

A stylized, grey-toned graphic of a tree with thick branches and rounded foliage, positioned in the upper right background of the page.

# Shaping Natural Regions. Capitalism, Environment, and the Geography of Post-Colonial Peru

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## ABSTRACT

During millennia Amazonia has shaped herself as an integrated cosmos of tangible and intangible beings interweaved as a totality of relatives. This indigenous non-anthropocentric civilizational construction can be better defined by the neologism cosmocentric rather than contemporary ecological terms such as biocentric or geocentric, which emphasize exclusively the materialistic component of the whole system. Colonial and capitalist occupation of Amazonia portrayed and actively reconfigured a manageable “social reconstruction” of Peru’s Amazon Rainforest –La Selva, imposing a new ontology devoid of any ethical concerns. This article will explore the ethnic and political journey of Indigenous Amazonian Communities since the early 1960s to restore a pre-modern and post-modern environmental, cultural, social and ethical conception and practice of Amazonia.

**Keywords:** Amazonia; integrated cosmos; colonialismo; Peru; political ethics.

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“The problem of history is the history of the problem”, K. Marx

“Events are the ephemera of history ... “, Fernand Braudel

“Our planet is being turned into a filthy and evil-smelling imperialist barrack”,  
Leon Trotsky

“Kawsak Sacha (the Living Forest) is our primordial font of Sumak Kawsay (the  
Good Living, the Life in Harmony) ... “, Sarayaku People Declaration, COP 21  
Paris, November-December 2015

**G**eological history, or the “Long Duration” perspective proposed years ago by French historian Fernand Braudel, may be the most appropriate epistemological and ethical tools to approach the study and understanding of Amazonia as a whole integrated living system co-created by millennia of interactive co-evolution of all its/her tangible and intangible bio-physical entities<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, rather than using the neologism of anthropocene – with its constraining reference to a late geological era defined by the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the overwhelming expansion of capitalism, I have suggested to choose a term that enlightens the joint role played by humanity and all other entities in landscaping, bio-scaping and thus ethno-scaping the tropical rainforest, the “selva”, as an anthropogenic phenomenon, a dynamic structured production and constantly expanding reproduction of life resulting from millennia of coexistence of all the “relatives” that inhabit the world.

It is with humbleness, then, that I must refer to the Kichwa people of Sarayaku, the large indigenous territory on the banks of the Bobonaza river in Ecuador and cite their words as the most appropriate ethical definition of what Amazonia has been and still is for thousands of lineages of indigenous people living in harmony – in Sumak Kawsay – in this immense territory now threatened by neo-imperialist destruction. The Kichwa of Sarayaku call their land, their territory, their “environment”, Kawsak Sacha – the Living Forest: “Kawsak Sacha recognizes that the forest is made up entirely of living selves and the communicative relations that they

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<sup>2</sup> Fernand Braudel. 1995. *A History of Civilization*, New York: Penguin Books, (translated by Richard Mayne from the original *Grammaire des civilisations*, Paris: Les Editions Arthaud, 1987). Fernand Braudel's bibliography is immense but I am referring to this single book because it summarizes fairly well Braudel's revolutionary ideas about historiography.

have with each other ... these selves, from the smallest plants to the supreme beings who protect the forest, are persons –*runa*– who inhabits the waterfalls, lagoons, swamps, mountains, and rivers, and who, in turn, compose the Living Forest as a whole. These persons live together in community (*llakta*) and carry out their lives in a manner that is similar to human beings ...”<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages I am arguing that addressing issues of cultural and social representations of Peruvian Amazonia by the national community – both the political society and the civil society – with a narrow temporal synchronic and spatial materialistic perspective (four or three hundred years of history and the reduction of bio-physical diversity to a few commoditized “resources”) lessens drastically our ability to fully understand and interact intelligently and ethically with this vast portion of Peru’s national territory. I am proposing the qualitative shift to an emic way of thinking and analyzing Amazonia, that is to say adopting the indigenous way of knowing and co-existing with the forest as a living entity peopled by thinking and feeling entities with will, intentionality and teleological energy-synergy. Such an epistemic shift coincide partially, with what contemporary anthropologist Viveiros de Castro has defined as “perspectivism”<sup>4</sup>, the Amazonian indigenous conception that the “... world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human or non-humans, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (1998:469). “These apprehensions are not alternatives point of views of the same world, as old orthodox cultural relativism would have it, but rather results from a carrying over of the same point of view into alternative realities” (2000, p. 424, endnote 5)<sup>5</sup>.

The analogy that comes to mind has been pointed out by quantum physics theorist F. David Peat (2002: 31) who has asserted that indigenous peoples of the Americas’ way of knowing is similar to the “quantum physics picture of the material world as being the outward manifestation of patterns, forms, balances and relations of energy ... likewise, (indigenous peoples) speak of relationship among the powers and spirits that surround them ... These relationships carry with them obligations and the

<sup>3</sup> *Kawsak Sacha-The Living Forest. An Indigenous Proposal for Confronting Climate Change* Presented by the Amazon Kichwa People of Srayaku, COP 21, Paris, November 30 - December 11, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Eduardo Viveiro de Castro. 1988. “Cosmological deixis and Amerindian perspectivism”. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.):4: 469-88

<sup>5</sup> Tim Ingold. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. London and New York: Routledge.

necessity of carrying out periodic ceremonies of renewal ... “6. The indigenous conception and treatment of the world – in our case the Amazonian forest – as a living and willing web of inter-relationships rather than a fixed set or structure of inanimate categories without intentionality implies that for indigenous people knowledge-science occurs always in a context where “nothing is abstract since all things happens within a landscape of and by virtue of a web of inter-relationships” (Peat, 2002: 234). These critical and comparative approaches to ways of knowing has been accompanied by profound revisions of Western modern science even questioning the ability of Indo-European languages and logics to operate in a cosmology where objects can be simultaneously members of two exclusive categories: evil and good, live and dead, material and spiritual, “waves and particles”. This epistemological – at the same time ethical and ontological – revolution has been driven by the fundamental insights of quantum scientists such as Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and others who forced modernity to re-introduce metaphysics into our worldview and accept “ontological uncertainty”, “complementary descriptions” rather than single descriptions that exhaust the phenomenon in question, and “mutually contradictory accounts”<sup>7</sup>. But most of all the quantum revolution has confronted us with the existence of mysteries and the ancient philosophical quandary of how to coexist with them in peace and harmony in what the Sarayaku people call the “Sumak Kawsay”.

### HOW MANY AMAZONS IN PERU?

In Peru La Selva or Montaña or La Amazonía is a vast region of more than half of the country that does not have a single official definition. Since the enactment in 1974 of the Law of Native Communities (Decree Law 20653) during the Military Revolution of Velasco Alvarado, and a series of other legislative measures in the following administrations, the Amazon region has been treated more as a cultural ideological construct than as a precise geo-ecological region with its specific policy requirements. The now defunct INRENA (Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales, Ministerio de Agricultura) identified 77,528,030 hectares, the 60.32% of the national territory as Amazonía Peruana. This extension of national territory is covered by

<sup>6</sup> F. David Peat. 2002. *Blackfoot Physics. A Journey into the Native American Universe*. Boston, MA/York Beach, ME: WeiserBooks

<sup>7</sup> Frédérique Apffel-Marglin. 2011. *Subversive Spiritualities. How Rituals Enact the World*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.

tropical rain forest that begins on the Eastern slopes of the Andes at an altitude of approximately 3,800 meters. The actual forested area – the original ecosystem of the tropical rain forest – of the whole Selva has been assessed in few opportunities during various administrations with notable distortions due to political opportunism. Until 1974, 4.5 mm hectares had been deforested, in 1990 the number had grown to 6.9 mm hectares<sup>8</sup>, the current situation of deforestation is practically unknown since the various administration have no interest in revealing the level of destruction caused by the total lack of regulations and control of private and state run extractive activities. A simple projection of the data provided by Marc Dourojeanni's study for the year 2000 average of yearly deforestation of 150,000 hectares per year would add another 2,550,000 hectares of deforestation for the current year of 2017. These numbers contradict the official position of the Peruvian government that the level of deforestation of the Amazon is a little more than 9% while studies of the United Nations in the mid '80s were already showing that the entire South America forested area had been denuded of 40% of its original cover and the two major Amazonian countries Brazil and Peru were responsible respectively of 20% and almost 10% of the loss (Dourojeanni 2010: 44).

