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## Desire, difference, and productivity: reflections on “The perverse child” and its continued relevance

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# Desire, difference, and productivity: reflections on “The perverse child” and its continued relevance

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*A few women have voluntarily agreed to form families with mestizo colonists [commonly soldiers] and have accompanied them to the towns downriver, but these unions are very different to the economic association that characterizes traditional Amahuaca marriages. In accompanying their new partners to Pucallpa [regional capital] or Leticia [in Colombia], Amahuaca women lose their traditional role as providers of a considerable proportion of their family's sustenance, which gave them a degree of independence and social status. These women become dependent on their men not only for food, but also to buy other things such as fuel, implements, and clothing. Mainly becoming sexual companions and servants [of the men], they are easily abandoned [...].*

(Dole, 1998: 261, author's translation)

*Cuucayama (Maria)<sup>1</sup> lived at the military base at the headwaters of the Inuya River with her grandmother, Shiuquina, and then married one of the soldiers. She left with him to live in Pucallpa and was later separated. She and her daughter returned to the Inuya River after some time. The granddaughter currently lives in Nuevo San Martin where she has many children and grandchildren.*

(Account based on personal testimony recorded by the author and the fieldnotes of Robert Carneiro and Gertrude Dole, n.d.)

## Introduction

This article is concerned with the relationships through which children have been born, raised, and made into Amahuaca people over the past 75 years, and within contemporary Native Communities on the Inuya River since their formation beginning in the 1980s. Using ethnographic examples of children, and specifically children whose “biological fathers” are either not known or have little to no role in parenting, the article demonstrates how care and living together are central for making kin out of Others, such as foreigners or other Indigenous Peoples. The point I want to make is that the identity, ethnicity, or Otherness of a “biological relative” is not as relevant for the processes of making children into Amahuaca people.

The Inuya River is an eastern tributary of the lower Urubamba River and located in the Province of Atalaya, Region of Ucayali in the Peruvian Amazon. The Inuya River has been an important area for external economic and political activities for at least 150 years, with rubber extraction, military outposts, missionization, petroleum companies, logging, and other activities. During this period, it has been common for Indigenous and non-Indigenous men who come to stay for work to engage in relationships with Amahuaca women. Conversely, it is common practice for Amahuaca men to leave to work in town, and some of these men return with wives who are not Amahuaca, mostly Asháninka/Ashéninka.<sup>2</sup> Another common feature of Amahuaca life, which is not as often addressed in the literature on the region, is for women to leave to live with outsiders, or for the purpose of work (on riverboats, in logging camps, or in town).

Based on documentation by anthropologists<sup>3</sup> and missionaries, there is substantial evidence of continuity among multiple generations of Amahuaca women who have left their kin groups to engage in relationships with male outsiders for extended periods of time, and who then returned to these same kin groups with children from external relations. Leaving with these men can be shown to be part of long-term processes that were first documented in the 1960s,

1. This is the only name that I did not change in this article because it comes from the work of another person. All the other names of individuals mentioned throughout the article have been changed. The names of places have been kept.

2. I use both, as they correspond to contemporary usage among Indigenous Peoples and the difference between them depends on an individual's identity and preference.

3. A significant portion of the material in this article comes from my PhD thesis (Hewlett, 2014).

but were likely occurring much earlier. These kinds of relations are not new, as demonstrated by the excerpt from Gertrude Dole quoted above, who lived with Amahuaca people on the Ucayali River in 1960 and on the upper Inuya in 1961. However, while there is continuity in terms of women relating to outsiders, there have also been important transformations in the types of people involved, the ways in which women came to relate with outsiders, and the kinds of agency that Amahuaca women have had within these relations. For example, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Amahuaca women were often captured by others through violence (Dole, 1974, 1998). During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, we have evidence of Amahuaca women choosing to go with non-Amahuaca men, such as soldiers. As the second excerpt points out, some Amahuaca women who left with soldiers later returned to the Inuya River with children from those partnerships. Today, it is quite common for Amahuaca women to seek relations with non-Amahuaca men either for marriage or as short-term sexual partners, or to engage with them while working away from their communities.

In this article, I will discuss the ways in which these relationships can be perceived as productive of contemporary Amahuaca social life. I will do this on the basis of a specific example of a blockage of proper flows that has important parallels with Peter Gow's seminal article "The perverse child" (1989). A central aim of the article is to engage with Gow's article in order to highlight the ways properly directed desires and the circulation of substances and people are rendered productive in the making of Amahuaca people. "The perverse child" was Peter Gow's first major publication based on his fieldwork on the lower Urubamba River in the Province of Atalaya, Ucayali Region of Peru. As such, it touches on many of the themes and arguments Gow returned to in his numerous later publications, including three books.<sup>4</sup>

I set out the argument through two interconnected aspects of sociality. The first is the phenomenon of women working outside the community and leaving children to be raised by their own mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. During the time of my initial fieldwork (2009-11), more than one third of the children under the age of 15 living in San Juan had been birthed by women who lived and worked outside of the village, but either had been or were being raised by elder kin. This is not an insignificant number and the practice is considered common among Amahuaca people. In fact, were it not for these children being raised by kin other than their birthmothers, the community would not have sufficient numbers to maintain a school. This is important to note because a major reason people make the effort to live together is for their children to have access to schooling (see Killick, 2008, as well as Killick and Sarmiento Barletti in this issue).

