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COMMENTARY AND DEBATE

Response to Taylor and Platt

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BINARIES ON THE BRAIN: RESPONSE TO ANNE-CHRISTINE TAYLOR

My grounds for criticism of Anne-Christine Taylor's otherwise excellent long-term, dedicated ethnohistory of Jivaroan peoples, which touches on their Quichua-speaking neighbors, are twofold: (1) her reliance on categories of Spanish conquest and colonial rule (especially *manso*[a], and "hybrid"); and (2) the structuralist/neostructuralist reliance on binary opposition to subsume difference. The fundamental contrast, which began with Christopher Columbus was *indio/español*, and then transformed within the category of *indio* to *manso/bravo* to bring Spanish order to the dichotomy "Arawak"/"Carib." The former was to be used for profitable labor, the latter to be the target of "just wars." "Hybridity" did not, in colonial mentality, mean "mixing" or "syncretizing," or "blending." It referred specifically to a special combining of "civilized" and "savage" blood and culture to create a malleable "race" of humans whose labor could be turned to a profit. By the time the conquest and colonial rule reached the Andes and its adjoining Amazonian regions, those in the ruling, civilized category were *español* (and later *blanco*); those on the bottom were *indio*. Then the binary continued to separate out those who were *manso*, missionized Quichua speakers, from those who were *bravo*, the Jivaro and the Auca (Whitten 2007).

Taylor's use of these categories, highlighted by the structuralist requirement of binary oppositions to subsume cultural differences, leads her, apparently unconsciously, to apply categories of animal breeding to aggregates of real people. The church certainly did, and does, use the categories and has been known to lecture to contemporary indigenous

people about becoming *manso*. The term enters Quichua speech from time to time, but the only context of which I am aware is in the negatively ascriptive contrast *manso/sinchi* where people rear their children to be *sinchi*, strong, or “hard.” Taking Uzendoski to task for defining *manso* as “weak” is unfortunate. He uses an ethnographically induced gloss rather than the historical use of the Spanish animal breeders and ecclesiastical ideologues.

There is no question in my mind that the Canelos Quichua cultural characteristics of time-space, kinship structure, the ceramic-shamanic complex, and their remarkable interculturality are definitive of a people worthy of study in their own right. They certainly are very different from the Jivaroans with whom they interact (particularly the Achuar and Shiwiar). Yet, as Taylor notes, and as noted in my own published works in 1976 and 1985 (for examples), the movement of Runa and Achuar back and forth is quite remarkable. What we in the West think of as “very different” systems do not seem to bother the Runa-in-motion.

I have no disagreement with Taylor’s insistence that “integrated systems can rest on the cultivation of difference.” Care should be taken, however, to avoid pushing the metaphor of “cultivation” into the colonial categories of animal domestication and breeding. It is all too easy to reproduce the hierarchical syntagmatic chain of white (civilized) over *manso* (domesticated, a-cultured) contrasted with ... well, what’s left? Pristine savagery? Wild Indians? Jívaros? Without the colonial logic that begins with “indian” bifurcated into wild and tame, a different flow of understanding is possible, and disagreements such as this one could evaporate.

COMPARATIVE SPLATS: RESPONSE TO TRISTAN PLATT

I leave it to Platt, readers, and whomever else may be interested now or in the future to take up these comparative dimensions of culture and humanity in the Amazonian-Andean interface, and beyond. In doing so, as I have tried to demonstrate in this article, it is important to understand that the sharp distinctions made between myth, history, ritual, and political action are Western, not Runa, ones. My mode of presentation here is to see these dimensions of thought and action as cultural correspondences, ways of constructing and reconstructing symbolic templates in multiple systems of signification.

As to the Canelos Quichua and their “melding” (a term I do not

use), I can only say that since my first experiences in the region in 1968 (described in a section cut from the published draft to save space), diversity has been and still is highly apparent, as is unity. As to my shortcomings in not addressing the “wider continental system,” I have done so elsewhere (Whitten and Torres 1998; Whitten 1999, 2007). And to ask me to clarify “the shape that millennial renewal might take, beyond the rebirth of a healthy future” suggests clairvoyant or divinatory facilities that I do not possess. I shall end here and hope that readers and others pick up on the themes explicated, suggested and implied.

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