about the past as well as the culturally acceptable forms of sociality within their own villages and beyond. However, the content and moral charge of these stories does not prevent them publicly engaging historical imagination in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant Huaorani notion of the self as victim.

Huaorani representations of the past provide an example of how 'memory' is not only created at the interstices of personal experience and shared cultural practices, but also at the interface of radically different social imaginations. From this perspective the quintessential victim and the *auca* warrior/killer are not at all contradictory images for the people who narrate and perform them. Rather, specific Huaorani generations and genders have different, yet simultaneously relevant roles in creating social memory. While victimhood is the dominant perspective by which they identify themselves and their ancestors, attention to generational differences and embodied expressions of the past beyond spoken language reveal a fundamental ambiguity in Huaorani social memory. These multiple forms of historical representation should be understood in part as a result of the changing experiences of a relatively small indigenous group within a nation-state. Yet the past is also an important resource through which Huaorani negotiate relationships within their own communities and households. Given their history of revenge killing and conflicts with outsiders, it is important to consider the potential uses of past victimhood to justify violence. It remains to be seen whether the young men who are assigned the symbolic role of 'wild' *auca* killers will in turn draw on images of victimhood, warriorhood, or both in carrying out actual violence in the future.

Acknowledgements

[1] This appears to be an example of Levi-Strauss's (1966) characterization of 'cold' societies projecting an image of continuity by incorporating historical transformations into local institutions.

[2] Although I very seldom recorded these narratives as they were told or even asked people to tell them to me, my questions about kin were often met with tragic accounts of how siblings, parents and grandparents were killed in the past. They were sometimes told in the Huaorani language and other times in Spanish when directed at me specifically. In other cases I simply overheard stories as part of a wider household audience of listeners.

[3] See also Robarchek and Robarchek (1998, 2005), who examine Huaorani revenge-killing from an ethno-psychological perspective.

[4] Despite the vast majority of Huaorani population joining the mission settlement by the late 1970's, few today identify themselves as Christians.

[5] Rival (2002) suggests that the missionaries who established the original mission settlement were accepted in part due to their status as close kin of the missionaries killed by the Huaorani in 1956.

[6] The vast majority of teachers who work in the Huaorani territory are Quichuas or mestizos from urban areas (Rival 1992).

[7] The Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE), formerly the Organization of Huaorani Nationalities of Amazonian Ecuador (ONHAE), has been the formal indigenous political organization representing the Huaorani since the 1990's. It consists of elected Huaorani officials who negotiate with oil companies, the state, NGOs and an increasing variety of international interests.

[8] See Overing and Passes (2000) for ethnographic examples of how peaceful sociality is idealized as an aesthetic of everyday conviviality in Amazonia.

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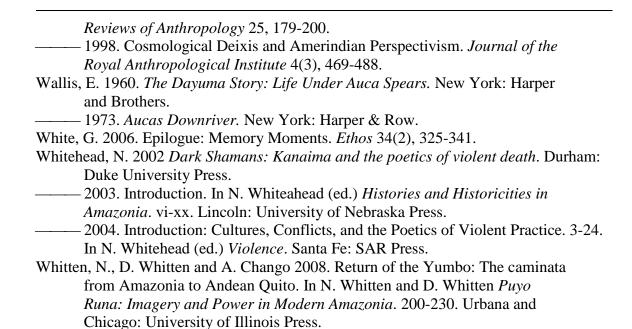
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