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Mission, Food, and Commensality among the Yukpa: Indigenous Creolization and Emerging Complexities in Indigenous Modernities

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Venezuela is a through and through creolized nation-state formed through centuries of racial and cultural mixing between people of Amerindian, Black African, and European origin. Through the Amerindian heritage, the Spanish conquest, the forced translocation of Black African slaves, and European immigration, the historical background for contemporary religious and cultural life worlds came to be. The resulting Venezuelan *cultura popular* is therefore an amalgam fed by and elaborated out of these influences.¹ Its specific national dimension is based on the early Latin American liberation from colonial rule, with Simon Bolivar as the celebrated Founding Father of the nation.

Contemporary Amerindians have usually been set apart as pure and aboriginal in contrast to this generalized background of mixing and creolization and were in the national context treated as survivors of original indigenous traditions. For a long time, South American notions of national progress and modernity went hand in hand with indigenous pacification, forced integration and acculturation. In this understanding, progressing colonial frontiers were generally accompanied by a linear notion of successive and necessary stages leading from Amerindian isolation to intermediate and permanent contact, followed by either integration or extinction of the formally savage² (Ribeiro 1967: 90, 1970). The transformation of the Yukpa, one of Venezuela's indigenous groups, is also generally interpreted in terms of a linear process leading from "traditional isolation to an approximation toward the national society" with two consequences: "integration into the Venezuelan nation and disintegration as a specific ethnic group" (Acuña 1998: 22, my translation, see also Molina 2005).

Such a linear notion of integration and acculturation into the nation-state became variously questioned and finally abandoned. Contemporary political processes³ may hardly serve as straight forward indicators for ethnic disintegration and/or indigenous extinction. Many Latin American countries replaced their culturally and ethnically homogeneous versions of national identity – "the myth of a mestizo nation" (Van Cott 2000) – by constitutional reforms and recognize, at least formerly, ethnic and cultural diversity, pluriethnic rights, collective rights to self-government and special representation of indigenous groups (*ibid.*). The Venezuelan Bolivarian Constitution of 1999 and the laws concerning indigenous groups that have been put into force ever since may serve as examples for a transformation in this direction.⁴

Venezuela's Amerindians⁵ have faced centuries of forced and radical transformations including epidemics, genocide and ethnocide. These transformations also produced fundamental changes in indigenous life ways, new peoples and kinds of people (Schwartz 1999). Cultural and ethnic differences were and are (re-)constituted within specific historical processes (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 16) and produce forms of indigenous modernities that are neither reducible to continuing Amerindian conceptions grounded in pre-conquest ways of life nor a mere product of Western influence.⁶

By focussing on the classical theme of commensality and co-substantiation, one can analyze such processes and the internal transformation of the Irapa-Yukpa. Thereby, Yukpa perceptions and practices will come into

focus that produce and annihilate internal differentiations as well as relations with the outside world. By referring to the work of Carlos Fausto (2007), commensality and co-substantiation (see also Halbmayer 1999) can be examined in terms of maintaining and rearticulating the distinction between Yukpa and non-Yukpa. These transformations reproduce not only a long lasting indigenous hybridity and openness to the Other (Santos-Granero 2009), but create a specific form of indigenous creolization that is an integral part of contemporary indigenous modernities and their typical complexities. Among the Yukpa, such a creolization implies becoming an other without becoming the Other. The master distinction between Yukpa/non-Yukpa is thereby at the same time specifically *fuzzy as well as* constantly re-enacted.⁷

Indigenous Creolization

I will use the term “indigenous creolization” to refer to processes of transformation of indigenous groups resulting from contact with non-indigenous power structures, knowledge, tools, and technologies. In contrast, the term “indigenous mestizos” (de la Cadena 2000) was used to refer to cultural complexities of social and racial classification at the intersection of indigenous and mestizo persons.

Indigenous creolization focuses on processes of creolization,⁸ the outcome of which are not Creoles. Thus a distinction between classical concepts of creolization and indigenous creolization seems necessary. Classical creolization focuses on foreign settlers becoming native in a new context. By adapting to a region, Creole populations emerge, often, but not always, through racial mixing. This newly emerging population is both in continuity and discontinuity with the original newcomers.

In the last several decades the concept of creolization has been expanded in several ways and there is an ongoing discussion on how far creolization should serve as a general theoretical concept (Palmie 2006). In its most narrow usage, the notion of creolization is locally and historically specific and constrained to the Caribbean and the plantation economy (Hall 2003, Mintz 1996).⁹ Many authors have a broader understanding and acknowledge that the process of creolization does not necessarily lead to Creoles, to populations that explicitly understand and conceptualize themselves as Creole. Creolization as a process may therefore be distinguished from the emic conceptualization of the outcome of these processes. Diaz (2006) and Munasinghe (2006) distinguish between “Creole as proper noun and creolization as practice” and Munasinghe demonstrates that “the processes of cultural mixing (creolization with a small *c*)” may be “associated with non-Creoles (with a capital *C*)” (Diaz 2006: 577). So creolization processes take place in regions and among populations that are generally not considered to be Creoles. As Diaz (2006) states in reference to Munasinghe, the Caribbean formula (Mix = Creole; Creole = native) may also be (mix = creole = native¹⁰).

