

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

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

Volume 19

Issue 1 *An Amazonianist and his History:
Thinking Through (the writings of) Peter Gow*

Article 7

5-31-2023

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Recommended Citation

Villagra Carron, Rodrigo Juan (2023). "Ritual (and Myth) transformations in the Gran Chaco", *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol19/iss1/7>

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Ritual (and Myth) transformations in the Gran Chaco

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In one of the most recent articles that Peter Gow (2014) left us, he takes up the canonical formula that Claude Lévi-Strauss (1974 [1958]: 228) had articulated, in precise and almost cryptic mathematical terms, and used sporadically for the structural analysis of Amerindians myths. Gow, however, frees himself (and us) from deciphering the numerical esotericism of the formula, and clarifies that it is a specific type of transformation, a double twist, “a transformation of a transformation”. He also explains that he will dedicate himself to empirically test—not define—the concept of *ensemble*, “larger unit”, which Lévi-Strauss (1981 [1971]: 609) also uses in the last chapter of “The Naked Man”, the fourth volume of *Mythologiques*. To do this, Gow takes us into his ethnographic terrain, the Lower Urubamba region of the Peruvian Amazon, discussing the different ideas of theorists such as Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Boas to explain, or not, the cultural and linguistic thresholds inside and between local communities and larger social units. Starting from the widespread Amerindian myth of the Sun and Moon twins (both male) who kill the primordial jaguars—a diffusion which Métraux (1946) cleverly first noted—Gow shows us how Lévi-Strauss’ canonical formula operates in the corpus of narratives that connect, and in turn, distinguish the Yine (formerly Piro), Yanesha and Ashaninka peoples of that region. These peoples are neighbors over a large area that runs eastwards from the Amazonian forest’s border at the Andean foothills. Gow points out the gradual variations of the myth along that territory: for the Yanesha, the Sun (Yompör Ror) and Moon (Yacho Arror) are twins, but the latter is a woman; for the Ashaninka, the seducer Moon (Kashiri) is the father of Sun (Pawá/Inti), and he and his sister kill the jaguars; and for the Yine, both characters are not mythically articulated, although the male twins (or triplets)—Tsla and his Muchkajine brother, the first white men—do kill the primordial jaguars. As Gow show us, these mythological variations are analogous to the ones found in these groups’ kinship terminologies, but instead of stressing the differences and socio-linguistic thresholds between groups as their respective mythologies do, their distinctive kinship terms are easily translated in their daily plurilingual interactions, in spite of their semantic differences.

In another article, published posthumously, Peter returns to the notion of the *ensemble* (Gow, 2022), this time analyzing a Kuniba myth about the origin of the Moon registered on the Middle Juruá river of southwestern Amazonia, where this group used to live. This myth was narrated by Carolina, one of the few Kuniba survivors of a massacre perpetrated by Brazilian colonists circa 1912 that led to their relocation to Manaus by the *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios* (Indian Protection Service, Brazil), where Kurt Unkel Nimuendaju interviewed her and recorded the myth. Gow demonstrates how neighboring peoples, the Cashinahua and the Kanamari, to the south and north of the Kuniba respectively, in the area of the Juruá and Purús basins, adopted the Kuniba version of the myth by the end of the 20th Century, leaving aside the versions of the myth of the moon recorded among them¹ at the beginning of that century. Taking into account that “for the peoples of the Juruá-Purús area, the moon is the celestial operator of these socio-spatial relations of Self and Other” (Gow, 2022: 15), the Kuniba variant of the myth became a “specific spatial dialectical syn-

1. The three versions of the Cashinahua myth of the moon recorded by Abreu (1914 *Apud* Gow, 2022: 8-9), unlike the Kuniba myth, do not mention Brother/Sister incest—but all three do mention the decapitation incident—and in one those Cashinahua versions, curiously, “the moon-to-be is female, a young woman who refuses to marry” (*Ibidem*). In the case of a Kanamari myth of the moon, different versions were recorded by the French priest Constantin Tastevin “in the Juruá area between 1905 and 1926” (*Ibidem*). As the Kanamari were (and are) divided into endogamous groups “each subgroup had a distinctive vision of the moon”. Thus, for example, for the *Amena Djapa* subgroup, the moon is a nasal ornament of the mythic creator, for the *Wiri Djapa* the moon is a married couple, for the *Ben Djapa* the moon is a young man and, for a fourth unknown subgroup, the moon is a young woman (Carvalho, 2002 *apud* Gow, *ibidem*).

thesis” of the Cashinahua and Kanamari versions, and, as such, reflects the “foreign policy” (Lévi-Strauss, 2019 [1949] *apud* Gow, *Ibidem*: 16)—i.e. with whom they trade or feud—of each group along of those rivers. As Gow states: “When the Kuniba people were removed from that social landscape, it seems, both of their neighbours found themselves obliged to start telling versions of the Kuniba story” (*Ibidem*: 18) and thus to “locate the origin of the moon in the transgression of the incest taboo, the transgression of the very constitution of their own social interiors” (*Ibidem*: 19). The myth, in this way, moved its rationale from the theme of external differentiation to internal differentiation. Gow goes on to say that the “very constitution” of these societies is about kinship and “‘Real Humans’, people among whom it is appropriate to live and to engage in ongoing everyday life” (*Ibidem*: 19). He then explains that “the contrast between ‘Real Humans’ and ‘Unreal Humans’ is not absolute, but rather transitive: to be ongoing as a project, ‘Real Humans’ must contain a form of ‘unreality’ or Otherness” (*Ibidem*: 20) and thus “this community of ‘Real Humans’, where we live, is the localized precipitate out of a universe of otherness” (*Idem*: 21). In synthesis, the previous situation where a myth varied gradually between three neighboring groups, working as a system spread over a spatial axis and synthesized in Carolina’s story, was later transformed into another one where the remaining two groups of the system adopted that version in order to re-assert their selfhood against the background of otherness—an issue to which we will return later on.

Here I will extrapolate Gow’s take on the Lévi-Straussian notion of *ensemble*, in both mythical and sociological senses, to the multiethnic context of the Gran Chaco region. To do so, I will show a gradient of girls’ and boys’ initiation rituals through linguistic and cultural thresholds, which, in turn, is related, but not limited to, a complex mythical corpus and its variations. Thus, my argument is based on the “controlled” comparison of the variations of certain specific characters present in female and male initiation rites of several peoples of the Chaco: the *Sowalaq* / *Savaalaq* / *Sevalaq* figures that appear in the *Yanmana* / *Yaanmaan* / *Ngvenemaa* (female initiation)² of the Enlhet-Enenlhet³ peoples, the *Kambá* figure of the *Kuña* Dance (Dance of the woman or “queen”) of the Maskoy, and the *Anabsero* figure of the *Debylytá* (male initiation) of the Yshiro⁴ (Ebitoso and Tomaráho) (see table 1).