The second aspect is the relationship between adults and children within the community. I want to make a specific point about what it means to be raised as an Amahuaca person, and how this is much more important than "biological" kinship between birthparents and their offspring (Conklin and Morgan, 1996). In San Juan, I focus on "adopted" or fostered children in order to highlight how flows of people, substances, and desires are productive of sociality. The two main examples I provide are José and William, two Amahuaca boys aged 13 and 18 respectively, who were raised by generations of women above their birthmothers. My choice to use boys as examples rather than girls is not arbitrary, which I return to below. Because this article draws upon and engages with Gow's article "The perverse child," one of these examples introduces a specific problem that occurred and the ways in which this can be perceived as a disruption or denial of processes of making and maintaining kinship due to improperly directed flows of desire. In discussing this example, I build on Gow's analysis while arguing the term "*egoísta*," translated roughly as "egotistical and selfish," might be a more appropriate conceptualization of the problematic behavior in question than Gow's "perverse." I return to this concept, as well as the implications of its relevance for the example I offer and for engaging with "The perverse child".

4. It is worth pointing out that in "The perverse child," Gow engages with Lacan as a way of rethinking and building upon Lévi-Strauss's engagement with Freud in *The jealous potter* (1988). A key text for Gow's thinking about and engaging in this discussion was Gayle Rubin's (1975) "The traffic in women: notes on the political economy of sex." I want to thank Cecilia McCallum for pointing out the influence of this chapter and suggesting it as worth mentioning. While I do not discuss it directly, it has impacted my thought and analysis.

## Making Amahuaca people

As with many Amerindian people, the process of becoming Amahuaca is not finished at birth. As Woodside, an anthropologist who carried out fieldwork with Amahuaca people in the 1970s and 80s, pointed out for Amahuaca people: “All humans are born by women, but this origin is insufficient to establish human status” (Woodside, 1980: 96). A mother may deny the humanity of the infant, in which case she will allow it to die. Furthermore, recognition of a child as human is not the end of a process—it is not the recognition of a bond that will persist through time—but marks the beginning of a process through which a child’s spirit will grow more attached to their body and to others. Recognizing a child as human makes it potentially kin, and the work to realize this potentiality entails a complex matrix of desire, care, affection, agency, and substances (Belaunde, 2000; Carsten, 2004; Feather, 2010) or what Gow (1989) calls “relations of caring.” The process of making children into kin among Amahuaca people is similar to that described throughout much of lowland South America. The production, preparation, and sharing of proper food (manioc, plantains, fish, and game) as well as manioc beer are central aspects of sociality and the formation of specific kinds of bodies. As with other groups, sharing substances, as well as the Amahuaca language, is central to the making of kin. While the processes of sharing substances, demonstrating care, and living together are central for making kin out of Others (such as foreigners or other Indigenous Peoples), this article focuses on children, and specifically children whose “biological fathers” are either not known or have no role in parenting. The point I want to make is that the identity, ethnicity, or Otherness of the fathers is not necessarily for the processes of making children into Amahuaca people. As mentioned above, a baby is not automatically considered human, let alone kin. If the mother accepts the child as human, this marks the beginning of the process of making them into kin. This process of making children into kin, into Amahuaca people, is often put into the hands of elder Amahuaca women.

As mentioned above, many of the children living in San Juan are being, or have been, raised by the women from the generation above their birthmothers, who live and work in town. This practice of having one’s children raised by others has been a part of Amahuaca people’s way of relating to one another for a long time, and is quite common in the region (Killick, 2007; Maizza, 2013) and beyond (Alber, 2003; Leinaweaver, 2008; Gay y Blasco, 2012). Dole pointed out that in 1960-61, Amahuaca children were often adopted by others because a parent could not take care of them, a person did not have a child, or the parents simply did not want them (1998). Woodside discussed the same processes, but pointed out that there was a difference between what he calls “adoption” and “fosterage.” He claims that adoption takes place across “societal lines,” and that a parent who gives up a child in this way loses all rights to the child. In this case, the child is renamed and raised like an “actual” child by their new parents. More common, he states, is the practice of fosterage, in which a child is sent to reside with an older woman, usually the grandparent or great-aunt of the child. The older woman becomes the primary nurturer of the child and calls them “my child.” Children call this person “mother,” but not “my mother,” which distinguishes them from their “actual” mother, as these children maintain certain relationships with their parents and sometimes visit them (Woodside, 1980: 108-109).

Among Amahuaca people in San Juan during my fieldwork, it was common for the birthmother to keep a child for the first year or while they were breastfeeding. Once a child could eat “real food” (manioc, plantains, fruits, and fish) and no longer required breastfeeding, they would be left with an elder related woman to be raised. As with the example described by Woodside, this is best understood as a form of “fosterage,” as the child still acknowledges their birthmother and maintains a relation with her, especially when the birthmother visits

the community. In one case, a young Amahuaca girl told me that she was raised by her birth-mother for some time, until she was no longer breastfeeding. She used the term “*desmamar*” to describe the transition, which translates as “wean.”