This flimsy and possibly manipulated quantitative information about the reality of the Amazon indicates, however, how dangerously deceitful is the neoliberal ideology claiming the emptiness and untouched wealth of this part of Peru that needs to be occupied, “colonized” and developed for the good of the rest of the country. Since the times of President Ramón Castilla in 1848 and through the conservative and liberal governments of the country all the way to the first administration of Fernando Belaúnde Terry in the '70s and the following neo-liberal administrations, the political “imaginary” imposed on the country has been that the Amazon, La Selva, is where lays the country future of wealth. This political geography of deception has sustained for more than one hundred and fifty years the fiction of a *Terra Nullius* rich of untapped resources that can be occupied directly as an internal colony or better yet given in concession to foreign enterprises. Former President Fernando Belaúnde Terry in the early '60s expressed this oligarchic colonialist mythology in the title of his first

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<sup>8</sup> Marc Dourojeanni, Alberto Barandiarán y Diego Dourojeanni, *Amazonia Peruana en 2021*. Lima: Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental (segunda edición), pp. 44-45

political platform and book: “*La conquista del Perú por los peruanos*” – “*The Conquest of Peru by Peruvians*”, letting unsolved the questions of who are the Peruvians and who are the conquered.

#### FROM GEOGRAPHY OF DECEPTION TO ECOLOGICAL REALISM

In terms of geo-historical perspectives the Eastern slopes and foothills of the Andes of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, between an altitude of 1,500 and 3,800 meters on the sea level, constitute a complex mountainous and hydrological system of extreme biological diversity that announces the vast lowland of Amazonia, the largest tropical rain forest of the world. In each country this boundary of cloud forest receives a different vernacular name: *montaña* in Peru and Ecuador, *yunga* in Bolivia, *ceja de selva* (“brow of the jungle”) in most of these countries, or simply *selva alta* (high jungle) and *El Oriente*. The geo-cultural area loosely referred to by the term *montaña* extends from the headwaters of the Caquetá, in southern Colombia, to the headwaters of the Mamoré in Southern Bolivia<sup>9</sup>. The extreme humidity of this piedmont region, caused by the ascending warm air of the Amazon crushing against the cold and dry Andean mountain, creates a blanket of fog – the cloud – that is burned by the sun only for a few hours every day. The eastern Andean piedmont is also the ecological frontier of the major Amazonian cultivar: the *yuca* root (*Manihot esculenta*). Beyond the 1,500 – 2,800 meters of altitude the basic staple of most Amazonian indigenous people does not grow well. Bananas, plantains and others neo-tropical fruit trees are still viable cultivars so is corn (*Zea maiz*), a plant of astounding adaptability and *coca* (*Eritroxylon coca*), one of the earliest plant to be domesticated by the ancient indigenous peoples of the Coastal region of Peru thousands of years ago.

This ecological divide between the Andes and Amazonia has constituted historically a barrier and at the same time a gate for the movement of peoples, cultivars and cultural practices of production, circulation and consumption. Since the early archaeological studies of Andean societies in the 1940s scholars such as A.

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Christine Taylor, “The Western Margins of Amazonia from the Early Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century” in Salomon Frank and Stuart B Schwartz (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, Volume III, South America, part 2. U.K., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A.Ch. Taylor’s *Bibliographic Essay* at the end of the chapter is possibly one of the most complete list of ethnohistorical references on the *montaña* available today.

Posnansky, Julio C. Tello, and A. Lipshutz in Bolivia, Peru and Chile and J. Imbelloni in Argentina had carved a niche to study and understand the archaeological remnants of “Ancient” cultures and their relations to other regions of the Americas and across the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. Peruvian Quechua speaking scholar J. C. Tello put forward the argument that some of ancient pre-Inca societies of the Central and Northern Andean region of Peru showed their clear Amazonian origin. J. C. Tello’s hypothesis would have to wait more than thirty years to be proven by new archaeological studies of the Upper Amazon region of Peru by D. W. Lathrap<sup>10</sup> as well as ethnological studies of indigenous communities living in the upper jungle of Ecuador and Peru<sup>11</sup>.

Eastward, as the Andes drop to an altitude of approximately 600 meters their formation changes into softer hills and increasingly into plains and wetlands crisscrossed by slow moving rivers carrying the rich sediments of millennia of human agricultural activity and geological Andean existence. Here begin the other Amazonia, La Selva Baja – The Lower Jungle – the immense extension of tropical rain forest and slow flowing rivers rich in Andean silt that is deposited year after year on the riverbanks or varzeas and the flooded forest and lagoons, the igapós. In Peru La Selva Baja-Lower Jungle may constitute two third of the total extension of the Amazon. These two major partitions of Peru’s Amazon region: the Upper Jungle and the Lower Jungle can be subdivided in a series of ecosystems with their own specific biological structure, concentration of bio-diversity and potential for species adaptation and survival. Considered as a whole, this 60% of the Peruvian national territory should be treated as Andean-Amazonian hydrological basin, since most of the rivers that flow eastward originate in the Andes and in this case the Andean-Amazonian territory would constitute the 74.4% of the total national territory<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Lathrap D. W. 1970. *The Upper Amazon: Ancient Peoples and Place*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, See also Lathrap, D. 1968, “The Hunting Economies of the Tropical Forest of South America: an Attempt at Historical Perspective: in Lee, R. and De Vore, I. (Eds.): *Man the Hunter*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

<sup>11</sup> Stefano Varese, *Relations between the Andes and the Upper Amazon*, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History, (<http://latinamericanhistory.oxfordre.com/view>), Online Publication Date, June 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Dourojeanni, Alberto Barandiarán y Diego Dourojeanni, *Amazonía Peruana en 2021*. Lima: Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental (segunda edición)

## ETHICS OF TIME AND PLACE

One of the central principles of the Andean-Amazonian cosmologies is the notion of time/space warp – *pachakuti*. Time is written in space-place, space marks time. Humans, non-humans, other-than-humans all coexist in a time-space warp where past-present-future are not separate entities but a coexistent phenomenon so that the spirit protector of the animal, the spirit of the tree, the spirit of the water-river (*yaku*) is existing in the primordial original time, the present and the future at the same time. When I cut a tree to make a canoe I am cutting the tree of the original time, the current tree and the future expression of the tree. That is why I have to ask permission, pay an offering, mourning the loss-death and celebrate the continuity of life. The ritual, even in its bear simplicity, is what enacts the world by acknowledging the origin, continuity and future of each entity of the forest with whom (not which) I interact. In modern Euro American terminology this indigenous cosmology is defined by the categories of History (times/space warp and “long duration”); epistemology, way of knowing; and ethics: consequences of choices, decisions, treating the web of interrelationships as “all my relatives”.

The long historical presence and continuity of these indigenous ethical and cosmological praxes in the Peruvian Amazon region have been impacted drastically by the Euro American invasion, colonial establishment, modernity and late expansion of unconstrained capitalist market economy and its extremely destructive extractivist version. A few hardcore deeply rooted principles of the indigenous cosmologies have survived in clandestinity or as ideal practices of past generations and ancestors not anymore viable except as symbolic re-enactment in ceremonies, performative activities or oral narratives. In all the indigenous nationalities of Peru’s Amazonia the strength of native ethics tends to re-emerge when the community is threatened by external aggression. At least since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century a series of punctual, local, regional or pan-ethnic movements of resistance and opposition to the aggressive penetration and expansion of the early and late capitalist economy in all its different manifestations have dotted the history of Amazonia. From opposition to early colonial *encomiendas*, *haciendas* and missions, to the modern slavery of the rubber boom and plantations and the increasingly violent dispossession of territory lead by oil, mining, logging industries, and agribusiness corporations, as well as roads, hydroelectric and



waterways infrastructures initiatives with the full cooperation of the liberal state, indigenous/native communities have expressed organized responses to all these acts of blatant colonialism. A future brief history of colonial/neo-imperial aggression will certainly have to pay special attention to the decade of 1980-1990 that witnessed the horrors of a civil war waged against the Indigenous peoples by idiotic ideologues disguised as Maoists on one side and Neo-liberal chicanery on the other, both armed to their teeth by arm dealers and corrupted politicians, both determined to establish their version of hell on earth. The Campa-Ashánika people of the Selva Central lost more than 5,000 women, men and children during this tragic period of their millenarian history. Thousands of other people of the Amazon region were displaced and lost their lands becoming refugees in their own country. No just peace for the people was ever achieved in central Amazonia that was rather transformed in the blossoming marketplace of drugs, weapons, illegal logging and ecological destruction.