RITUAL		CHARACTER	PEOPLE	LINGUISTIC FAMILY	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION
<i>Yanmana</i>	Girls’ initiation	<i>Sowalaq</i>	Enxet	Enlhet-Enenlhet	Eastern lower Chaco
<i>Yaanmaan</i>		<i>Savaalaq</i>	Enlhet		Central Chaco
<i>Ngvenemaa</i>		<i>Sevalaq</i>	Enenlhet/Toba Maskoy		Northeastern central Chaco
<i>Kuña dance</i>		<i>Kambá</i>	Maskoy		Southern upper Chaco
<i>Debylytá</i>	Boys’ initiation	<i>Anabsero</i>	Yshiro Tomaráho	Zamuco	Middle upper Chaco
<i>Debylytá</i>		<i>Anabsero</i>	Yshiro Ebitoso		Northern upper Chaco

table 1. Chaco male and female initiation rituals and their characters.

2. The differences in the spellings of the name of this festival and its characters express linguistic differences between the Enlhet-Enenlhet languages, as well as the variation of transcriptions between different authors, which we respect, mostly using here the one of our choice. *Baile Kuña* (Woman Dance) is a Guaraní translation used by the Maskoy people, which is consistent with their semantic change and linguistic shift from their vernacular(s) to that language. I do not include here the Angaité’s variant of the term, which is *Yemenama*, to spare length of comparison and examples. In the same way, in the text I use the word *Enxet* of the *Sowalaq* character and the *Yanmana* ritual to refer synthetically to all the Enlhet-Enenlhet variants.

3. The groups that form this linguistic family were first identified with geographical ethnonyms; after which, with colonization in the late 19th century, by various exonyms, such as Machikuy, Maskoy, Lengua Maskoy, Enimaga (cf. Villagra, 2021); and now are (self) identified by six names: Enxet, Enlhet, Sanapaná, Angaité, Enenlhet (or Toba Maskoy) and Guaná (Kalisch and Unruh, 2003). A seventh group could be added, Maskoy, due to the process of ethno-genesis and linguistic reconfiguration undergone by all the groups of the family that merged in the area of Puerto Casado (Bonifacio, 2009a: 28-71).

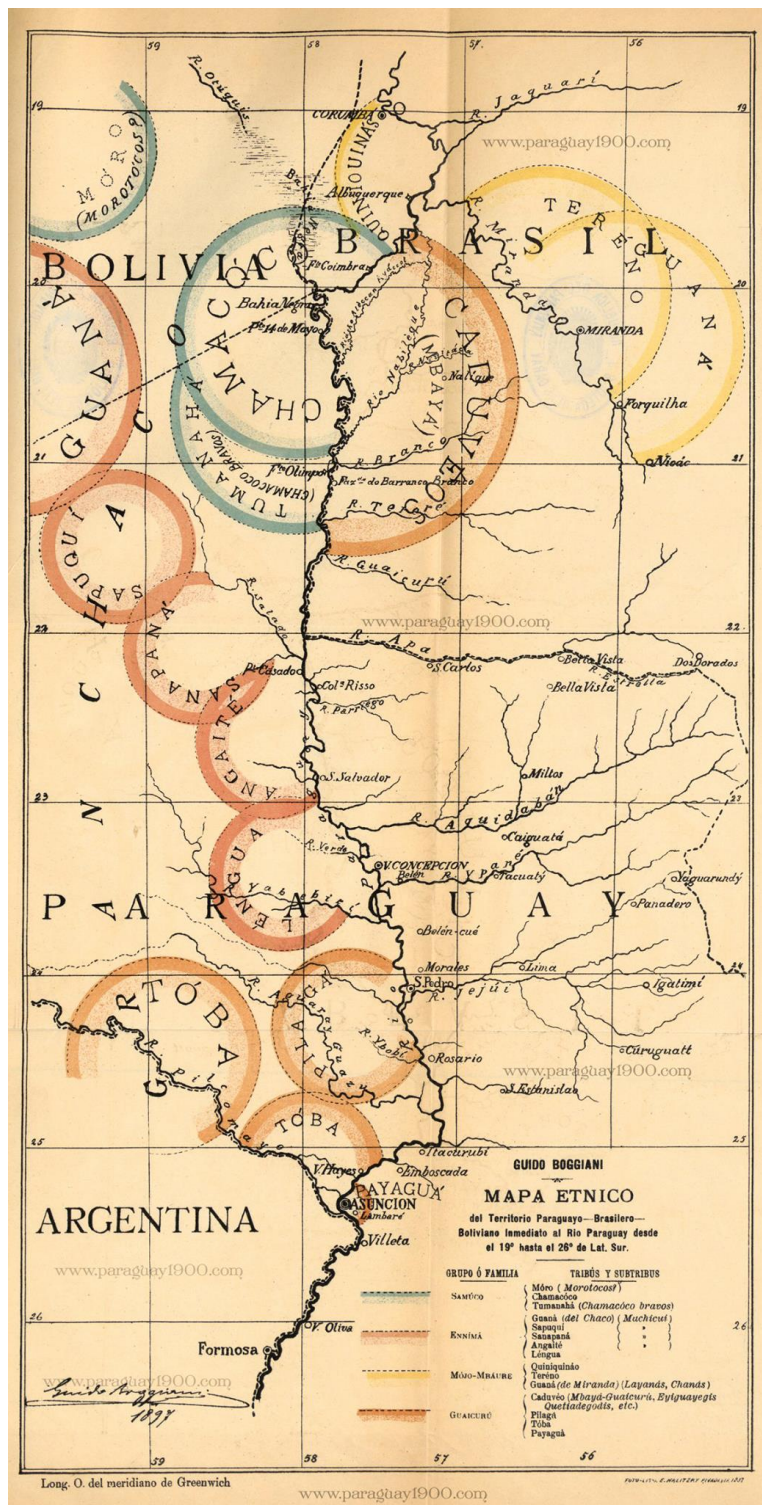
4. The plural is Yshyro, the singular form is Yshir.

I consider this a “controlled comparison” because it extends along a common geographical axis, the Paraguay River. It stretches from the right bank of the Paraguay River; at the mouth of the Montelindo River at the south, where the Enxet, Angaité and Sanapaná arrived from the interior of the Chaco region approximately in the middle of the nineteenth century, continues upstream passing through the location of the Maskoy, at Puerto Casado, until reaching the Alto Paraguay river where the Yshiro Ebitoso had established themselves by the end of the 18th century and where their fellow countrymen the Yshiro Tomaráho arrived much later from inland Chaco. This ethno-geographical gradient along the Paraguay River was stabilized at approximately the beginning of the 20th century, as illustrated by the map of the distinguished ethnographer Guido Boggiani (1900) (See map 1), but presents complexities because the historical processes and trajectories (and available ethnographic records) of each people are not necessarily synchronous. Therefore, linguistic and cultural thresholds that we currently observe cannot be formulated as static as they apparently are today: this is just an impression produced by colonization and its mechanisms of homogenization, that congeals clear-cut ethnic groups, classified by languages, and projects them onto the past (cf. Braunstein, 2016; Villagra, 2021). This implies that, regarding the exchanges of linguistic and cultural elements between these peoples, we cannot easily identify the direction and chronology of diffusion and variation of such traits. This case seems to confirm Gow’s remark about Amerindian mythology: “in regimes of complex social mechanisms of heterogeneity, notorious and strongly marked linguistic and cultural thresholds abound” (Gow, 2014: 2). Like Gow’s, my analysis does not seek to distort or ignore the functional character, *à la* Malinowski, and the meanings these rituals have had in the past and still hold in the present (however diminished or transformed) for these people themselves.