This kind of “foster mother” corresponds to what Susana de Matos Viegas (2003) calls a “focal mother.” According to Viegas, among the Caboclos living in the village of Jary in Bahia, Brazil, postmarital residence is virilocal, and, interestingly, when a divorce occurs, the woman leaves the children behind to be raised by the father. Apparently, this is quite common, and the father is assisted with the care of children by an older woman, usually his mother or aunt. Viegas calls these women “focal mothers” because they are nearby and give attention to the children. “Focal mothers” can become the “care mothers” of these children, which means this relationship is the most intensive in terms of daily interaction, feeding, and caring. An alternative is that a couple hands a child over to be raised by an older woman even if the couple remains together. In either case, this relationship with the “care mother” differs from that with the “real mother,” who is still recognized as a significant person, and through whom descent can be traced. Often, however, the “care mother” becomes “mother-like,” and the bonds between her and the child sometimes come to be considered stronger than those between the child and the “real mother.”

As Viegas argues, this is not a decision based on “rational choice,” but is largely based on affect and the intersubjective relations between adults and children. The bonds children form with their care mothers continue to be important as they themselves become adults. She puts this the following way:

From an adult point of view, relations towards their parents are not chosen but selected in affective memory. Adults who early in their lives had been taken to become raised children state clearly that the situation had never displeased them. They maintain they belong to the woman who cared for or raised them, and it is to her that they want their children to grow attached. (Viegas, 2003: 32)

This conceptualization of sociality in general and its connection to raising children are particularly important for two reasons. First, it is important to recognize that “sociality is something that must be strived for” (ibid.: 34), which entails meeting the desires of children through feeding and caring. This is connected to the second point, which is that this relationship remains unstable. Arguing against the notion that once kinship is established it becomes a social fact (Fortes, 1969), Viegas points out that the “sociality of becoming” implies history, and that since relationships can be made, they can also be unmade. The bonds between a parent and a child can always be minimized, and although they are not usually erased completely, they might be substituted by other bonds. Thus, there is always the threat that children will become “dissatisfied,” which is one of the major points of Viegas’s argument. “Caring-mothers” must continually work to meet the desires of the children so that they do not become “dissatisfied” and begin eating in the kitchens of others.

In her discussion, Viegas draws upon the work of Gow (1989, 1991, 2001), who states that for Yine people,<sup>5</sup> the passing of time “is primarily experienced as the making, living out, and unmaking of kinship” (Gow, 2001: 290). While Gow demonstrates the importance of mortality for the unmaking of relationships, he also points to the potential denial of kinship through the disruption of flows of desires and substances by what he comes to call “the perverse child.” This idea refers to a Yine child who eats dirt, which is not only perceived as negative because it is a filthy thing to do, but more importantly because

it is children who make the whole subsistence economy function, but only because they are the passive recipients of the products of adult labour and are not sexually active. What seemed to me an innocuous activity on the part of certain children, the eating of earth, is experienced by adults as a threat to the entire subsistence economy. (Gow, 1989: 579)

5. Gow uses the term Piro, which we have changed to Yine for this collection, as this corresponds to contemporary preferences among Indigenous Peoples.

6. It is important to note that this problematic was addressed in a variety of ways in Gow's later works and he continued to revisit Siskind's work in later writings (Gow, n.d.).

The position of children at the center of the adult world, based on their passivity, is threatened when a child tries to feed himself or herself. It is the fragility of these bonds that makes this work useful for thinking through the Amahuaca ethnography for several reasons. First, there is a fear among Amahuaca people that, as children grow up and enter the world of the "Other," they may forget those who cared for them. The second is what occurs when a child or young person denies relations of care and threatens the flows of production, desire, and consubstantiality, which I return to below. Regarding the first point, when people grow up and have their own children, they demonstrate their choice of whom to remember, and the processes through which this can be realized become meaningful. One way of making this relationship meaningful is by having a birth child raised by the same older person or people who raised the parent, which continues the cycle through time. This is certainly the case among multiple Amahuaca women in San Juan, who were each raised by their grandmother and then later had one or more children raised by that same person.

## Production, mobility, and labor

One issue that needs to be addressed here is the concept of the subsistence economy, which is a core aspect of Gow's argument and a concept that was commonly utilized at the time he was writing. In the quote above, Gow argues that children "make the whole subsistence economy function," and it is this economy that the "perverse child" puts into danger. In another section of "The perverse child," Gow states the following:

During the period of fieldwork, lumbering was the dominant form of commodity production in the area, although there was a small cash crop sector. The present article will not address the issues of wage labour nor of the circulation of money in the local economy. With the exception of alcohol, virtually no food items are purchased with money, nor can subsistence products easily be converted into cash. Further, the entire logic of the local system of *habilitación*, a system of boss/worker relations based on extended indebtedness, is predicated on the insulation of the subsistence sector from the commodity sector. The local bosses, *patrones*, depend on being able to find their labourers when production is possible (i.e. when credit is available to them), but make no attempt to prevent them achieving subsistence security. (Gow, 1989: 569)

The maintenance of a division of work and sociality into a subsistence or domestic economy and a market economy raises two fundamental problems. The first relates to the way the article engages with the work of Janet Siskind (1973). The central point Gow draws from Siskind is her discussion of the connections between production and reproduction, specifically, what Siskind calls the "hunting economy of sex," which entails the exchange between men and women of meat for sex. In building on this insight, Gow points towards the importance of this connection while offering a critique regarding what he interprets as the insertion of a commodity logic into social relations based on demand and respect. In short, Gow argues that Siskind's analysis of the exchange of meat for sex positions them as objects. He states the following:

Where I would take issue with Siskind is over her representation of the 'hunting economy of sex' as an exchange of goods between proprietors. Siskind treats the flow of game and sexual favours between Sharanahua men and women as an exchange relationship between the owners of two different objects: men give game to women in return for sex because men are the proprietors of game and women are the proprietors of their sexuality. (Gow, 1989: 568)