#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF AN ECOLOGICAL DELUSION**

From the very first encounters with the tropical rain forest, Europeans and later Euro-Americans, construed an equivocal imagery of the landscape and the people of Amazonia by projecting on this newly found landscapes old mythological mirages embedded in their own ancestral history. The terror of the dark forest inhabited by mysterious monsters, dragons, and elusive witches that occupied the imagination and folktales of medieval Europe reappears now located in the thick Amazonian forest. Within the ambiguity of the unknown this is also turned into the land of El Dorado and Sevilla del Oro, precious rewards expecting those heroic conquerors willing to risk their life for the Crown or the Church (or the Republic) and bring into the folds and the light of civilization the hidden treasures of the forest. These initial misinterpretations and quasi mythical attributes of peoples and lands described by the first conquistadors and missionaries were followed by the more disturbing colonial and imperial gaze that introduced the narrative of untapped riches and brutal savagery. Spain disregarded the few dependable chronicles and *Relaciones* like the one by Gaspar de Carvajal, chaplain of the expedition of Francisco de Orellana

to the Amazonas<sup>13</sup> that was discredited as pure fantasy by the Crown, only to be confirmed more than 460 years later by new archaeological and ethno-historical studies of the Amazon<sup>14</sup>. The Coastal and principally Limeñan elite that replaced the Spanish administration in the new republic inherited most of the colonial prejudices about the Amazon and a deep suspicion about the indigenous people of the Selva that were able to defeat Spaniards and Peruvians during more than one century between 1742 and 1845 keeping them out of their vast multiethnic territory<sup>15</sup>.

The early Spanish invaders of Amazonia traveling through these areas on their way to the lowlands between years 1540 and 1560 did not realized nor reported in their chronicles the harsh reality of the *montaña*, in fact for the first one hundred years the eastern slopes of the Andes, especially in the southern portion east of Cusco, were inhabited, relatively urbanized and administered by the colonial power<sup>16</sup>. The term used by the Spaniards to designate the inhabitants of the central and southern *montaña* in what is today Peru was the *Quechua* word *antis*, (*indios antis*) and another series of hispanized *quechua* and local indigenous terms such as *camparites*, *amages*, *piros*, *jíbaros*, etc.<sup>17</sup> The geographical term *montaña* appears much later in the vernacular Spanish language of Ecuador and Peru. Jesuit missionary Juan Font, for instance, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote reports to the Viceroy and the Crown, describing the central *selva* indigenous *camparites* and *antis* as peaceful and generous hosts that received him with music played on flutes, abundant food and an open invitation to establish his residence in their native territory<sup>18</sup>. The chronicle of Gaspar de Carbajal, the Dominican chaplain of conquistador Francisco de Orellana's first expedition to the Amazon River, does not emphasize aggressions by any of the native peoples of the *montaña* east and south of Quito, only when Orellana arrives to

<sup>13</sup> Gaspar de Carvajal. 1542. *Relación del nuevo descubrimiento del famoso río grande que descubrió por muy gran ventura el capitán Francisco de Orellana*, the chronicle of Garvajal was reproduced partly by González Fernández de Oviedo in his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* (1524), the full chronicle of Carvajal was finally published by José Toribio Medina as *Descubrimiento del río de las Amazonas*. Sevilla: 1894

<sup>14</sup> For a brilliant summary of the state of the art in pre-European Amerindian studies see Charles C. Mann. 2011. *1491. New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House.

<sup>15</sup> See Stefano Varese. 2006. *La sal de los cerros. Resistencia y utopía en la Amazonía peruana*. (Cuarta edición revisada) Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú.

<sup>16</sup> Most of this section is reproduced from my original manuscript submitted to *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* with the title: "The Andes and the Amazon Basin (Relations)" on-line at: <http://latinamericanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.001.0001>

<sup>17</sup> The term *anti* designated the orient/east corner of the four cardinal points of the Inca cosmos: the *Antisuyu*. By extension peoples living to the east of the Andes in the *Antisuyu* (piedmont, *montaña*, Amazonia) were called *Antis* by the Andean guides and porters recruited by the Spanish captains.

<sup>18</sup> Varese, Stefano. 2006-a. *La Sal de los Cerros. Resistencia y Utopía en la Amazonía Peruana*, (Cuarta edición revisada), Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú.

the Coca River and the lower Napo River in the proper Amazon Basin is when the *Omaguas* (*Cambebas*) threatens the Spaniards and a series of skirmishes force the expedition to build a better and more defensible ship for riverine navigation<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish expeditions in search of El Dorado or Sevilla del Oro, mythical cities of gold and treasures supposedly located in the depth of the Amazon jungle, became less frequent and the piedmont region, now called by the Spaniard *la montaña*, became simply another land of colonial occupation with weak economic attraction. The colonial state and private entrepreneurs did not actively settle in new areas considered unhealthy and inappropriate for large cattle haciendas or plantations. The viceroyalty delegated instead to the Catholic missionaries the task of “civilizing and Christianizing” the indigenous peoples that inhabited the *montaña*. Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits were assigned, and often fought for, different zones of the upper jungle and the indigenous inhabitants. In most of the areas of the upper Amazonia, the Missions became soon *encomiendas* and later *haciendas* where entire communities of Natives were enslaved and forced to settle and work for the mission. As early as the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century there were Indian uprisings and organized resistance in the central and southern *montaña* of Peru, where the defeated Incas had established an independent “kingdom” under the rule on Manco Inca. Still in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish travelers mentioned to have encountered canoes of *Yine* Indians (Piro) navigating upstream the Urubamba River carrying tributes for the Inca rebels of Vilcabamba<sup>20</sup>.

## INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND OPPOSITION

During the following centuries, and especially in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous rebellions spread out through the Andes and the *Montaña*: Juan Santos Atahualpa in 1742 mobilized dozens of Amazonian Indian Nations and Andean Quechua Indians keeping colonial Spaniards and later Peruvians out of the central

<sup>19</sup> Gaspar de Carvajal, Dominican chaplain of Francisco de Orellana's first expedition to the Amazon wrote the chronicle of the voyage: *Relación del nuevo descubrimiento del famoso río Grande que descubrió por muy gran ventura el capitán Francisco de Orellana*. The text was reproduced partially by Gonzalo

Fernández de Oviedo in his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (written in 1542). Carvajal chronicle was finally published by José Toribio Medina in 1894 as part of his book *Descubrimiento del río de las Amazonas*. Sevilla: Imprenta de E. Rasco, 1894.

<sup>20</sup> Varese, Stefano. 2006-a. *La Sal de los Cerros. Resistencia y Utopía en la Amazonia Peruana*, (Cuarta edición revisada), Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, see chapters I and II passim.

jungle for more than one hundred years (Varese, 2006: chapter III). Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari bloody rebellions at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century threatened to defeat the Spanish Viceroyalty and revived the Andean indigenous peoples' aspirations of independence and a sense of Indian national identity that spread throughout the whole Andean and Amazonian territory<sup>21</sup>.

Juan Santos Atahualpa, an Andean Quechua from Cusco, began a major movement of Indian rebellion and resistance in the central *montaña* of Peru in 1742. In the small Franciscan mission of *Quisopango* Juan Santos Atahualpa assembled Campa-Ashéninka-Asháninka and Yanesha calling for the expulsion of the missionaries and their Black, Mestizo and Spanish servants. The entire region of the central jungle, all the way to the main tributaries of the Ucayali to the North and Urubamba and Apurimac to the South, was mobilized and hundred of hamlets and communities of Asháninka, Yanesha, Machiguenga, Nomatziguenga, Yine, Shipibo, Mochobo and Cunibo took arms against the Spanish colonial authorities. After ten years of military skirmishes and battles the colonial authorities decided to isolate the rebels in the jungle, practically acknowledging the Indigenous People's victory over the Spanish militias and fortifying the Andean regions on Jauja and Tarma to avoid the spread of the rebellion into the Andes. Juan Santos Atahualpa rebels, however, were able to occupy during three days the Andean town of Andamarca in a show of strength aimed at convening more Quechua peoples to the rebellion against the Spanish colonial power. Juan Santos Atahualpa died probably in Asháninka and Yanesha territory, maybe by the *Cerro de la Sal* (Mountain of Salt, close to the villages of Paucartambo or Quimiri) or in the Gran Pajonal around 1755 or 1756. It took more than one hundred years to the Spanish colonial government and the later Peruvian Republic to reopen the *montaña* territory, especially the Gran Pajonal, to the missionaries and colonists and the re-settlement of liberated Indian Territory had to be done with the help of the army in 1848<sup>22</sup>.