Other theoretical influences in this analysis come from Chaco ethnography. The first of these is the anthropologist José Braunstein who stated that:

Like a kaleidoscope that rotates periodically, the ethnography [of the Chaco] presents ever-changing images, although composed over and over again by similar elements. In other words, the Gran Chaco offers a variable ethnic panorama, but made up of a more or less stable number of elements and these, in turn, always present new combinations of components (2016: 57).

Braunstein distinguishes three groups of Chaco peoples based on their different cultural traditions, geographical locations, and direct or indirect relationships with the colonial fronts around the 18th century. First, the remnants of peoples affected by military and missionary colonial incursions, who were farmers and potters, and who formed an external belt around the Chaco region, called “peripheral campfires” by Branislava Susnik (1978). Secondly, the hunters and gatherers of the interior, who were later to become equestrian. And finally, the archaic hunter-gatherers of the northeast (Braunstein, 2016: 70-71, 95). Translating this to linguistic classifications, he differentiates the “Western *Chaqueños*” belonging to the Tupí-Guaraní and Arawak families, the “Central *Chaqueños*” belonging to the Mataco-Mataguayo, Guaikuru and Enlhet-Enenlhet families, and the “Northern *Chaqueños*” that speak languages of the Zamuco stock (Braunstein, 2008: 27-28). Among all these peoples, and before the process of sedentarization and colonization of the Gran Chaco, which began at different times but was consolidated by the end of the 19th and early decades of the 20th centuries, hybridization, intermarrying and cultural mixture occurred. It was facilitated by sociological interfaces and a common pattern of political organization: bands of extended families, preferably of uxirolocal residence and bilateral descent, with charismatic leaderships, who simultaneously often held shamanic, political and warrior roles, and whose symbolic prestige was based on festivals and rituals of drinking, and war trophies. These sociological and political interfaces worked better for the “Central *Chaqueños*” (equestrian hunter) groups than for the Western (agrarian potter) and Northern (hunter and gatherer) groups (Braunstein 2008 27; 2016: 83, 93).



map 1. Gradient of Chaco indigenous peoples along the Paraguay River circa 1900. Source: Boggiani (1900: 149).

In a similar sense, Richard identifies historical "chains of mediations" for Upper Paraguay, which are also valid for other parts of the Chaco "that organize...the general form of the field of relations within which...[the] ethnic names [of the peoples of the Chaco] function" (2008a: 24). These chains worked at the geographical borders of the Chaco (i.e. the Salado

River to the southwest, the Paraguay River to the south and northeast, the Andean foothills to the northwest, and Chiquitania to the north) with the axis of colonization. On the one hand, there were relations classified as “tributary”—of goods and captives—as in the case of the Chané (linguistically Arawak) and Guaná (linguistically Enlhet-Enenlhet) towards the Mbaya-Caduveos (linguistically Guaikuru). On the other hand, there were those defined as being of “socio-peripheral dependency” (Susnik, 1981: 161) “between the great farmers from the Chaco periphery (the “furious foreigners”) and the groups from the interior lands (the “dogs”)” (Richard, *Ibidem*: 24). This latter distinction demands some explanation; to which we will return below.

Such “chains of mediation” between peoples and groups, from the periphery to the interior of the Chaco, can also be qualified taking into account their specific contexts and the constant “kaleidoscopic” variations and mixing highlighted by Braunstein. The mediations between different groups were not only and exclusively of a tributary and/or of a peripheral dependency nature (and therefore not only predicated on asymmetric alliance and war) but were also made up by gradients of cultural elements, as Boggiani had already noted (*apud* Braunstein, 2016: 86). Boggiani rightly observed that among the Enlhet-Enenlhet peoples, there was a gradient variation of cultural elements, such as the preponderant use of wool and hunting practices in the southernmost groups of this family—such as the Enxet—and the more common use of cotton and farming in the northern groups like the Guaná. Likewise, there is evidence of linguistic “dialectal chains” such as among the Enlhet-Enenlhet peoples (Kalisch and Unruh, 2003) and among a specific “ethnic group”, like the Toba of Argentina (Messineo, 2003).

In this way, the heterogeneity and abundance of cultural and linguistic thresholds in the Gran Chaco does not prevent us from observing a certain continuity. Braunstein notes the following: “The repetition of the phenomenon by which elements of culture gradually distributed in lines (i.e. chains between different social facts that are opposed and whose intermediate elements or discrete links gradually differentiate)” (Braunstein, 2016: 95). Finally, it is worth remembering an answer given by Lévi-Strauss: “Probably there is nothing more than that in the structuralist approach; it is the quest for the invariant, or for the invariant elements among superficial differences” (Lévi-Strauss, 2005 [1978]: 2), or better said for our case “among ostensible differences”. Let us then see how similarities and differences are woven together in the correlative cases.

Girls’ initiation ritual and *Sowalaq* / *Kamba* figures of the Enlhet-Enenlhet peoples

To begin with, here is a description of the ritual provided by Loewen in the 1960s:

Yanmaná. The girls’ puberty festival was the greatest festival of Lengua [currently Enlhet and Enxet] culture... it could last from a month to seven or more weeks, depending on the amount of food that was available, messengers were sent to all the outlying villages announcing the coming yanmaná... Once the festival began the drums would beat incessantly, day and night, although the dancing and drinking was carried on only during the evening and night. During the first part of the festival the girl in whose honor the celebration took place was kept in seclusion [in a special hut] ... During this time of restricted movement, the girl received instruction from one of the chiefs or shamans who spoke to her about her duties as a woman. From some older females the girl also received instruction concerning housekeeping, the planting of crops, and her marriage obligations. As at the boy’s puberty festival, the whole range of Lengua dances took place in the course of the celebration... this festival was one of greatest sexual liberty, and also the time when most of the weddings took place. As the food supply was nearing its end, the festival was finally brought to a climax. For the last great event several young men were selected. These retired into the forest where they were painted and dressed up and masked with bags covered with ostrich feathers. The disguise and ornamentation was to give them the appearance of the spider called sovalac. This name denotes not only the spider but also a type of malignant spirit whom the young men were to impersonate in the ceremony. After these young men had been properly disguised in the forest they came back into the camp, mingling with the crowd, crying very shrilly, and frightening the people with their impersona-

tions of evil spirits. Bit by bit they wormed their way into the vicinity of the celebrated girl, chanting “now we will take her, now we will take her.” Then suddenly two of them rushed forward, grabbed the girl by both arms, and dragged her out onto the dancing area in front of the house. All the disguised men in pairs followed the two who were dragging the girl. As they ran over the dancing area all the women and children ran after the spider spirits with sticks and shouted loudly as if trying to drive them away. When the two young men tired, another pair of masked youths came from behind to take their places, continually dragging the girl by her arms until she became utterly exhausted and finally fainted away. As soon as the girl lost consciousness she was laid under a tree in the shade. The shaman stepped forward and began to call to the young woman.⁵ He then threw some cold water into her face until she was revived. As this happened the crowd sighed with relief, for the girl had died and a woman had been resurrected” (Loewen, 1967: 18-20).