The problem is that Gow's use of the delineation between two separate spheres in his own work cuts the analysis short and, in a sense, diminishes the potential of his critical engagement with Siskind's argument. Using the western concept "subsistence economy" blocks the analysis by utilizing a problematic concept and fabricating a division between the sphere of sociality and that of the market and *habilitación*.<sup>6</sup> This leads to the second issue, which is that as a result, the conceptualization of desire developed in "The perverse child" is limiting. For

one, we are left with the impression that desire among Yine people is experienced and understood differently depending on whether people are relating to kin or outsiders, consuming manioc beer or alcohol, without any detailed discussion of how and why. Not engaging with desire in terms of all of sociality does not make the analysis wrong, but it does have the effect of positioning Yine people's desire in a specific frame. Finally, while Gow references both people's participation in logging as a source of work and the importance of school, he does not mention a fundamental connection between the two, which is that one of the primary reasons parents work for cash is to pay for school supplies and uniforms. This connection becomes even more important for parents who support children studying in secondary schools, which are rarely located in the Native Community but rather in urban areas where children require money for everyday expenses.<sup>7</sup>

These points are not arbitrary or simple critiques of Gow's argument or approach. On the contrary, "The perverse child" inspired me to observe and think about the position of children among Amahuaca people, about how the visible interconnections between children and adults are made, and about the importance of intergenerational relations in ways that I might have ignored or taken for granted otherwise. Moreover, Gow's description and analysis of Yine people's relations to children forced me to address the fundamental differences I observed in these relations among Amahuaca people. While I cannot discuss the many reasons for such differences in this article, an obvious point to note is that I started fieldwork 20 years after the publication of "The perverse child," so many things had changed in the region. However, the most important reason for raising these critical points is that this article directly addresses women who spend significant amounts of their time working outside of the community for money, and one objective of this article is to relate Gow's discussion of desires to both children and women's participation in capitalist production and in the making of kin among Amahuaca people. I am doing this for two reasons. First, I am discussing an important aspect of Amahuaca life as set out above. Second, in addressing the ways some Amahuaca women work outside the community, often have children with non-Amahuaca men, and then leave them with their kin to be raised as Amahuaca people, it is necessary to avoid a division of the spheres of production, consumption, and kinship based entirely on a Euro-American logic (Strathern, 1988). Furthermore, while I maintain a difference between inside and outside, Amahuaca and non-Amahuaca, this is based on rendering analytic conceptualizations of difference among Amahuaca people (Toren, 2007; see also Hewlett, 2014).

### Cooking, fostering, and motherhood

From a very early age, boys and girls mimic the actions of adults. By the time they begin to speak, they have already begun showing some adeptness at the activities of their parents, and games often mimic the types of activities they will do in the future. As also observed by Russell (n.d.: 11), children learn from adults through a pattern of leader-follower, in which mimicry is the most common form of teaching. There is very little direct instruction given by adults (Woodside, 1980).

Gender roles are part of children's maturing into adults in a similar way as among the Cashinahua,<sup>8</sup> an Indigenous group from the same Panoan language family who live nearby on the Purus River (McCallum, 2001). Young girls help their mother in the kitchen and in the garden, and young boys will go along with their father when he fishes. By the age of approximately eight, boys and girls are capable of general tasks related to the complementary work of men and women. Both boys and girls are expected to help their parents with small chores such as collecting water, gathering firewood, and working in the garden. From approximately eight to 10 years old, boys will often participate in collective work parties. At this

7. It is worth pointing out that Gow was engaging with important discussions and debates surrounding the distinction between exchange and commodity forms of value and relationality—individual/dividual forms of personhood and sociality (Strathern, 1988), which he built upon in the publication of his article, and continued to re-address from different perspectives. I do not engage with these points directly in this article, as it would require extensive discussion that is beyond the scope of the argument, which is grounded in shared ethnographic examples and engagement with one specific article.

8. I use Cashinahua rather than Huni Kuin to match the way it appears in the literature I am citing.

same age, if not earlier, girls participate in cooking, cleaning, collecting manioc, and taking care of younger siblings. Both boys and girls attend school starting at around age five or six.

Since there are no initiation rituals of any kind, the transition from childhood to adulthood is not marked in any way, except when a person gets married or has children. The only other relevant marker is education, because there is no secondary school in the community, so those who continue their education end up living at least part of their lives in town. By the time they are 12, most boys are capable of hunting small game, though fishing is far more important. They will have also participated in logging in one way or another, either by helping collect logs that escape when the river rises, or spending time in a logging camp with their father, uncle, or sibling. Thus, the spaces of the household and garden are where girls learn the skills that make them into adult women, while the river and forest are where boys learn to be adult men. As mentioned above, this corresponds to children's adoption of gender roles among the Cashinahua.

For Cashinahua people, gender relations are oriented in part by the way men and women relate to difference. From an early age, difference between boys and girls is deliberately created through teaching children the skills connected to their respective genders. According to McCallum, gendered agency is developed through the types of activities that are learned as well as the geographical and social spaces in which this learning takes place. This entails an opposition between the "inside" and "outside" that corresponds to women and men respectively. Women tend to learn "inside" the villages, while men's agency is connected to their relationships with the "outside." If for Amahuaca people we take the household/village and forest/river as corresponding to the "inside" and "outside" respectively, then their pattern of gendered learning seems to correspond to that of the Cashinahua, where the "opposition is reflected in the way that agency is formally acquired. Women's learning takes place, socially and geographically, on the 'inside' while men's learning often involves relationships with beings and spaces linked to the 'outside'" (McCallum, 2001: 50-58).