The decades of Amazonian Indian rebellion under the leadership of Juan Santos Atahualpa's and the power of convocation that the uprising had on Andean Indians

<sup>21</sup> Charles F. Walker. 2014. *The Tupac Amaru Rebellion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Varese, Stefano. 2006-a. *La Sal de los Cerros*. For a vivid historical memory of Juan Santos Atahualpa in contemporary Yanesha cosmological narrative see the audiovisual record produced by Richard Chase Smith: 2014. Instituto del Bien Común, Lima, Perú [www.ibcperu.org](http://www.ibcperu.org): *Where our Ancestors once Tread. Mapping the Historical-Cultural Space of the Yanesha People*, Video Series: [www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha\\_series.html](http://www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha_series.html)

throughout the Viceroyalty is an indication that the Andean and the Amazonian indigenous world and communities were linked and intertwined in a common struggle for regaining sovereignty. More than 250 years of colonialism rather than having achieved the dismantlement of these interethnic relations consolidated the different indigenous ethnicities from the Amazon and the Andes into a common objective of cultural and social independence. This newly found ancient common language can be witnessed today in the various local narratives: for the Yanesha people *Yompor Santo* (Juan Santos Atahualpa) is the incarnation of the grandchild of the cosmic divinity sent to earth to save the Yanesha peoples and their world (R.Ch. Smith, 2006). The memory of Juan Santos Atahualpa is alive among the Asháninka<sup>23</sup> and also among the Shipibo of the Ucayali. Quechua words, concepts, cosmological references can be found in the Arawak and Pano languages spoken by indigenous people of the *montaña* and the *selva baja*. The major cultural hero of the Gran Pajonal's Ashéninka is *Pachakamaite*, a transfigured divinity of the pre-Inca Quechua divinity *Pachacamac* whose physical representation is a small rocky island and shrine in the central Pacific coast near Lima (Varese, 2006). As in the case of the Amazonian Yanesha, who as the Asháninka, speak an Arawak language, Quechua linguistic loans are frequent as well as a highly refined geographical knowledge and terminology of areas of the coast and the cordillera of Peru, that could mean either ancient migration routes from the coast across the Cordillera and eastward to the upper jungle, or century-old use of this trans-Andean corridor for trading and trekking activities<sup>24</sup>.

### THE MONTAÑA: REGION OF REFUGE AND ETHNIC PRESERVATION

During these years of upheaval, violence and dislocation of people, the boundary between the *montaña*, the upper Amazon and the Andes became ethnically permeable as it was probably during millennia before the European invasion. Ancient trading relations as well as kinship and community alliances were renewed. Quechua speaking Andean peoples sought refuge in the *montaña* canyons and valleys close to

<sup>23</sup> Macera, Pablo y Enrique Casanto. 2009. *El poder libre asháninka: Juan Santos Atahualpa y su hijo Josecito*. Fondo Editorial de la Universidad de San Martín de Porres. Lima.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, Richard Chase (2006) *Where Our Ancestors Once Tread: Amuesha Territoriality and Sacred Landscape in the Andean Amazon of Central Peru*. In *Être Indien dans les Amériques Spoliations et résistance - Mobilisations ethiques et politiques du multiculturalisme*. Christian Gros and Marie Claude Stigler, eds. pp. 69-84. Paris: Institut des Amériques and I'HEAL-CREDAL l'Université Paris III. Smith, Richard Chase. 2014. Instituto del Bien Común, Lima, Perú [www.ibcperu.org](http://www.ibcperu.org): *Where our Ancestors once Tread. Mapping the Historical-Cultural Space of the Yanesha People*, Video Series: [www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha\\_series.html](http://www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha_series.html)

Cusco, Tarma, the Apurimac, Ene, Perené, Tambo, Ucayali and Huallaga Rivers as well as to the more inaccessible area of the Upper Amazon such as the Gran Pajonal, the Vilcabamba mountain range, and some of the tributaries of the Purus, Juruá, Madre de Dios and Madeira Rivers. It can also be assumed that some of the Quechua speaking Andean rebels or uprooted commoners would have sought refuge among the Amazonian Quechua communities of Lamas in the upper jungle and the Napo, Tigre and Pastaza Rivers in the lower Amazon jungle. It is still an open academic debate if these Quechua speaking communities of the lower Amazonia in the Napo, Pastaza and Tigre Rivers or the *montaña* Quechua speaking communities of Lamas and the region of Tarapoto, are the descendants of *mitimaes*<sup>25</sup>, populations forcefully relocated by the Inca state after having been defeated, or the result of old migratory movements taking place even before the expansion of the Inca state. Linguistically the Amazonian Quechua language (spoken in the *montaña* and the lower Amazon basin) is well adapted to the “new” ecosystems and landscapes of the tropical rain forest with the incorporation of neo-tropical bio-cultural terms and linguistic loans from the main lowland linguistic families: Arawak, Pano, Guaraní, Chibcha, Carib and even vernacular forms of Spanish-Portuguese Amazonian dialect<sup>26</sup>. Spanish colonial civil and religious governments are also partially responsible for having spread the two major native languages of the Andes and Amazonia – Quechua and Guaraní – as *lenguas francas* to be used for Christianizing indigenous peoples and for administering “colonial civil and criminal justice” throughout vast regions of South America.

### AMAZONIAN-ANDEAN ECOSYSTEMIC RELATIONS

The archaeological history and the “topographic mapping” of the upper Amazon, the *Montaña* of central Peru, shows that the indigenous peoples occupying this region in pre-colonial times had long-standing trading relations with Andean and

<sup>25</sup> *Mitimaes* or *mitmakuna* from the quechua verb *mitay* (to expatriate or to send into exile), were groups of families and communities of people uprooted from their original lands and sent by the Inca state to “colonize” new acquired territories. This particular Inca state policy produced a massive demographic and ethnic reorganization of the Andes and Upper Amazon from the southern edge of Colombia to Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and even parts of northern Chile and Argentina.

<sup>26</sup> For more information about Quechua dialects and regional variations see: Torero, Alfredo. 1964. “Los dialectos quechuas” in: *Anales Científicos de la Universidad Agraria* - 2: 446-476, Lima, Perú. On indigenous languages in South America see also: Pottier, Bernard (Ed.). 1983. *América Latina en sus lenguas indígenas*. Caracas, Venezuela y UNESCO-Paris: Montes Avila Editores; see also the classic study by Loukotka C. 1968. *Classification of South American Indian languages*. Los Angeles, CA: Latin American Center, University of California; and Mason J. “The languages of South American Indians”, in J. E. Steward (ed.) 1948. *Handbook of South American Indians*. Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, Bull. 143.

Coastal peoples lasting at least until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>. The long-standing historical social and ecological relations between the three major ecosystems of Peru – Coast, Andes and Amazonia – has been highlighted in recent years by renewed archaeological and ethnohistorical studies of the central region of Peru, confirming the early intuitions of Julio C. Tello about the importance of the Upper Amazon as a center of cultural dispersion<sup>28</sup>

The Spanish Captain Pedro Cieza de León in his *La Crónica Del Perú* written in Lima probably between 1547 and 1550 described another example of interactive relations between Andes and Amazonia. Cieza de León describes the Quijo chiefdom of the upper Napo as having close interethnic social and political ties to the *Panzaleo* peoples around Latacunga in the Ecuadorian Andes, in fact it is thanks to these friendly political relations between the two ethnic communities that the Spaniards were able to gain a foothold in the upper Napo valley and proceed toward the exploration of the Amazonia<sup>29</sup>. Similar interactive relations between people of the Cordillera and people of Amazonia existed to the north of today Colombia: the *Quillacinga* federation included Amazonian peoples from Sibundoy, Andean communities from Pasto and coastal groups of the *Cibcha-Barbacoa* family (A. C. Taylor, 1999).