5. Félix Bogado, an Enxet shaman and Anglican pastor who published a book of Enxet “ancient stories”, including a reference to *Sowalaq* and participation in the girls’ initiation ritual, clarifies that the shaman “... sang close to her ear” (Bogado, 1991: 11) to revive the initiated girl.



figure 1. Women dancing around the initiated girl. Source: Grubb (1911: 182).



figure 2. *Sowalaq* approaching. Source: Grubb (1911: 182).

Discussing this ritual, Kalisch states that:

Coincidentally [with its central ritual importance] it occupies the most prominent place in the memory of the people, and the accounts of such a celebration are much more consistent than those of the male festivals: while the script of the *Yaanmaan* is quite clear, the data on those male parties are much less precise and even contradictory” (Kalisch, 2012: 351).

6. The video was recorded in Enenlhet with subtitles in Spanish. This is a summarized translation of part of the transcribed narrative.

However, even if the stories about the performance and script of the ritual are more present in both the Enlhet studied by Kalisch and the first ethnographical accounts of their southern Enxet neighbors (Grubb, 1911: 177-178), we do not know of any reference to a myth or narration about the “origin” of the ritual; or, what would be even more interesting, about the origin of the *Sowalaq*, the supernatural devilish spirits embodied in the young boys dressed as such. We can find, however, a short intriguing allusion to a “piece” or fragmented version of this myth among the Enenlhet; which is, as we will see, fully, extensively and variously told by the Yshiro Ebitoso and Tomaráho peoples. In a video of the testimony provided by an Enenlhet elder named *Melteionkasemmap* (Kalisch and Unruh, 2016) while referring to the *Ngvenemaa* / girls’ initiation ritual, he recalls that:

Before, women and men did not mix...did not speak to each other... That was the custom of the Enenlhet. If they [the women] wanted to find a husband, they entered the forest without saying where they were going, they went alone... They arrived at another village, and each of them looked for the one they were going to take as their husband. ‘Who is with you?’ she was asked. ‘Nobody. I’m just visiting you.’ That’s what women used to do (Kalisch and Unruh, 2016: 44-52).⁶

He adds that either the mother or the grandmother of the future husband, did not know about this and once she was told, the relatives of the husband considered whether to give their approval. *Melteionkasemmap* goes onto explaining how a girl’s initiation ritual and eventual wedding was then prepared. Now, what seems to be a just a commentary on the differences between the ancient past and the more recent courtship ways, local exogamy, and strategies for marrying, inadvertently includes a “fragment” of the Yshir myth about the boys’ initiation ritual. We will come back to this after examining the Yshir myth and ritual.

At this point, I should synthesize the characteristics and appearance of the *Sowalaq* in the *Yanmana*: they are “young men” who “retired into the forest where they were painted and dressed up and masked with bags covered with ostrich feathers...to give them the appearance of the spider called sovalac”. They “came back into the camp [trotting in a particular way (Arenas, 1981: 275)], crying very shrilly, and frightening the people with their impersonations of evil spirits...” and “grabbed the girl by both arms in succeeding pairs (as if they were trying to kidnap her) while women and children ran after them with sticks and shouted loudly... as if trying to drive them away”. The girl becomes exhausted and finally faints away, she thus “dies”—*ayetsema*— (Kalisch, 2012: 350) as a girl, and wakes up with the singing and calls of the shaman as a “new” and stronger women.

The Maskoy—initially an exonym which was extended to the entire Enlhet-Enenlhet family (Villagra, 2021)—represent a well-documented and consciously assumed process of ethnogenesis from the progressive amalgamation of five peoples of this family (Enenlhet, Enxet, Angaité, Sanapaná and Guaná). Such mixture was impelled by their insertion as workers in the *obrajes* (logging camps), ranches and tannin factory of the company Carlos Casado S.A., and their united ethnic identity emerged along with and by effect of the land claim they presented to the state in Paraguay at the beginning of the 1980s (Bonifacio, 2009a: 28-71; Casaccia and Vazquez, 1986). It was because of the territorial restitution that the Kuña Dance reappeared, after “20 years” of not having been done, as the leader Faustino Ramírez points out in the film *Casado’s Legacy* (Bonifacio, 2009b: 4:39 mins). Bonifacio explains that:

... evil spirits [Kamba] never appear in the central plaza, but always on the periphery of the community or in the woods. It is worth mentioning, moreover, that both the masked men and the initiated girl of Baile Kuña

get dressed in a temporary house that is built on the periphery of the central plaza (it used to be in the woods) (Bonifacio, 2009a: 175).

Let us turn now to the Yshir boys' initiation ritual to draw the comparison between the rituals (and myths) of the whole *ensemble*. The movement of the characters from the periphery to the central plaza, the choreography and clothing of the *Kamba* (spirits) and the *Kuñatai* or "Queen" (the initiated girl) (*Ibidem*: 148), do not differ much from those indicated for other Enlhet-Enenlhet peoples who live south of the Maskoy and the Enenlhet, except for some relevant details. For instance, both for the Maskoy's *Kamba* in *Casado's Legacy* and the Enenlhet *Sevalaq* of *Altanema Seiana* we notice the impression of hands and other designs on the painted bodies, quite similar to those made on the Yshiro's *Anabsero*, which are absent from the Enxet's *Sowalaq*. In that film, we can also see the instructions a shaman gives to a young man about how to properly and seriously emit and modulate his cries, and later, a kind of fight with branches that is observed among the Maskoy's *Kamba* and women, actions and gestures that we can observe as well in a film about the Yshir *Debylytá* (TESAPE, 1984: 24:40 mins). Thus, due to their historical and geographical proximity, the Maskoy's *Kamba* and Enenlhet's *Sevalaq* resemble the Yshiro's *Anabsero*. Here we must keep in mind that both the Maskoy and the Enenlhet occupy the middle territory of our area of comparison. It is a position that works as an "electrical transformer" or synthesis, to recall Gow's expression employed to tackle the working of the Ashaninka myth in-between the Yine and Yanesha mythologies (Gow, 2014: 3) or the Kuniba myth as a dialectical synthesis of the Kanamari and Cashinahua versions (Gow, 2022). In this case, the intermediation is not mythological but ritual: the *Kambá* Maskoy and the *Sevalaq* Enenlhet indeed work at some level as an "electrical transformer" or, at least, as a "visual synthesis" between the appearance, dress and designs of the southern Enxet *Sowalaq* and those of the Yshir *Anabsero*.



figure 3. *Kamba* during an initiation ritual in 2007. Photo by Bonifacio (2009a: 153).