There is an important difference between the Cashinahua and the Amahuaca, however, which brings us back to the women who work beyond the community. For the Cashinahua, the geographical and social space of the inside where women learn is where they remain as they grow into adulthood. McCallum summarizes this the following way: "This division of labor, whereby men are responsible for direct contact with the outside and with outsiders and women for transforming external products and people for internal consumption, underlies the central place of gender in the constitution of sociality..." (2009: 48).

This not only entails specific types of activities—women learn design and weaving, while men learn how to hunt, fish, and interact with spirits—but also different types of movement and the relationships through which these skills are acquired. According to McCallum, Cashinahua "men learn by moving away from the village, travelling in the forest and the city whilst both conscious and otherwise, whereas women learn when relatively immobile, staying, for example, in their *chichi's* house" (McCallum, 2001: 48). The *chichi* is the woman's maternal grandmother, who is her own namesake and teaches her many of the skills she needs to know to be a fully productive female agent. Men, on the other hand, learn from their maternal grandfather, who, following the system of marriage, is their brother-in-law's namesake. Women's immobility and men's mobility are central aspects of Cashinahua people's coming into adulthood and becoming fully gendered persons.

What I want to point out is that this specific connection between gender, space, and affinal relations does not necessarily apply in the same manner to the Amahuaca case once people become adults. Women and men both have relations with those from the outside, and the ways these occur differ based on the skills and work they do, rather than necessarily on a division between "inside" and "outside." Among Amahuaca people, boys learn from men in "fatherly



positions” to them and girls learn from women in “motherly positions” to them. Moreover, the locations where skills are acquired might be related to the household and garden for women and the river and forest for men, but this is where the correlation with Cashinahua people becomes difficult to sustain. This is because women are just as likely to engage in direct relationships with affines and potential affines as men are, which can occur within the village when loggers visit, or beyond the village when girls go to cook in a logging camp or town.

To further this point, I will offer another example of a difference in how gender is realized among the Amahuaca and Cashinahua, then provide a short discussion of an example from Ecuador. The first example entails the connection between alterity, gender, and embodied knowledge in the form of shamanism. For Cashinahua people and other groups in the region (Gow, 1991; Townsley, 1988, 1993), there is an explicit connection between taking *ayahuasca* and relations with the “outside.” According to McCallum (2001: 57), “men learn bravery by taking the drug, a quality that they will also need during their lifetime as hunters, traders and (in the past) warriors. Women do not need this skill, since they neither hunt nor kill...” In short, Cashinahua women do not take *ayahuasca*, as this does not help them to acquire the types of qualities necessary for them to act in the world.

Amahuaca women can take *ayahuasca* and have visions of traveling, visiting, and being visited by forest spirits and the spirits of dead relatives. The fact that women can participate in the taking of *ayahuasca* implies that they may acquire similar capacities to men. While I did not have the opportunity to explore this in my own fieldwork, there is some evidence of a relationship between the ways people experience taking *ayahuasca* and other types of experiences of transformation and relating to Otherness. For example, Aparecida Vilaça (2007) makes the point that traveling to towns and cities might be understood as being analogous to the travel of shamans, which opens a significant space for further research in general, and with women particularly. My point here, however, is not that women experience the world like shamans, but that such experiences in cities or contexts outside of the community are shaped by differences based on gender and gendered agency. A similar point is made by Mezzenzana (2018) based on her work with Runa in the lowlands of Ecuador. She argues that despite the extensive scholarly discussions of “openness to the Other” and its connections with a disposition for reframing “cultural change” in terms of “bodily transformation” among Indigenous Peoples, such transformations seem to occur “indiscriminately to ‘indigenous people’ without much distinction between the experiences of men and women” (ibid. 4). In her article, Mezzenzana discusses the importance of gender and gendered agency among the Runa to questions regarding conceptualizations of the inside/outside dichotomy: “While the association women-interiority and men-exteriority is a widely accepted fact in the regional literature, the issue of ‘what it is in men that turns them into a predatory force, and what it is in women that gives them such domesticatory powers’ (Hernando 2010: 304) is ultimately left open” (ibid. 5).

Mezzenzana goes on to state that, among the Runa, “women are predisposed to the exterior,” which increases “the dangers of becoming ‘other’” but also positions them as “the quintessential cultural brokers” (ibid. 20). While I cannot engage further with the details of her ethnography and analysis, I take this as an important insight that is relevant for the present discussion of Amahuaca women’s experiences, transformations, and agency. Specifically, while Amahuaca women’s agency and actions are necessary for “transforming external products and people for internal consumption” (as it is for the closely related Cashinahua [McCallum, 2001: 48]), this does not necessarily entail their remaining in the village. Nor does it entail the same processes of mediation between the inside and outside. The active pursuit of outside wealth, which today is motivated by having to pay for their children’s education, food, clothing, etc., connects them with Others in complex webs of relations. And it seems that these relations and the capacities involved are crucial for the regeneration of Amahuaca

sociality at a variety of scales. Rather than the pursuit of money and outside forms of wealth impeding flows, these desires can be seen as complementary to the desire for kinship. In short, in pursuing a desire to provide goods and materials that require money, as well as their own corporal desires, women come to be producers of the most important form of wealth: children who can be made into Amahuaca people.<sup>9</sup>

The forms this takes can vary, but there is a certain type of work that has predominated for at least the past 60 years or so, which is cooking, whether this takes place in a restaurant in town, on riverboats traveling between cities, or in logging camps.<sup>10</sup> Some of these activities carried out by women outside the village blur distinctions between work, love, and relationality. For example, I was told on different occasions that women who work as cooks for loggers sometimes have sexual relations with men during their time in logging camps. This sometimes entails the exchange of gifts and sometimes results in children.