Our understanding of the pre-Inca, pre-Contact and even Colonial interactive relations between Amazonian and Andean-Coastal peoples has to be framed in terms of what could be called “ethnic and eco-systemic relations”: a methodological perspective that was developed, especially for the Andean world, by John Victor Murra and others in the 1960s and 1980s. Andean and upper Amazonian peoples for millennia were clearly separated spatially and socially, though at the same time they

<sup>27</sup> Smith, Richard Chase (2006) *Where Our Ancestors Once Tread: Amuesha Territoriality and Sacred Landscape in the Andean Amazon of Central Peru*. In *Être Indien dans les Amériques Spoliations et résistance - Mobilisations ethniques et politiques du multiculturalisme*. Christian Gros and Marie Claude Stigler, eds. pp. 69-84. Paris: Institut des Amériques and I'HEAL-CREDAL l'Université Paris III. Smith, Richard Chase. 2014. Instituto del Bien Común, Lima, Perú [www.ibcperu.org](http://www.ibcperu.org): *Where our Ancestors once Tread. Mapping the Historical-Cultural Space of the Yanesha People*, Video Series: [www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha\\_series.html](http://www.ethnovision.net/EthnoVisionYanesha_series.html)

<sup>28</sup> Lathrap D. W. 1970. *The Upper Amazon: Ancient Peoples and Place*. London, UK: Thames and Hudson; see also Lathrap, D. 1968, “The Hunting Economies of the Tropical Forest of South America: an Attempt at Historical Perspective: in Lee, R. and De Vore, I. (Eds.): *Man the Hunter*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing; Lathrap, D. “Los Andes Centrales y la montaña. Investigaciones de las relaciones culturales entre la montaña peruana y las altas civilizaciones de los Andes centrales. Lima: *Revista del Museo Nacional* 32: 197-202. See also the important contribution of Santos Granero, Fernando, “Writing History into the Landscape: Yanesha Notions of Space and Territoriality” in *The Land Within. Indigenous Territory and the Perception of Environment*, Surrallés Alexandre and Pedro García Hierro (Eds.), Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Pedro Cieza de León. (Sevilla, circa 1553). *La crónica del Perú*. Madrid: Calpe, 1922.

had developed two complementary systems of land occupation, use, production, exchange and consumption.

In the Andes the principle of “verticality” was applied to the occupation of different and multiple diverse eco-zones, from the frigid Puna in high altitude down to the temperate climate of the “Quechua” zone and lower to the coastal arid planes on the West side and the cloud forest and upper jungle on the eastern valleys. Such a multiple and complementary landscape occupation and utilization – also called the Archipelago System – allowed the indigenous communities to expand and diversify their range of cultivation by creating and nurturing a network of multiethnic reciprocity and complementarity. Coca, which is an essential sacred-ritual and nutritional plant of all Andean and Amazonian peoples, can be cultivated successfully in the lower *montaña*. Fields of coca –*Cocales*– managed by Andean communities often-distant days of walks, are dotting the upper jungle slopes. Tropical cultivars, such as banana, plantains, tomatoes and certain varieties of *ajís* (*Capsicum*) were probably cultivated by Andean farmers in community fields located in the *montaña*<sup>30</sup>. Other cultural traits that reveal the close historical association of Amazonia and the Cordillera are the massive presence in pre-contact upper and lower Amazonía of stone axes that were manufactured in quarries located in the southern portion of the Andes east of Cusco and were traded all the way to the central and eastern lower Amazon, the macaw feathers in Pre-Inca and Inca manufactures, the red body paint *achiote* (*Bixa orellana*); the mineral rock salt from the central upper jungle of Peru, and the hard wood and palm wood from the rain forest found in Andean manufactures and constructions. To these material culture traits other more symbolic and intangible elements such as deities and cultural heroes, ontological and ethical principles have been identified by careful ethno-historical and symbolic anthropology studies.

In Amazonia the network of “ethnic and eco-systemic relations” can be defined as “horizontal” in contrast to the “vertical” system of the Andes. The Indigenous Peoples organization of a horizontal network of ethno-eco-systems took advantage of the different eco-zones that exist in the upper and lower tropical rainforest of Amazonia. The seasonally flooded banks of the rivers rich in fertile soils –the *várzea* –

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<sup>30</sup> These agricultural practices that survived centuries of colonialism and are still fully functional in contemporary indigenous communities, created a nightmare when in the 1970s a Revolutionary Agrarian Reform law was enacted and the determination of the land-tenure system in the Andes and Upper Jungle had to be handled in fairness to different communities and a true mosaic of lands of the commons.



were occupied for millennia by permanent cultivations of poly-cultures of fruit trees, yuca, and plantains, bananas, beans, corn, and capsicums. The surrounding *igapós*, flooded lands, were fishing and hunting space, the hinterland and inter-fluvial land of *selva alta* of poor soil quality was the space reserved for foraging and small game hunting. Obviously, there are many more eco-zone in the whole Amazonia, including the very fertile seasonally inundated lowlands of eastern Bolivia, savannahs crisscrossed by rivers and galleries of tropical rainforest, however what is important to notice is that a multiethnic network of these various ecosystems was developed during millennia of co-existence of indigenous peoples, and this bio-cultural network was the foundation of an advanced civilizational landscape and ethnoscape that we are just rediscovering in the last three decades<sup>31</sup>.

#### RECIPROCITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY

The verticality in the Andes and the horizontality in Amazonia imply a long-duration historical construction of socio-cosmological concepts that favor the coexistence of the principles of reciprocity, complementarity, diversity and cooperative opposition-antagonistic harmonizing between moieties of the community and different ethnic groups and communities. In the Andes these principles of peaceful and productive coexistence are symbolized in the ritual *tinku* in which moieties, communities or kin groups engage in ritual violent battles that symbolize a sacrifice to the earth and a highly socially controlled forms of expressing hostility and release frustration over competition between dual factions of society (*hurin* and *hanan*). These encounters may take place in “no man’s land”, in boundary zone that may have to be renegotiated by two *ayllus* (communities). The encounters could also take place between trading delegations of Amazonian groups and Andean communities. Some of the current Andean dances, like *Los Chunchos*, symbolize these periodical events and the trade circuits that linked distant communities and ethnic groups from Amazonia and the Andes. On the side of the lower Amazon the trading circuit connected a series of riverine groups specialized in long-distance trade: *Yine-*

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<sup>31</sup> Mann, Charles. 1491: *New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York: Vintage, 2011, (Second Edition). See also Balée, William. 2013. *Cultural Forests of the Amazon: A Historical Ecology of People and their Landscapes*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press; and Varese, Stefano, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin y Róger Rumrill (Coordinadores), *Selva Vida, de la destrucción de la amazonía al paradigma de la regeneración*. Copenhagen: IWGIA; México: UNAM; Cuba: Casa de las América. Lima, 2013

*Piro* (Arawak), *Cunibo* (Pano) and *Omagua* (Tupí) that would carry goods to and from the Colombian piedmont and the Eastern region of Cusco to the central Amazonian (Tapajós-Madeira) which lay at the end of another trading circuit crisscrossing over the Guyana and Northern Amazonia (A. C. Taylor, 1999). The extensive distribution of *Tupí* words for cultural items, institutions and geographical places throughout the Amazon basin indicates that another circuit may have connected peoples of the coastal range of Brazil (Tupi Guaraní) and peoples from the Paraguayan tropical rain forest and the arid Chaco region to the larger Amazonia.

In the central *montaña* of Peru the *Campa-Ashéninka* of the Gran Pajonal were still practicing a ritual fight between two groups of different lineages in the late 1960s. Two groups of men would wear two or three *cushmas* (traditional cotton tunics) to protect their bodies and line up with their kin in front of the other group and start to throw arrows without sharp points to each other. The receiving man was supposed to either detour the flying arrows with a fast movement of the tunic or catch the rival arrow with his hand and shoot it back to the opposite band. Women and children would seat behind the lines of men with plenty of fermented yucca beer *masato*<sup>32</sup> ready to celebrate the warriors. Some of the young men would be wounded and even lose one eye, although deaths were uncommon. The meaning of this *parawa* (loosely translated as “duel”) was to renegotiate trading partnerships (*ayumparii* is the *Ashéninka* term that defines the trading relation between two individuals) as well as territorial rights<sup>33</sup>.

The trans-Andean and trans-Amazonian sets of network built during centuries of pre-Inca state formation played a fundamental role in creating a pan-Indian culture - actually a civilization - based on the cosmological, ethical and ontological principles of reciprocity, complementarity, bio-cultural diversity and the ethnopolitical dynamics of cooperative opposition between communities, villages, moieties, clans, lineages and different ethnic communities. At the core of this type of cosmology stands the concept - expressed in most of the indigenous cosmogonies, the myths of

<sup>32</sup> *Masato* is the generic Amazonian term for this type of fermented beer of yuca, the *Ashéninka* term in the Gran Pajonal is *piárintzi*. Fermented beverages are common throughout Amerindian territories in the whole Continent. The most common ingredients to produce the fermented beverages are corn (called *chicha* in the Andes), yuca, sweet potato, peanuts, after the European invasion sugar cane is also utilized. In pre-contact Amarindia there were not fermented beverages.