Yshiro *Debylytá* and *Anabsero* rituals

In the case of the Yshiro (Ebitoso and Tomaráho), the female ritual of the Enlhet-Enenlhet neighbors is transformed into the *Debylytá*, boys' initiation ritual, in which the central characters are the *Anabsero*. After a careful study of its etymology, Richard (2008: 183-187) translates this term as "furious foreigners". There is a dense and extensive mythical record, as shown in his stratigraphic table (see Table 2).

AUTOR	DATE	TERM	TRANSLATION
Boggiani	1898	Anábüsén	Spirits
Frič	1906	Anabason	Spirits
Alarcón & Pittini	1926	Anabason	Spirits
Baldus	1931	Anápösö	Spirits of the forest
Belaieff	1937	Anabsonro	Spies
Métraux	1943	Anápösö/Anabason	Spirits
Susnik	1957	Anabsonro	Anthropomorphic subterranean and underwater demons
Cordeu	1981	Axnábsero	Theophany
Sequera	1988	Anabsero	Original beings
Escobar	1993	Anabsero	Deities
Ulrich	2000	Ahnâpsire	Mythological clowns
Sequera	2003	Ahnapsûro	Mythical beings

table 2. Stratigraphy of the term "anabson" (sing.) and its translations. Source: Based on Richard's table (2008a: 185), with my own additions and translation from French.

The myth, when reduced to its minimum expression, starts with some young *Yutoro* (free and single women) who are following a group of *Esnanio* men (without *Woso* / knowledge / Power / Understanding), but then stay behind in the path. They find a large tuber *axporá* (*Jacaratia corumbensis*) and start to dig it out, while the plant caresses their vaginas. Once they managed to get it out with great effort, pushed by their great curiosity and desire, the wonderful and powerful *Anabsero* beings emerge from the dug out hole. The women have sex with them, hiding their existence from the men, until they are discovered. Then, the main goddess *Ashnuwerta* pairs with the chief of the humans, *Syr*, and makes him and the other men live with the *Anabsero* in the *Tobich* (situated to the East and in the middle of the forest) and subsequently orders the expulsion of the women from there. In the *Tobich* the men learn from their different *agalo* (companion) *Anabsero* their "cultural" teachings (e.g. cooking, hunting, behavior rules according to age, *inter alia*). This place correlates with the *Harra*, which is the central ceremonial plaza located to the west, where the *anabsonic* families (*Anabsero* men and women and their children) parade. Such families will later institute the matrilineal clans among the Yshiro people (a distinctive and exclusive trait of the Zamuco groups). Various conflicts arise and men, with the help of goddess *Ashnuwerta*, kill the *Anabsero* men; after which *Ashnuwerta* informs the men of their duty, from then on, to impersonate the deities at the *Tobich* and the *Harra*. One *Anabson* saves himself, *Nemourt*, and manages to flee from his *agalo* human companion *Syr*, and during his escape creates the Paraguay River (the eastern limit of the Yshir territory). Before leaving, as a final act,

Nemourt curses the men, who from then on will suffer death, disease and eventual extinction. Later on, the women are also killed by the men. *Ashnuwertá*, who escapes, tells the men to copulate with her and then tear her to pieces, from which human women will arise again. This is done and thus new women and men arise with *Woso* / understanding. As a result, the men are given the duty to carry on the *Debylytá* ritual in which they take the place of the *Anabsero* and terrify the women, who are forbidden to participate and to know the ritual and its prescriptions. Thus, the newly born Yshiro people will become extinct if they do not follow the instituted taboo and ritual (cf. Baldus, 1931; Métraux, 1943; Susnik, 1995; Cordeu, 1999; Escobar, 1999, and Richard, 2008a).

The ritual also shows a richness and diversification in clothing, choreography, and paraphernalia that does not "repeat" itself but expands on its own. Richard explains these variations:

In the feast of the Anabsoro—the *Debylytá*—the repertoire broadens, on the other hand, noticeably, and no less than fifteen of the characters represented are not explicitly connected to the myth. The ritual has its own dynamics and productivity, and if the story serves as an explanatory framework (but the story is also an object taken from the economy of this celebration), the ritual is not reduced to the elements that this one proposes and it is often freed of the mythographic coordinates that explain it: the feast belongs to a different order of reality, animated by specific mechanisms and purposes, with a history, issues and other dynamics. Thus, the Anabsoro *Púio* or *Ehrich* have no place in the story but play an important role in the ritual, or *Syr* whose role in the story is crucial does not appear in it, etc.... The ritual and the *ishir* (Sic) vast narrative repertoire therefore multiply the characters, actions and connotations associated with the anabsonic world; they unleash clean productivity and work according to the rules and circumstances of their own signifying matter (Richard, 2008a: 198).



figure 4. *Ashnuwertá*. Source: Richard (2008a: 204), Museo del Barro and Guillermo Sequera' collection.

Let us include a description of the ritual made by Métraux, which is based on the testimonies of Frič and Boggiani. After explaining the beginning of the initiatory period of the *Weterns* (initiated young men) in the *Tobich*, he tells us about the ritual itself:

On the following day the Anāpösō make their formal appearance on the village plaza... The spirit impersonators conceal their identity by pulling tightly netted bags over their heads and wrapping their bodies in hammocks. They are profusely decorated with feathers and the bare parts of the body are painted red, black, and white. 'Su-

ddenly shouting, running and jumping like madmen, they [the Anabsero] rush upon the encampment where they begin the dance, always keeping up their shouting, like little girls in fright...' (Boggiani 71) [Boggiani, 1900: 71]. The women hide themselves behind a wall made of mats, mosquito nets, and rags and there they remain silent with their backs toward the dancing place. Some press their faces against the ground. Knowing that it would mean death, no one dares to look. The opinion is held among the men that if the women were ever to discover that the spirits were really humans, the whole tribe would perish (Métraux, 1943: 115).



figure 5. “Chromatic oppositions of the Anabsero”. Source: Richard (2008a: 204), Museo del Barro collection.

The ritual that recalls the exclusion of women, also cements the division by age, and other aspects that condense its functionality and meanings. Were it not for the ostensible similarities between the rites and the *Sowalaq* / *Saavalaq* / *Sevalaq* / *Kambá* and *Anabsero* characters, it would not appeal to any comparative analysis. The “functional” richness of the rites, its specificity and value for each people, would make any meaningful connection between them difficult to ascertain. As Richard’s account and analysis endorses Susnik’s exhaustive study, it was already a great task to analyze the correlation between the myth and the ritual variations of the Yshir alone. Indeed, as Susnik outlines: “The ‘change of the world’ myth [and ritual] interprets the passage between ‘the old people’, inferior hunters, and ‘the new people’, who have another life pattern” (Susnik 1995 [1969] *apud* Richard, 2008a: 182).