Rather than looking to escape the structures of the kinship system (Wardlow, 2004), these women seem to be following a certain desire for a life and forms of wealth beyond the village, but reaffirm their position as Amahuaca people by creating potential kin through direct relations with outsiders. It could be argued that through the transformation of the potency of “Others” into potential kin in the form of children, they are enacting their own agency and power to create while simultaneously fending off the process of being fully incorporated as Others themselves. In other words, the agency of directly engaging with outsiders and making these relations productive of potential kin corresponds to general tropes regarding the gendered agency of women as domesticators, while also subverting this trope as they bypass the need for male agency to mediate these relations with outsiders. At the same time, they are remembering the woman or women who raised them and taught them to speak in Amahuaca. Thus, they live and work in the mestizo world for extended periods of time, but maintain corporal relations with those who cared for them and taught them to become Amahuaca. By returning to the community, either in the long term or to visit, and by extension through their children, they maintain a bodily connection with those who raised them. Furthermore, it should be noted that they also maintain their claim on communal wealth, thus avoiding losing their position as members of the community. This wealth includes access to natural resources, as well as to payments to community members (cash, goods, etc.) from loggers in exchange for the extraction of timber from communal land.

In discussing the Amahuaca women who married non-Amahuaca men, mostly mestizos, Woodside pointed out that this was widely disapproved of because these men did not give sisters in return. He continues on to say that

this asymmetrical form of marriage contributes toward maintaining the barriers between the two societies and provides reason for Amahuaca to hate Peruvians. Peruvian mestizos refer to it as ‘tomando su cuerpo de los indios.’ I translate this ‘consuming the body of the Indians’ or ‘taking shape from the Indians.’ It is a formula for mestizaje. (Woodside, 1980: 137)

I examine this issue from the other side of the encounter by focusing on how Amahuaca people, and particularly women, work towards the internalization of outsiders and the making of bodies of kin. These women do not give their children away, but “make kin out of others” (Vilaça, 2002, 2005, 2010) in an opposite manner to the one Woodside describes. While I did not carry out fieldwork with these women in the contexts of their work outside of the community, I did spend significant amounts of time with them in a variety of places, including town. During fieldwork (2009-11), I spent time with their children, who comprised a good portion of the total population of San Juan. Since that time, I have engaged with them in many different contexts. In the next section, I turn to an ethnographic example of how one of these children met his father, and how their mutual denial of one another might be understood as a “successful” transformation of outside substances into an Amahuaca person.

9. See Hewlett (2014) for a detailed discussion of the centrality of kinship and abundance among Amahuaca people.

10. I have specific details on women’s experiences of working outside and having relations with outsiders over at least three generations in rubber (1940s), on large riverboats (1950s), and in logging camps (2000s).

## An Amahuaca

On a rainy day in February, a group of loggers arrived to the community of San Juan in three boats. They arrived amidst a dispute between a former leader and community members. The former president had, while still in office, made an agreement with these loggers that entailed him cutting trees upriver and allowing them access to community land. He had apparently been paid a good amount for the work he was meant to do and the contract they were meant to have with the community. He had not done any of the work he was paid for, nor had he had the contract signed by the community, so their arrival meant he had many problems on his hands. As the former president sat in his house speaking with the representative of the loggers, the rest of us were consigned to sitting in the next house trying to catch what we could of the conversation and speaking amongst ourselves.

As we were sitting talking, the conversation turned to the identity of one of the loggers, whom a community member named Federico said he knew. He could not remember his name or how he knew him, but he kept asking people and seemed excited. Then he suddenly got up and walked quickly over to an older Amahuaca man named Mario, who was speaking with a group of loggers a few meters away. Federico said one thing, and a big smile appeared on Mario's face as he nodded in affirmation. Federico had pointed out that the logger sitting in the canoe was a man named Pablo, who was José's father. He had come to the Inuya River years earlier to work as a logger and slept with Angela. Federico had seen the logger in town, but apparently he had never returned to the Inuya River since his time logging there years earlier.

When Federico told this to José, José denied it and got a bit upset. Over the next couple of hours, Federico kept teasing José, who got more and more irritated. Finally, the man came up from the beach port and walked past us towards the groups of loggers sitting a bit further down the path. He looked almost exactly like what José might look like as an older man. They had the same gait and appearance. In fact, it was almost uncanny how similar this man was to José. As the man walked past us, he made a point of not looking in our direction, avoiding the gaze of José, who, in turn, did not look at this man who was apparently his father. When I asked him later, José claimed he did not know him, and that perhaps he was his father, but even so, he did not care to speak with him. He might be his father, but José had no relation with him, and neither one seemed interested in acknowledging the other.