<sup>33</sup> Catholic and Evangelical missionaries as well as the few mestizo authorities of the area ended up prohibiting the *parawa* with the argument that they incited violence when the ritual actually diffused conflicts and release tension.

origin - that all beings on earth are relatives, that humans, animals, plants, physical entities and intangible spirits are all related to each other by links of kinship. This “ecological ontology” presupposes a strict ethical conduct and a highly ritualized social and individual behavior when dealing with all activities of production, circulation and consumption such as cultivation, hunting, fishing, foraging, trading, the building of houses, bridges, canoes, sharing meals and beverages, in sum all social activities imply an act of communion with the rest of the cosmic relatives<sup>34</sup>.

### THE DESCENT INTO MODERNITY

The official *Inca* historiography, based mostly on Spanish written records by chroniclers, civil and religious administrators and a few Quechua Indians and Mestizo writers, indicate that the occupation of the *montaña* and Amazonia was attempted only in the last few years of Huayna Cápac ruling around 1493-1524. Despite the “expansionistic” trend of the Inca state, the *Tawantinsuyu* imperial administration did not implement a systematic policy of assimilation of the peoples of the *montaña* and Amazonia. During the roughly hundred and fifty years of Inca ruling only limited parts of the upper Marañón valley in the north, the upper and lower Huallaga in the center of contemporary Peru, the piedmont east of the central Andean region of Jauja and Tarma, the piedmont to the east of Cusco and part of Bolivia’s piedmont *yunga* and the lowlands of the Moxos were actually “integrated” in the state formation. Some *mitmakuna* were located by the state in the upper foothills in order to supervise the links between the various vertical and horizontal eco-zones that supported the tributary system of the state as well as the intra-communal trading network. Contrary to what existed in other pre-contact areas of Amerindia where the market system became very early the central mechanism of social, economic and cultural integration of many different ethnic nations in the case of the Andes the direct trading between communities and the state-run tributary system - in goods and labor corves, the *mita* - was the main system of linkages between the various ethno-eco-zones of the Cordillera and the *montaña*. To this network of relations the Inca state seems to have

<sup>34</sup> See: Varese Stefano y Michael Grofe. 2007. “Notas sobre la territorialidad, sacralidad y economía política Bennizá/Binigula/Beneshon” in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Berkeley: UC Press/Mexico: UNAM, Vol 23, N° 2-Summer 2007 and Philippe Descola. 1994. *In the Society of Nature: a native ecology in Amazonia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ph. Descola. 1994, “Constructing Natures: Symbolic Ecology and Social Practice”, in Ph. Descola and G. Pálson (eds.). 1996. *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

also favored what the Spaniard called *rescate* – direct barter between domestic units outside a more formal marketplace (A. C. Taylor 1999).

In the *Antis* region of the central *montaña* the Campa-Asháninka and the Yanesha were able to establish a well-guarded frontier of hamlets and small communities in the no-man land of the high cloud forest. A similar situation must have existed east of Cusco where the Arawak *Machiguenga*, interacted with the Quechua Inca subjects, either with historically established *ayllus* or with Andean *mitmakuna* relocated by the Inca state. Some sources mention the presence of enclaves of lower Amazonia people such as a Cashinahua group in the Opatari area in the southeastern region of Madre de Dios. A. C. Taylor (1999) argues that the general dualist structure of the Andean civilization allowed for a process of geo-social expansion of the *Quechua*-speaking communities of the Andes into different regions of the *Tahantinsuyu* by creating a series of dichotomies of peoples/cultures that would interact in a dynamics of antagonistic complementarity: Colla/Chuncho and Palta-Chachapoyas/Bracamoro. This hostile and aggressive dichotomic complementarity, especially important in the inter-*ayllu* social organization, was possibly misunderstood by the Spanish invaders who in their own Eurocentric frame of mind could not fully grasp the meaning of institutions like *Tinku* or *Parawa* and the peaceful, although stressed, coexistence of multiethnic Indian nations.

What became clear after the “conquest” and the collapse of the Inca state is that the peoples of the lower Amazonia, that had been intentionally marginalized by the *Tahuantinsuyu*, were transformed and conceptualized by the Spaniards as the true barbarians, the savage “others” –hybrid generic Indians- without any link to the higher forms of social life that existed in the Andes. These were the “*indios bravos sin ley ni rey*” (“the savage Indians without law or king”). In the post-Orellana and the post Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Guamán Poma de Ayala<sup>35</sup> Spanish chronicles and writings depicted the lower Amazonia’s Indians in negative terms as the brutal “otherness” and were assimilated to the early post-Colombus descriptions of the Caribbean savages as cannibals – the *cannibas* or *caribas* of the Antilles- with the unfortunate coincidence that some of the Pano people of the lower Peruvian and

<sup>35</sup> de la Vega, Garcilaso, Inca, (1918). “*Comentarios Reales de los Incas*”, web version available as “*El Reino de los Incas del Peru*”, ed. by James Bardin, *Professor of Romance Languages*, U.VA. Allyn and Bacon; and Guamán Poma de Ayala, Felipe, author. Christopher Wentworth Dilke, ed. *Letter to a King: A Peruvian Chief's Account of Life Under the Incas and Spanish Rule*. Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1978.

Bolivian Amazonia were practicing a type of secondary burial ritual that implied the ingestion of fermented beer mixed with the ancestors' crushed bones.

### **FROM FAILED COLONIALISM TO SHAKY CAPITALISM**

The dismemberment of pre-Colombian indigenous societies and civilizations began immediately upon the arrival of the first Spanish invaders at the onset of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Infectious viral and bacterial diseases brought from across the Atlantic by the invaders spread quickly into South America from the Caribbean Islands, the Gulf Coast, Mesoamerica and Central America, to the south of Panama even before European and African human carriers could reach the Andes and Amazonia. By the time the actual Spanish penetration of the eastern Andean foothills and Amazonia took place between 1538 and 1580 most of the population of the Cordillera and the eastern piedmont from Colombia to Southern Peru and Bolivia had been directly or indirectly infected by non- endemic diseases and impacted by mosquitos carriers of malaria and the introduction of transatlantic animals some of which were infested by flees and other vectors of infections.

The *Inca* state ideology had been built on a hierarchical and stratified conception of the cosmic and social order that privileged Cusco as the center of the universe and the Cusco *Quechua* elite as superior to all other peoples. This cosmological conception and its social and political practice was implicitly adopted by the Spaniards and the colonial system with the Spanish elite displacing the Inca nobility downward into the new hierarchical multiethnic and racially stratified society at which bottom were located the Amazonian Indians considered savages beyond salvation. The barbarians of Amazonia were born in the Iberian colonial imagination and its civil and religious narratives that survived for centuries in contrast with a much more moderated image of the Andean inhabitants that, at least until the great rebellion of Tupac Amaru in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, were treated as the subjects of a defeated empire. It is within this colonial and imperial mentality that the Spaniards began the exploration and occupation of the eastern foothills of the Andes and Amazonia from Colombia through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. During the first forty years of Spanish occupation various captains tried repeated *entradas* into the northern, central and southern gates of Amazonia. The main reason for these *entradas*

was the discovery of gold and gold mining sites supposedly located deep into tributaries of the Amazon River, soon however the newly opened frontier was occupied by the emerging new mix-race, multiethnic society of mestizos, poor Spaniards, African slaves, and dispossessed Andean Indians that settled in the area creating towns that began to spring along the piedmont frontier. Such frontier towns, with relative little Spanish administrative control, were also the starting point of numerous *encomiendas* granted to conquistadors and captains as well as initial geographical base of Jesuit and Franciscan Missions.

Amazonian Indians approached these frontier towns to trade forest goods for colonist goods, especially axes and machetes that were not still manufactured in the Indian forges that were initiated by the missionaries a few years later. Fair-trading between Indians and colonists did not last long, soon after the first few years plundering and piracy became the normal way of interaction between colonists and the Amazonian Indians always subordinated, exploited and captured as slaves or *encomendados* for Spanish captains. Some of the Pano and Arawak groups of the central jungle of Peru learned the piracy trade by practicing *correrías* to capture slaves from other groups and sell them to the colonists, *encomenderos* and missionaries. The *encomiendas* in the *montaña* produced little income and required more labor than the ones in the highland. The need of labor could be hardly fulfilled by local mestizo and Serrano population thus creating an incentive for *correrías* ever deeper in Amazonia.