But who were these “inferior hunters”, located at the beginning of the Yshir myth, and who later, due to the various events and transformations that occurred in it, became the new people, the current Yshiro? We have already seen that in his typology of indigenous peoples of the Chaco, Braunstein (2016) situated “inferior hunters” as once populating the northern zone of the Alto Paraguay river.

Taking this into account, and the peripheral location of agricultural peoples such as the Tupí-Guaraní, the Chiquitos, the Chané and the enigmatic Gorgotuquis, Richard proposes that towards the end of the 18th century, when the Spanish settled in Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), several of these peoples moved to the southeast and over the northwestern tributaries of the Paraguay River, such as the Otuquis and Taquary rivers. There, they came into contact with "inferior hunters". Following Combès (2007), he argues that the "gorg-otuqui" would have belonged to the Bororo and Otuqui groups, and therefore were part of the Ge linguistic family. Hence, the traces of possible influences of the Bororo and Otuqui peoples on the ancient Zamucos, and thus on the current Yshir groups, of which the division into (matrilineal) clans is most notable—and absent in all other Chaco groups—a socio-cultural trait instituted by both the Yshir myth and rite. This influence could also account for the origin of the designation "furious foreigners", which is implicit in the etymology of the *Anabsero* term. It appears to be an evocation of those Bororo and Otoqui and similar peripheral "farmers" who met the ancient *Esnanio* men of the myth—people without discernment and culture. These men were transformed by the mythical encounter that led to the birth of Yshir society, and which has since been reproduced in the *Debylytá* ritual.

Transformations and relations of myths and rituals

Let us turn to the question of the relationship between these myths and rites. Lévi-Strauss gives us an initial methodological observation in this regard:

When we look at the myths and rites of a given population, we must remember that this is not a closed system. That is so even at the language level; the structure of each language is determined not only by its internal laws, but also by its relations with other neighboring languages (in the form of affinities). Consequently, it is not surprising that myths and rites cannot be interpreted without taking into consideration the existence of neighboring groups, which are historically or geographically related to each other (Lévi-Strauss, 1956: 707).

We do take into account the existence of neighboring societies in our interpretation of myths and rituals. But, this still leaves us with questions about how to explain, on one hand, the overwhelming presence of the Yshir "myth of the change of the world" that begins with the ancient *Yutoro* women wandering around and then digging out the *Anabsero* beings, and on the other hand, the absence of any (known) reference to the origin of similar *Sowalaq* figures in the mythology of the Enlhet-Enenlhet. Here Lévi-Strauss warns us that:

Mythic thought operates essentially through a process of transformation. A myth no sooner comes into being than it is modified through a change of narrator, either within the tribal group, or as it passes from one community to another; some elements drop out and are replaced by others, sequences change places, and the modified structure moves through a series of states, the variations of which nevertheless still belong to the same set. Theoretically, at least, there is no limit to the possible number of transformations, although, as we know, myths too can die (Lévi-Strauss, 1981 [1971]: 675).

However, the "Change of the world" myth and its variations within the Yshiro Ebitoso and Yshiro Tomaráho, and according to their different narrators, apparently enters into a void when we consider the Enlhet-Enenlhet peoples. Among them, a myth does not seem to exist about the origin of the *Sowalaq* and similar figures. Did it ever exist or did the Yshir myth exhaust its transformations without ever passing through the ethnic and linguistic thresholds of the Enlhet-Enenlhet?

Such a demise of this myth is, however, challenged by the referred account of *Melteiongkasemmap*, recalling that the ancient Enenlhet women "...entered the forest without saying where they were going, they went alone..." This resembles the opening scene of the Yshir myth where the *Yutoro* women wander alone in the forest staying behind and losing track of the *Esnanio* men, whom they initially followed. The Enenlhet storyteller, however, does not elaborate further

on this sequence but he adds that the single women arrived on their own at the other village to look for a husband—an attitude that in terms of social etiquette appears somehow bizarre and unlikely—and uses the reference to describe how, through the female initiation ritual, couples were established. Therefore, we might be facing a myth whose long sequence and complexity has disappeared or has been transformed, so as to now explain, not the emergence of a "new people", but the differences between the past and present (or recent past) customs for finding a spouse and forming couples in an acceptable and ritualized way. We maintain that it is no coincidence that this "fragment" of myth appears among the Enenlhet, who are southern neighbors of the Yshiro.

Here, therefore, we might be dealing with a process of transformation that has led to the fragmentation and decaying (or dying) of a myth among the Enenlhet people and their southern linguistic relatives, a story whose full account still can be found among their northern neighbors, the Yshiro Ebitoso and Yshiro Tomarâho. We know very well that myths may change and transform between narrators, within a certain group or between different groups. But how does the relationship between myths and rites operate? The resounding absence of a myth explaining the origin of the Enxet female initiation ritual, or at least concerning some of its characters, becomes even more perplexing when we consider the vigorous presence (at least until not so long ago) of the correlative rites along the whole *ensemble* of peoples, shifting their focus from boys to girls.

Richard has already pointed out that the Yshir ritual has its own dynamics and that its vast *anabsonic* repertoire does not correspond exactly, but rather exceeds that of the Yshir myth and its different versions. In a similar sense, Izard and Smith state that: "attempts made to establish systematic homologies between mythology and ritual quickly reach their limits. Rituals can both do without myths and contradict, overflow, or escape them" (Izard and Smith, 1982: xviii).

Lévi-Strauss points out: "How, then, are we to define ritual? We can say that it consists of words uttered, gestures performed and objects manipulated, independently of any gloss or commentary..." (Lévi-Strauss, 1981: 671) and adds that such performance and manipulation "are devices which allow ritual to avoid speech" (*Ibidem*: 672) and the ritual proceeds by parceling out "classes of objects and types of gestures" almost to infinity, to find differences and by repeating them indefinitely (*Ibidem*: 673). By doing so, ritual "takes upon itself the laborious task of patching up holes and stopping gaps, and it thus encourages the illusion that it is possible to run counter to myth, and to move back from the discontinuous to the continuous" (*Ibidem*: 674). In sum, Lévi-Strauss concludes that "the opposition between rite and myth is the same as that between living and thinking..."; ritual tries, unsuccessfully, "to re-establish the continuity of lived experience, segmented through the schematism by which mythic speculation has replaced it" (*Ibidem*: 675) by dividing up "...the same continuum into large distinctive units separated by differential gaps." (*Ibidem*: 674).

Instead, we want to take a different and more conciliatory approach here, different from the sharp distinction and opposition between myth and ritual made by Lévi-Strauss and Izard and Smith. Mariza Peirano, for example, after analyzing the different positions of several classical anthropologists, including the founder and followers of structuralism, points out that: "speeches [such as myths] and rites are phenomena that can be cut out in the sequence of social acts [and thus] are good for revealing also day-to-day mechanisms and, even to examine, detect and confront the elementary structures of social life" (Peirano, 2002: 29).