José was born a bit upriver and at the time was about 18 years old. He was Angela's oldest child, but had been raised by his grandparents Magdalena and Ernesto since he was very young and still lived with them in their house. He understood Amahuaca, though he did not speak it regularly in public. He was treated and behaved like an Amahuaca in every way. He knew that his mother was Angela and addressed her as such when she was there and stayed with her when he went to town to work, but always returned to the house where he had been raised in the community.

If not for this incident, he would likely never have known who his father was, and he did not seem interested. The fact that he was raised by his grandparents in the community made him Amahuaca. José's close relationships, like those of most of the people living in San Juan, were not given at his birth, but were part of ongoing processes of "making kin out of others" (Vilaça, 2002). As discussed above, children are recognized as partly "Other" when they are born and are grown into human beings through care, feeding, and coresidence with kin. This process helps their spirits grow more firmly attached to their bodies, and they begin to demonstrate recognition<sup>11</sup> of those who care for them by sharing food, helping with work, and, more recently, ensuring they have medicines when they are unwell.

This brings me back to the issue of the women who work away from the community. Through their birth children raised by elders in the community, these women maintain closer connections to their kin in the community. Without these children to care for, older

11. In later unpublished work, Gow developed a conceptualization of "raising" and "recognition" that is particular to the region where we worked. While I am using the term differently here, the denial of the father to "recognize" his son does correspond to Gow's framing of the relation. While I do not take this further here, it would be interesting and worthwhile to build on Gow's conceptualization to carry this analysis further.

Amahuaca would be lonely, living in a village with very few people, which can easily occur as more and more people leave to work or live in town. The presence of these children makes life more fulfilling for older generations of Amahuaca people, who take great joy in caring for them, which includes teaching them how to live well, clear and harvest gardens, and learn the Amahuaca language. If these children lived elsewhere, such as town, then they would not learn these things and they would not become Amahuaca. In fact, one of the ways people describe those who have left, do not return, and are perceived as becoming Other is to say that they “forget how to live in the community,” which entails participating in collective work parties, drinking manioc beer together, and participating in community events such as the community anniversary. When an elder person complains about younger people, they often refer to them as bad people because they forget their kin. For Amahuaca people, living well in a community is not a given and is based on certain dispositions of mutual care, mutual help, and relative harmony. As I discuss elsewhere, Amahuaca people used to live spread out in the forest, fighting and killing each other until they “learned how to live together” (Hewlett, 2014). This is not taken for granted and is a valued aspect of sociality taught to young people.

### *Un malcriado o un egoísta*

The boy I discuss here, William, was raised by Marta, the maternal aunt of his birthmother. As stated above, my choice to use boys as examples is not arbitrary. There was only one girl being raised by others in the community during my fieldwork, but she left to work in town while I was living there. There were several other girls who were still quite young and so remained with their birthmothers and had not yet been left with elders to be raised in the community.<sup>12</sup> William was in many ways a typical thirteen-year-old Amahuaca boy. He could fish, hunt, handle the motor in the canoe, and had an extensive knowledge of gardening. He was capable of the work of an adult, but was different than some of the other boys for three reasons. First, at age 13, he was the oldest of a group of five boys otherwise ranging in age from five to 11, but significantly younger than José, who was considered an adult.

Second, because of his age, he had few concrete responsibilities beyond attending school and spent most of his time visiting people, looking for fruit, fishing, and playing soccer. However, a person of that age is expected to participate in productive activities with and for his kin. William often went fishing with other people, rather than those in his household, and spent a good amount of his time away from his home, located five minutes from the main area of the community where the soccer field, the school, and most houses are located. This absence from the home did not seem truly problematic at first, until I began hearing certain comments regarding his behavior.

Third, as my time in the community progressed, it became clear that William’s activities were scrutinized more than any other person’s, which took the form of both gossip and direct accusations. The primary accusation made against him, usually in his absence, was that at night when nobody was watching he would steal chickens. He was said to take them to an abandoned kitchen, roast them, and eat them all by himself. He was occasionally accused of this openly, usually when he was perceived as being irritable and not helping. His response was always to deny it vehemently, get angry, and ask if anyone had seen him doing it. In short, he denied the accusation and emphasized there was no evidence for its truth.<sup>13</sup>

While many people have told me this about William, only one person claimed to have witnessed him cooking chickens at night. This was Tío Diego, or “Uncle” Diego, who lived alone, but was part of the household of William’s parents, Marta and Mario. Diego did not think fondly of William and complained of him often. He did not speak of William as a good person, but referred to him as *un malcriado* who was selfish, or *un egoísta*. He claimed that William never helped his family with work, including fishing, weeding the patio, or clearing,

12. This has changed since my fieldwork (2009-11), but the details of their situations are beyond the scope of this article.

13. I do not know with any certainty whether William did or did not steal the chickens, therefore I discuss the accusation and surrounding context, but do not engage in speculation over whether it was true or not.

planting, and harvesting the garden. As he lived next door to William, he had a particularly harsh attitude towards him. According to Diego, the reason William did not work was because he did not have to. When he stole chickens and ate them alone, he got so full that he did not have to eat with others. As he did not have to eat with others, he did not have to help. Diego was not the only person who made this connection, but he was the most adamant about it. I never heard who owned the chickens that were apparently stolen, which is important because Amahuaca people are very aware of who owns each chicken. Chickens are a source of food and are often consumed by owners during special events such as birthdays. People eat the eggs regularly, and the eggs belong to the owner of the hens that produce them. However, chickens are also sources of money. Amahuaca people will sell chickens to loggers who pass by or in the market in town. During my initial fieldwork (2009-11), chickens were one of the most important sources of cash for Amahuaca people. Given this, and the fact that everyone knows who owns which chickens, the lack of detail regarding the owner of the stolen chickens led me to believe the problem had less to do with theft than it had with William's denial of relations of care, which are expressed through mutual work, generosity, sharing food, and eating together.