#### **FAILED COLONIZATION OF THE MONTAÑA AND INDIAN RESISTANCE.**

This trend of human trafficking continued unabated even after the *encomienda* was officially terminated by the Crown in 1721 resulting in profound modifications of the demography and the ethnic map of Amazonia. Most of the indigenous groups of the *montaña* and northwestern Amazonia adopted the modality of scattered habitat in which single extended families, lineages or clans would open a clear in the forest, build a *maloca* or smaller nuclear family houses and cultivate a poly-culture garden that would be rotated every few years depending on the soil quality. The dislocation of Indian communities from the fertile banks of the rivers to the less productive hinterland of *selva alta* implied at the same time a technological change (de-volution)

in the agroforestry production system that could be possible because of the adoption of metal tools. Slash-and-burn agriculture and short cycles rotation with intensive deforestation of small acreages became the common Indian practice in upper Amazonia and increasingly in the lower jungle. The ancient civilizational practice of creating “black soils” (*terra preta do indio*) and cultivate long-term plantation of fruit trees combined with poly-culture fields of yuca, corn, beans, tobacco and *ajíes* became less and less common and was eventually abandoned altogether<sup>36</sup>. The slash-and-burn short-term rotation of cultivated plots – the *chacra* – was adopted by the mestizo and Spanish colonists and has been ever since the horticultural technology of the *montaña* and the Amazonia separating very clearly these agricultural technologies and practices from the ones of the Highlands with the only exception that coca cultivation in the *montaña* was still practiced by Andean farmers as monoculture. Cotton on the other hand became one of the few cultivars of the Amazonian Indians that was used as currency together with cloths. Indigenous weaving on back strap loom, vertical and horizontal ground looms remained controlled by the Amazonian groups, while pedal-action Spanish looms were part of the *encomienda* production<sup>37</sup>.

By 1630 and 1650 most of the northern frontier of the Marañón and Napo were collapsed, colonists returned to the Highlands, *encomiendas* were abandoned and *entradas* were reduced or simply suspended. The mid 17<sup>th</sup> century also marks the beginning of Amazonian Indians active resistance and uprisings all along the *montaña* frontier. As the colonial administration relaxed its control over the *criollos* –the Spanish colonists born in America – who were increasingly occupying position of economic and political power in the “private” sector, the Crown and the Empire were confronted with the increasing deterioration and decline of revenues and the loss of military power in its competition with other European countries.

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<sup>36</sup> Mann, Charles. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. Vintage, 2011, Second Edition; Varese, Stefano, Frédérique Appfel-Marglin y Róger Rumrill (Coordinadores), *Selva Vida, de la destrucción de la amazon al paradigma de la regeneración*. Copenhagen: IWGIA; México; UNAM; Cuba: Casa de las Américas. Lima, 2013

<sup>37</sup>An interesting question is related to the presence of cotton robes for males and females in most of the indigenous peoples of Andean Amazonia. It has been argued by the missionaries that the *cushma* of the *Campa-Asháninka*, *Yanasha*, *Yine-Piro*, *Shipibo-Cunibo*, *Cofanes*, y many other groups of the *montaña* region was imposed by the Church on Native peoples that were naked at the arrival of European. This argument may be disputed by analyzing cosmogonic and mythological narratives of Arawak speaking peoples of the *montaña* where spinning and weaving cotton is structurally related to fertility, moon cycle, cultivation and women fundamental function in maintaining the cosmic order and equilibrium. See Varese, Stefano: "Deux Versions Cosmogoniques Campa: Esquisse Analytique," *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Libr. A. Colin, No. 3, Paris, Mai-Juin, 1976.

It will take another five decades for the Spanish Empire to transfer the Crown to the Bourbons, barely survive a long War of Succession and finally initiate a series of structural reforms of “modernization” of the Monarchic State and its many colonies around the world. The differential effects of the reforms on Indians, mestizo and *criollos* separated even more each group from the others in a society that had not reached any substantial form of integration since its colonial foundation in the 1530s. The physical and ethnic continuity between the Andes and Amazonia that had existed in pre-Inca, Inca and early post-Inca times was now totally dismantled; the gap between the Highlands and the Amazonian *montaña* widened creating empty spaces and new niches of Indian refugees from the Sierras and the Jungle. New ethnogeneses were forming, cultural and “racial” polarizations became part of the colonial discourse that alienated more and more the Amazonian Indians from the bulk of colonial society relegating them and their lands into an incomprehensible cultural limbo.

The regrouping of Amazonian Indians in new “ethno genesis” communities, larger regional alliances, and the presence of African and Indian *cimarrones* (colonial outlaws) became the social and political environment appropriate for the emergence of a culture of resistance and rebellion that congealed in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century when most of the Indian nations realized that even the missions could not protect them from raids, slavery, death, loss of homelands and cultural destruction. When Juan Santos Atahualpa rose up in arms in 1742 in the Central Selva against the Spanish missions and the viceroyalty he was speaking with the voice of thousands of Amazonian and Andean Indians and dozens of ethnic and linguistic groups – Indian Nations – claiming for an end to their colonial, racial, social, cultural oppression and economic exploitation. The Spaniards never met these Indian demands nor did the new independent Republics or the so-called liberal democracies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they are still at the core of the present-day struggle of the Indian movement that is now re-uniting the Andean and the Amazonian peoples in their search for ethnic sovereignty and autonomous development<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> For critical reviews of the indigenous peoples contemporary movement of resistance and independence see: Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village. Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000; Mark Becker, *Indian and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008; Alberto Chirif, “Auges y caídas de las organizaciones indígenas” in Stefano Varese, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, Róger Rumrill (coordinadores), *Selva Vida. De la destrucción de la Amazonia al paradigma de la regeneración*, Copenhagen: IWGIA, México: UNAM, La Habana: Casa de las Américas, Lima, 2013; Stefano Varese, *Witness to Sovereignty. Essays on the Indian Movement in Latin America*, Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2006.



## FROM SACRED LANDSCAPE TO COMMODITIZED ENVIRONMENT

In the early 1970s my anthropologist friend Richard Chase Smith invited me to participate in an act of political resistance and cosmological foundation in Yánesha territory in the central upper amazon of Peru. The families of that particular Yánesha community had lost most of their forested lands to the Franciscan Mission and Peruvian colonists during the last two centuries. Forced to live in small, fragmented, deforested and overworked lands they were driven to combine their traditional social economy of “subsistence” with the sale of their labor to their own historical oppressors. However, it was not the violent social injustice that they were suffering what brought them to seek help from an outsider but rather the fear and desperation of having lost the “Center of the World” to the greed and desecration of the missionaries and colonists who had invaded their ancestral lands and fell a tall thin standing rock representing the connection between the various cosmic levels of the universe. Their *Axis Mundi* had been violated, their sacred connecting place in the universe had been pulled apart making it difficult to maintain the millennial dialogue that the Yánesha people sustained with their divinities, their ancestors and all their cosmic relatives. The humble ceremonial act of physically erecting the fallen rock while still in the “private” land of the Catholic mission became soon the Yánesha people’s symbol of their struggle to recuperate their territory, their forests, their mountains, their rivers and all their other-than-humans relatives.

Between the 1968s and the early 1970s the Amazonian Indigenous Peoples of Peru’s movement for recuperation of their ancestral lands and their ethnic autonomy grew at a very fast path under the hesitant safeguard of the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces lead by Juan Velasco Alvarado and legal protection of the Law of Native Communities (Decree Law 20653) which extended the principles of social justice and land recuperation from the Andean and Coastal Agrarian Reform to the Amazon region. By the time the Law of Native Communities was approved and began to be implemented in 1974-75 (period of President Velasco) until 2006 (period of President Toledo) 1,212 Native Communities were titled for a total extension of 10,105.505 hectares. The highest percentile of titles occurred during a period of

barely two years of the Velasco's revolution (1974-75)<sup>39</sup>. The process of defining the territorial claims and issuing the titles to Native Communities during the period of 31 years (1975-2006) was mostly done by Peru's civil society, NGOs, grassroots organizations (*organizaciones de base*), Amazonian indigenous organizations and a reduced number of actions by the various neo-liberal governments of Morales Bermudez, Belaúnde Terry, Alan García, Fujimori, V. Paniagua and A. Toledo. Most of these limited actions of the State were the result of popular mobilizations and pressures by indigenous organizations, activists and NGOs<sup>40</sup>.

In Alberto Chirif and Pedro García Hierro's book<sup>41</sup> what appears to be the most important result of more than 30 years of Amazonian Native Communities' struggle to regain territorial sovereignty, is their amazing ability to organize ethnopolitical civil institutions and establish a dynamic platform of social demands before the various government administrations. In contemporary Peru it is now impossible to disregard the active presence of the Amazonian Indians/Native Communities and their local, regional, national and even international organizations with their clear proposals, their social and cultural projects of political and ethnic autonomy and especially their demands of environmental, social, political justice and cultural democracy.