Initiation rites and the "impossible kinship" between humans and non-humans (or enemies)

The more stable element of our comparative study are the ritual figures of the Enlhet-Enenlhet *Sowalaq* / *Savaalaq* / *Sevalaq*, the Maskoy *Kambá* and (the ritual and mythical) Yshir

Anabsero, their symbolic meanings and functions, and their stylistic and choreographic resemblances.

These male characters, who are supernatural beings or simply deities (depending on the terminology of choice), correspond to one of the terms of at least five possible pairs of relationships, notably, i) between certain supernatural beings and humans, ii) between men and women, iii) between old and young people, iv) between different ethnic groups, and v) between different chains of interethnic relations (e.g. the Bororo - Chamacoco - Yshiro Ebitoso and Yshiro Tomaráho *ensemble* and/or the Yshiro Tomaráho - Enenlhet - Enlhet - Enxet *ensemble*). The groups evoked in their rituals and myths may be ancient, former, potential or latent enemies. Even at risk of putting forward an imprecise synthesis, I would say that these rituals speak to us of an "impossible kinship", or at least, of one which fails or failed to accomplish a peaceful mixture of different peoples (and beings). Paradoxically, the invocation and presence of the *Sowalaq* / *Savaalaq* / *Sevalaq*, *Kambá* and *Anabsero*, are necessary to constitute, reaffirm, mediate and reproduce society into the specific individual and social bodies in which and by which the rituals are held. They instill a necessary "otherness", as Gow explains, following Viveiros de Castro's concept of "potential affinity" in Amazonia (2001) (cf. Erikson, 1986):

Kinship does not have a frontier, a point at which kinship simply stops and non-kinship begins. Instead, Amazonian [and similarly Chaquean] kinship is characterized by elaborate spatial gradients of "close" versus "distant", but with no mapping of the spatial gradient onto genealogy in the Euro-American sense. As one moves away from the community of everyday life, kin relations become increasingly affinalized, as is minimally true between an adult brother and sister, out towards actual affines, such as brothers-in-laws, towards strangers, who are virtual affines, and onwards out towards enemies, animals, the dead, powerful beings, the moon, and so forth, in an escalating series of potential affinity. At the edges of the cosmos, all beings are fully affinalized. The return journey is the inverse: affinity is progressively expelled from relations, rendering them increasingly consanguineal (Gow, 2022: 20).

In the case of the Enlhet-Enenlhet and the Maskoy, female initiation is a party in the fullest sense of the word and an amplification of sociality due to the abundance of food and drink, guests (potential affines), and the eventual formation of marital and political alliances, and thus, it is a clear reflection of the more open sociology of the central Chaqueños. The threat of the *Sowalaq*, who come from the forest and from the invisible world, become visible to non-shamanic eyes⁷, and who try to take the young initiated girl, is just a necessary test that reminds participants of past rivalries and concomitant reproductive interactions. Such risk and/or latent conflict between these beings and humans, men and women, and between generations of both sexes, is finally and successfully overcome by the feast. We dare claim that the *Sowalaq* and *Kamba* are "scenic ritualizations" of the (now long gone) dangers and the potential of negative interactions with enemy peoples (e.g. other Enlhet-Enenlhet groups, the Mbaya-Caduveos, the Yshiro, the Paraguayans) in the interior and on the outskirts of the Chaco, where the abduction of women and children between groups was a common practice (Grubb, 1911: 105; Braunstein, 2016: 84; Susnik, 1977: 269).

Meanwhile, the inversion of the initiates' sex (from female to male), in the case of the Yshiro, is just one characteristic among many that are totally transformed and expanded in both their myth and ritual. Take, for instance, some of these idiosyncratic elements: the mythical and ritual proliferation of "furious foreigners", the founding theocide of Yshir society, and the consequent institution of its matrilineal clans, a typical zamuco social structure absent among other Chaco peoples. Take, as well, the taboo and explicit exclusion of women (whose primordial mythical role in acquiring *abnasonic* power and knowledge is reversed in Yshiro historical time). All these features mark a great transformation indeed.

And last but not least, these kinds of supernatural characters also take part in female initiation rituals of the Maká, Manjuy and Nivacle peoples of the Mataco-Mataguayo, and

7. As the Angaité shaman Gregorio Navarro told me, "*amokhame kelyahekama-ha*" ("They are still here").

the Pilaga and Toba Qom of the Guaikuru linguistic family (Karsten, 1923: 86-87; Métraux, 1937: 185, 1995 [1946]: 184-185; Braunstein, 1981: 516-518, 521; Regher, 1987: 176; Citro, 2008: 29; Tola, 2008: 63, 69). Notoriously, these figures also appear in the colonial ritual of the Rua, currently a popular Catholic religious festival for *San Pedro* and *San Pablo* known as *Kamba ra'anga* (the Image of the "Blacks"), on the eastern side of Paraguay. It is important to notice that the term *Kamba* is of dubious Guaraní origin, and it was used prior to the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1970) as an extensive appellation for the indigenous people of Chaco, afterwards changing its meaning to denote the Afro-American people forced by the Brazilian army to fight against Paraguay (Ferreiro, 1985 *apud* Colombino, 1989: 11-13). Moreover, some of the specific *Kamba* of the Catholic festival are disguised young men, who chase young women and are explicitly called Guaykuru, a generic name for the neighboring *Chaqueños* and western foreign enemies—the ethnically mixed Brazilian *bandeirantes*⁸—of the Guaraní and mestizos of colonial Paraguay (1537-1811) (Colombino, 1989: 16, 17, 19). This leads us to believe that they evoke the incursions of those Guaykuru Indians who ventured in search of agricultural products and female captives, precisely in the hilly range area and Paraguayan town of Altos. It seems as though the *ensemble* of myths, rituals, languages and ethnic groups that we have just reviewed extends its transformations beyond these indigenous peoples, trespassing a greater number of ethnic and geographic thresholds, even reaching the eastern non-indigenous Paraguayans.

8. The Portuguese *bandeirantes* were "...trail blazers, slave hunters, prospectors, explorers and raiders of Spanish mission...part Indian, part European, part Christian" [and also part African Slaves] and they "played a large part in occupying a vast area of continental proportions and in forming the Brazilian mystique" (Graham, 1968: 501-502).



figure 6. Guaykuru at Kamba Ra'anga festival. Photo by J. Baldwin, 1981. Source: Colombino (1989: 18)

Waning of *Debylytá* and *Yanmana* rituals

In his masterpiece, "An Amazonian Myth and its History", Gow (2001) dedicates a chapter to the *Kigimawlo*, a girl's initiation ritual of the Yine of the Bajo Urubamba River. At the beginning of that chapter he states that his objective is:

...to analyze this ritual as a system of spatio-temporal actions, to show how it projects the general viability of the Piro lived world onwards through space and time. I then discuss the 'abandonment' of this ritual, and show how the ritual forms of Piro people in the 1980s can be seen as another example of the transformation of a transformation (Gow, 2001: 158).