As evidence of this, I offer another example of a person in the community who was accused of stealing chickens under very different circumstances. José, the young man mentioned above who lived with Magdalena and Ernesto, was said to have taken his grandmother's chickens while they were away. I was told that when he was left alone to watch the house, he sold two of the chickens to loggers to buy cane alcohol. This claim was made on several occasions, but José's alleged reasons for doing so were quite different than William's. José was a young man who was not in school, did not have a wife, and so had little to do but fish and drink. Although both José and William "stole" chickens, their perceived aims were understood very differently. The fact that José stole his grandparents' chickens to sell was not good, but this accusation never took the form of a community-wide concern. I was told about the incident by the owner of the chickens who had raised José, and to my knowledge the incident never became a concern for other community members, but was a personal affair among family members. Moreover, José sold the chickens to buy alcohol, but he did not drink this alcohol alone. Therefore, while the theft was perceived as irresponsible and disrespectful towards those who cared for him, it was not perceived in the same way as stealing and eating chickens alone. The egoism of stealing and eating chickens alone was a way of trying to make one's self rather than recognizing the intersubjective relations through which proper human beings are made. It was as if William were denying all kinship and proper sociality, in which he is reminiscent of Gow's "perverse child," albeit in a different context.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the character of *un egoísta*, selfish and greedy, is a fundamental concern for Indigenous Peoples throughout lowland South America. For example, a foundation myth for how Amahuaca people got corn, their first domesticated plant, tells that it was stolen from a "greedy person" who refused to share their seeds. The theft itself was not the problem in this myth, but rather the stingy being who would not share. Since the beginning, it would seem, Amahuaca people have been fighting the tendency of *un egoísta* to disrupt the processes of becoming "real humans." In contemporary language among Amahuaca people living in San Juan, being "real humans" is a position of being civilized people, which came about through the process of learning to live together in a Native Community (Hewlett, 2014). This position stands against those less "civilized" people living upriver or in the forest, and those who are less Amahuaca as they live with Others and have forgotten their kin.

Within this context, there is a fear of children becoming Other and forgetting their kin, thus giving up their relationships to the people who have cared for them. Some of the pressure

on children as they are growing up arises from a fear of losing them to the outside when they go and work in town. I think that the fear is that if children leave too early and/or do not have a strong body—and a strong memory of those who raised them—they are more easily lost to the world of Others. This is different, however, from the problem of William, who is present, but is said to deny relations. The use of this example inevitably raises questions regarding whether his position as a child born through relations with Otherness might play into his egotistical behavior. While I understand that the way the material has been presented might point to this question, one intention of this article has been to raise another related question regarding how to address the commonly accepted trope of “making kin out of others.” Do we take this seriously and fully accept a reformulation of cultural change in terms of bodily transformation that can work both ways? Or are there still doubts regarding the validity of this conceptualization as such processes play out through generations? At this point, my interpretation of the problem is that it is more about changes occurring between generations as younger Amahuaca become more immersed in urban, national, and virtual relationality, than whether a young person is or is not “of mixed blood” (Gow, 1991). In “The perverse child,” Gow connected the aberrant behavior of eating earth to the disruption of circulations based on desires for food and sex between male and female parents. Here, I extend this discussion by discarding a distinction between subsistence and capitalist economies. As I stated above, drawing on the western concept of “subsistence economy” fabricates a distinction between spheres of sociality and excludes relations based on engaging with the capitalist or cash economy. Moreover, the use of this framing results in a limiting conceptualization of desire. I also discard the notion that women’s agency, productivity, and motherhood needs to be, or should be, built upon marriage and oriented around interiority. On the contrary, I highlight the potential of alternative perspectives for addressing the ways Indigenous women actualize their agency both internally, within the community, and externally, through relations with Others.

I have attempted to do this while engaging with important insights raised by Gow regarding the importance of children for the circulation of food, care, and substances. I am arguing that the problems caused by William’s behavior are not due to a difference in his body based on who his birthfather is, but an issue of egoism. In the many instances in which I heard accusations against William for stealing chickens or being selfish, the question of whether he was “really and fully Amahuaca” was not mentioned. To my knowledge, this had nothing to do with the cause of the problem. The issue was that he was perceived as behaving like *un egoísta*. My understanding of the term *egoísta* is that it can encompass selfishness, stinginess,<sup>14</sup> and a form of forgetting that has intentionality. This is perhaps a more accurate conceptualization of the problem than “perverse” for how Amahuaca people experience and express concern surrounding the accusations against William. Finally, as made clear by the origin myth for corn, the problem of a person being *un egoísta* is one Amahuaca people have been dealing with and working against for generations as they learned to lived together, a process that is not taken for granted and never fully finished as some Amahuaca people are lost and others are made (Hewlett, 2014).

14. Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, most Amahuaca people lived in small groups of very closely related kin groups. The capacity to live together entails learning to work together, care for one another, and not be stingy. Being stingy is one of the worst attributes a person can have, a theme discussed extensively in the literature on the region (see, e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1988).

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