### RESHAPING THE ETHICAL LANDSCAPE OF AMAZONIA

In approximately 200 years – since the nominal Independence of Peru in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – the landscape and the ethnoscape of the Upper and Lower Amazon have been drastically modified by the imposition of different incarnations of the capitalist market economy: from the slavery and indentured peonage forced to gather precious hardwoods, animals and rubber tapping of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the exorbitant usury lending to subsistence *ribereños* farmers, to the massive illegal and government-approved expropriation of communal territories for looting, logging, and mineral and oil exploitation, to the plain robbery of private and communal indigenous lands, all types of unbridled capitalist trickery have been tried

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<sup>39</sup> For accurate quantitative information and excellent critical social analysis of the relation land-territory/Native Communities see: Chirif, Alberto & Pedro García Hierro, 2007. *Marcando Territorio. Progreso y limitaciones de la titulación de territorios indígenas en la Amazonia*. Copenhagen: IWGIA.

<sup>40</sup> Stefano Varese, "From Repression to Revolution: Velasquismo in Amazonia, 1968-1975" in Carlos Aguirre and Paulo Drinot (Eds.) *The Peculiar Revolution. Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment under Military Rule*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Alberto Chirif and Pedro García Hierro (Eds.), *Marcando territorio: Progreso y limitaciones de la titulación de territorios indígenas en la Amazonia*. Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2007.

and have shaped the social and natural landscape through what David Harvey has called the ‘accumulation by dispossession’<sup>42</sup>. The complex web of anthropogenic ecosystems that for millennia were co-developed and constantly co-managed and renewed by Native/Indigenous Peoples together with “All-Their-Other-than-Human-Relatives” had been turned into the hunting grounds for the “aimless, senseless chaos of private interests” without any state-government regulations or any ethical restriction.

A closer analysis of the socio-economic and environmental history of the last two centuries of Peru’s Amazon region shows a classic example of K. Marx’s illustration of primitive accumulation<sup>43</sup> with all its range of processes: commodification and privatization of land; forceful expulsion of Native/Indigenous people and Andean and Coastal colonist farmers *chacareros* and Amazonian *ribereños*; conversion of different forms of collective, communal, and “tribal” property rights into exclusive private property rights; suppression of the notion and rights of the commons (lands, forests, water, surface minerals, animals); commodification of labor and the suppression of alternative indigenous forms of production, circulation, consumption; internal-colonial processes of appropriation of natural “resources”; monetization of exchange and elimination of the principles of reciprocity; commoditization of land; normalization of usury and lastly a credit system that traps the impoverished borrowers into a cycle of permanent dispossession.

Looking back at the last 60 years of Peru’s Amazonian ecological history it seems clear that of all the victims of this violence exercised on the Amazon region by the capital in collusion with the state, the Indigenous People - the Native Communities - have been able to endure the aggression and through their political and cultural struggle have brought to the center of national and international attention the ethical and environmental principles that should shape the relation of the rest of the country with the Amazon. The most enlightened participants of the Pan-Amazonian-Andean indigenous movement have been proposing what some

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<sup>42</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press

<sup>43</sup> See the summary of Marx and Marxists analysis of the concept and process of accumulation in Tom Bottomore (Ed.). 1983. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; Davis Harvey. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press; and especially Karl Polanyi. (1944) 1964. *The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times*. Boston: Beacon Press.

scholar are calling a *biocentric perspective* on the rights of nature and peoples<sup>44</sup> and I prefer to call a *cosmocentric perspective* in order to emphasize the deep spiritual and ethical dimension of this ontological revolution<sup>45</sup>. The Amazonian Indigenous Peoples concept of “socio-nature”, and even the ontological shift to the notion of *kawsak sacha-living jungle* proposed recently by the *Sarayakuruna* intellectuals José and Patricia Gualinga, was already contained in the philosophical and ethical platform of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku along the Bobonaza river of Ecuador announced more than fifteen years ago as the indigenous response to the “state-enabled immoral ecologies on economic activities – frontier-colonial agribusiness, oil exploitation, large-scale mining and commercial logging ... extracted from the (indigenous lands) without (permission and without) reciprocally giving back (anything as just compensation)”<sup>46</sup>.

Today, in the midst of the apocalyptic scenario of global warming that threaten the survival of humanity and hundred of thousand of species, the moral treatment of Amazonia and the reverence that all its tangible and intangible beings deserve becomes the fundamental challenge of our times, not only for the peoples living in Amazonian countries, but for all the humanity of good will and ethical common sense. The Amazonian Indigenous Peoples –as all the other thousand of Native Peoples of the Americas – are telling us the *Original Instructions*, the *First Teachings*, the stories that makes the world an expression of place-based spiritual responsibility and cosmic cognitive pluralism. This is the sentient that minimizes materialist science and its devastating commoditization of reality while shifting our focus toward a post-materialist science-knowledge where mind and consciousness become the center of life<sup>47</sup>.

Sixty years ago, Teilhard de Chardin, the heterodox Catholic mystic paleontologist, reminded us that “consciousness is not a byproduct of evolution; it is the purpose of evolution ... as human, who occupy the pinnacle of the tree of life, we

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<sup>44</sup> Eduardo Gudynas. 2016. “Deep Ecologies in the Highland and Rainforests – Finding Naess in the Neotropics”, CLAES (Arne Naess Chair in Global Justice and the Environment) University of Oslo, Norway.

<sup>45</sup> Stefano Varese, “La ética cosmocéntrica de los pueblos indígenas de la Amazonía: elementos para una crítica de la civilización” in S. Varese, Frédérique Apfel-Marglin and Róger Rumrill (Coordinadores), *Selva Vida. De la destrucción de la Amazonía al paradigma de la regeneración*. Copenhagen-México-La Habana: IWGIA-UNAM-Casa de las Américas, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Free paraphrased quote from an unpublished manuscript by Chris Ebdon, Doctoral Candidate at Yale University, Newhaven, CT.

<sup>47</sup> *Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science* (February 7-9, 2014, Tucson, AZ) *International Summit on Post-Materialist Science: Summary Report (PDF)* available on the Web

have a sacred obligation to participate responsibly in evolution ... (and thus) the age of nations is past ... (and) the task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the earth."<sup>48</sup> Today, as I write these final words of my essay, I am reminded by the Kichwa people of Sarayaku in Ecuador of similar ethical considerations when they assert that " ... the tropical rain forest of their Amazonian territory the "Kawsak Sacha is a living sentient being, with consciousness, constituted by all the entities of the jungle, from the smallest ones to the largest and the supreme ones. The Kawsak Sacha comprehends all the beings of the animal, vegetal, mineral, spiritual and cosmic world that are in constant communication among themselves and with us - the humans - offering to each other and to us the needed elements to renew our life, our thoughts, our spirits in a permanent flow of life energy that keeps the Native People in harmony with the Universe"<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> Paraphrased from Dave Pruett. 2015. *Reason and Wonder. A Copernican Revolution in Science and Spirit*. Alba Enterprises LLC: Harrisonburg, Virginia, *passim* 315-319.

<sup>49</sup> *Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaaku, Declaración. Kawsak Sacha- Selva Viviente, Ser Vivo y Consciente, Sujeto de Derewchos. Pueblo Originario Kichwa de Sarayaku, Puyo y Sarayaku, Junio 2018.*

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## La Ética Cosmocéntrica de los Pueblos Indígenas Amazónicos

### RESUMEN

Durante milenios la Amazonia se ha configurado como un cosmos integrado de seres tangibles e intangibles entrelazados como una totalidad de parientes. Esta construcción civilizatoria indígena no antropocéntrica puede definirse con el neologismo "cosmocéntrico" más que con términos ecológicos contemporáneos como biocéntrico o geocéntrico, que enfatizan exclusivamente el componente materialista del sistema. La ocupación colonial y capitalista de la Amazonía retrató y reconfiguró activamente una "reconstrucción social" manejable de la Selva Amazónica del Perú, imponiendo una nueva ontología desprovista de preocupaciones éticas. Este artículo explorará el viaje étnico y político de las comunidades indígenas amazónicas desde principios de la década de 1960 para restaurar una concepción y práctica ambiental, cultural, social y ética premoderna y posmoderna de la Amazonía.

**Palabras clave:** Amazônia; cosmos integrado; colonialismo; Peru; ética política.

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