It goes without saying that Gow's analysis of the Yine's *Kigimawlo* can provide a fruitful point of comparison for the Enlhet-Enenlhet girls' initiation rituals. This could consider, for instance: the seclusion of the girl and the way she is looked after by a chosen old woman (Gow, 2001: 174; Kalisch, 2012: 350); the motivations of the ritual—i.e. eating, drinking, dancing and singing, and desire for pairing, leading to affective and body transformations; the intervention of non-human beings (Gow 2001: 166-171, 178; Kalisch, 2012: 353; Kidd, 1992: 45, 88); and last, but not least, the sociological articulations that both rituals provide (Susnik, 1977: 226-277; Bonifacio, 2009a: 147-148; Villagra, 2011: 331-332). However, we will only focus on theme of the “abandonment” of the ritual, used by Gow to point out another possible “double twist” or “transformation of a transformation”. He alludes to three main reasons for this abandonment. Firstly, the increasing populational and geographical expansion of the Yine, which in turn makes it impossible for the host—usually the father of the girl—to provide for everyone who should be invited. Secondly, the considerable amount of work that it takes to organize the ritual (Gow, 2001: 158, 171). The third reason relates to the disapproval of the rite by the Adventist missionaries (*Ibidem*: 178). Similarly, the “abandonment” of both the Yshir boys' and Enlhet-Enenlhet girls' initiation rituals has been documented in the Chaco over the past decades. The changes and colonization that impinged upon the whole Chaco region, led to unbridled labor exploitation of the indigenous population by ranch owners and Mennonite colonies. This caused the indigenous population to suffer extreme poverty and go through processes of imposed Christianization, as well as to experience acute social exclusion both by the state and Paraguayan national society. Thus, rituals were scorned among the Angaité (Sanderson, 1937: 101-102; Villagra, 2011: 332), the Enxet (Kidd, 1992: 88), the Enlhet (Kalisch, 2012: 353), the Maskoy (Bonifacio, 2009a: 147), and the Yshiro Ebitoso (Susnik, 1995 [1969]: 213) and Yshiro Tomaráho (Cordeu, 1999: 316-319; Escobar, 1999: 357). For instance, the *Anabsero* were nicknamed either as “clowns” or “diabolic” (Susnik, 1995 [1969]: 212; Sequera, 2006: 83), stopped or forbidden by Mennonites and missionaries of various other faiths (Sequera, 2006: 171), Paraguayan *patrones* (ranch owners) and *peones* (ranch workers) (Loewen, 1967: 33-34). Today, when the boys' or girls' rituals are performed, they are circumscribed to particular dates and occasions (e.g. Indigenous National Day, April 19th), often in the form of fragments of the whole former events, such as certain dances and/or games, and labelled as a demonstration of the particular indigenous group's “culture”. Moreover, in some villages, alliances with non-indigenous “powerful others” such as NGO members, anthropologists, local and national authorities on the one hand, and on other hand, with different religious groups, has promoted relational internal divisions, such as between the traditionalists or *cultureros* and the *evangelios* (Gospels) or *costales* (Pentecostals), regardless of whether the links are more opportunistic or more formal and stable (Blaser, 2010: 116, 175, 192-198) (Glauser, 2018: 181-187). This reminds us of the passing from “ancient people”—with Bororo and Otuqui sociological sediments—to “new people” in Yshir myth. For some authors (cf. Susnik, 1995 [1969]; Alarcón and Pittini, 1926) this demonstrates the vestiges (or continuity) of a certain kind of bipartition, between social and physical moieties within a village, or a kind of dualistic “society”. For others, such as Cordeu and Richard, however, such a bipartition cannot be considered as “dualistic” moieties within an Yshir Ebitoso or Tomaráho village, but should be looked at from another level, i.e. the interethnic asymmetric relations between groups—e.g. the former Mbaya-Caduveos with the Chané and the Guaná, or the present Yshiro Ebitoso with the Yshiro Tomaráho (Richard, 2008a: 146-147).

Finally, another comparison can be made between the now sporadic and almost extinguished boys' and girls' initiation rituals, and the current festivals and commemorations of different types that are carried out in the indigenous communities and that include relations with non-indigenous people (e.g. national holidays, anniversary of the founding of a community). Peter Gow illuminates this point saying that:

...writing is experienced by Piro people as a transformation of 'design', such that the school and the *Comunidad Nativa* can be thought of as transformations, in the strictly Lévi-Straussian sense, of 'design'.⁹ That would suggest that the *fiestas de la Comunidad Nativa* might be transformations of *kigimawlo* (2001: 179).

He goes on to explain how related elements such as *Kigimawlo* and the *Fiestas* justify such an audacious leap and comparison (e.g. writing / design, women's songs / *cumbia*, *meyiwlu* / *fiestas* / having fun, *inter alia*) (Gow, 2001: 182). Similar comparisons have been made by Chaco ethnographers (cf. Loewen, 1967, Bonifacio, 2009a; Glauser, 2018; Villagra, 2021) regarding the demise or diminishing of boys' and girls' initiation rituals and the current and new public rituals. These analyses consider the current official acts, national holidays and similar new festivities and ceremonies—which often include indigenous “traditional” dances and rites such as the Enlhet-Enenlhet *Choqueo* or the Yshir *Debylyta*—as transformational, relational and performative events that indigenous groups perform to establish, assert and/or expand their relationships with other humans (e.g. Paraguayans) and non-humans (e.g. auxiliary spirits). This transformation, from past initiation rituals to current *Día del Indígena* (Indigenous National Day) celebrations and alike, can be observed both in the equivalencies between certain terms and symbolic oppositions, and in new elements and innovative changes. Of course, their extent must be analyzed for each particular case.

I hope that the insights with which Peter has illustrated so brightly indigenous transformations in the Lower Urubamba region and elsewhere in Amazonia, are not debased by my effort here to use them for the Chaco region, as if they were a “depreciated” version of the former.

9. Unfortunately, I am unaware of the Lévi-Straussian notion of design that Gow alludes to, but I sense that it could be related to Lévi-Strauss' analysis of Mbaya-Caduveo design and art in *Tristes Tropiques*, where we find arguments about his notion of “design” as transformation: “The face-paintings confer upon the individual his dignity as a human being: they help him to cross the frontier of Nature to culture, and from the ‘mindless’ animal to the civilized man” (Lévi Strauss, 1961 [1951]: 176). This sounds similar to the transformations seen in the Yshir and Enlhet-Enenlhet (myth and) rituals, and seems related to the type transformation that new rituals bring about in the Chaco.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support of Tierraviva and its *Centro de Investigación y Capacitación Tomás Galeano*, the PRONII of CONACYT-Paraguay and UNILA, Brazil, and I am also grateful to the editors Juan Pablo Sarmiento and Victor Cova, for editing this special issue of *Tipití* in memory of our beloved Professor Peter Gow. Finally, I thank the reviewers for their precise and valuable comments and their more than necessary suggestions and grammatical corrections to the text.

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