Cohen and Tonatino argue correctly that “Creole can apply to white, mixed heritage and black people, sometimes in the same country at the same time, sometimes shifting over time.” Therefore “‘Creole’ is a race-free designation. In short, it is primarily a sociological and cultural term, not a racial one” (2010:9). However, Creoles and creolized populations that became native to a region are generally distinguished from Natives.¹¹ While Creoles became sociologically and culturally indigenized in a new surrounding, indigenous groups are considered to be and in many cases are native to that surrounding, at least compared to non-indigenous creolized populations. In the *longue durée* and from an etic perspective, those who become native and those who are Natives are nevertheless both the product of (past) processes of becoming native in correlative contexts.

Theories of cultural globalization developed by Hannerz (1987, 1996) make use of creolization as a theoretical concept derived from linguistics¹² to

describe the process of social organization of a more or less open continuum of diversity in the context of the global ecumene. These processes are related to power, prestige and centre-periphery relations. As Hannerz states, “(w)hat was not really part of this package was attention to ethnicity and the politics of identity or to native, ‘emic’ categories of what is or is not creole and does not produce Creoles” (2006:564). In this tradition, creolization is associated with current global cultural transformations, to a “world in creolization” (Hannerz 1987), but does not necessarily produce Creoles nor is it intrinsically associated with settlers. Hannerz himself distinguishes phases of creolization such as creole₁ and creole₂. He writes, “(o)ne has focused on the Caribbean, on Plantation America, the historical home region of creole society and creolist scholarship. The other, to which my own few writings on creolization belong, makes creole concepts travel into a wider variety of settings, in which they usually have something to do with global or transnational cultural interconnectedness” (2006: 563).

What may be gained from speaking of indigenous creolization in this theoretical context? First of all, it implies that there is a phenomenon of indigenous_{Creole}, “a kind of Native creole, not Creole native” (Diaz 2006). The creolization formula may be (mix = creole = Native). In this position, settlers and Creoles are (early) expressions of global cultural connections and an emerging complexity. But these settlers and Creoles are not the only centre of creolization processes since these processes also take place among Natives, although under different conditions of power, repression and dominance. Indigenous creolization is not primarily about becoming native in a new region, although in cases of migration, flight, and forced relocation, this may become important, but relies on processes of rearticulating indigeneity in social, cultural, and biological contexts marked by the introduction of new and formerly unknown elements. The core of creolization centres in both cases around becoming native in a new context.

Indigenous modernities, despite being modern and creolized, may be interpreted in an essentialist or purist way, or may be understood in terms of a specific Amerindian “openness to the other” that relies on the incorporation of elements of the Other (Santos-Granero 2009, Overing 1983/84, Lévi-Strauss 1991, Hugh-Jones 1992). However, such a partial incorporation of external elements also leads to a transformation of the self. It produces ontological changes and mixed cosmologies. Paradoxically, “native conceptions that have been operative since precolonial times” are, just like Western and Christian conceptions, part of such cosmologies. They have been innovatively blended and are neither reducible to nor separable from both Amerindian tradition and Western (late) modernity, “resulting in a configuration in which these elements, though never equal, can no longer be disaggregated or restored to their originary forms, since they no longer exist in a ‘pure’ state but have been permanently ‘translated’” (Hall 2003: 30f.). However, such separations are permanently drawn by different observers, including anthropologists as well as Amerindian and non-Amerindian actors. They form part of ongoing identity politics.

Cohen and Toninato (2010) state that creolization is “not to simply be understood merely as a synonym for cultural mixture, as it also entails a process of internal restructuring, inventiveness and reflexivity” which is “a highly creative and continuous process.” So, this process “is grounded in a well-defined socio-historical context characterized by a specific configuration of power relations” as well as in specific ontological and socio-cosmological assumptions structuring perception of context and the internal process of restructuring. The following analysis aims to understand such a process of internal restructuring in the context of specific power relations by starting from the classical standard anthropological image of the Yukpa.

The standard anthropological image of the Yukpa

Between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s (e.g. Reichel-Dolmatoff 1945, 1960; Wilbert 1960, Ruddle 1971, 1974, Ruddle and Wilbert 1983: 38ff), a standard anthropological image of the so called “Yukpa-Yuko tribe” (Ruddle 1971, 1974) was created.¹³ This image, however, concealed transformations imposed by the expansion of the colonial frontier, especially haciendas, oil enterprises, and missionary activities. A taproot notion of identity and ethnicity of tribes and bounded cultures – as Rosengren (2003) calls it in reference to Deleuze and Guattari (1988) – became standardized that hardly reflected the Yukpa’s own categorizations of their social universe.

Wilbert assumed that Yukpa are “all tribes in the region of the Colombian and the Venezuelan Sierra de Perijá, between the Rio Palmar in the North and the Rio Tucuco in the South” (1960: 116f). While arguing for the existence of different tribes in the 1960s, Ruddle and Wilbert (Ruddle 1971, 1974, Ruddle and Wilbert 1983) later conceptualized one Yukpa “tribe” divided in 16 “sub-tribes”. This image has served as the background for anthropological studies ever since. The different “sub-tribes” were conceived as endogamous (Wilbert 1960: 117, 1974: 78, 83; Ruddle and Wilbert 1983: 38f.) and as lacking overarching peaceful social relations, because “traditionally, each of the subtribes has occupied a distinct territory focusing upon a particular river valley” (Ruddle 1971: 24; 1974: 28). They were understood as “independent, politically autonomous, largely endogamous bands, which, until recently, have lived in a state of almost perpetual hostility toward each other” (Ruddle 1974: 33, see also Layrisse, Layrisse and Wilbert 1960: 422, Wilbert 1961: 16).

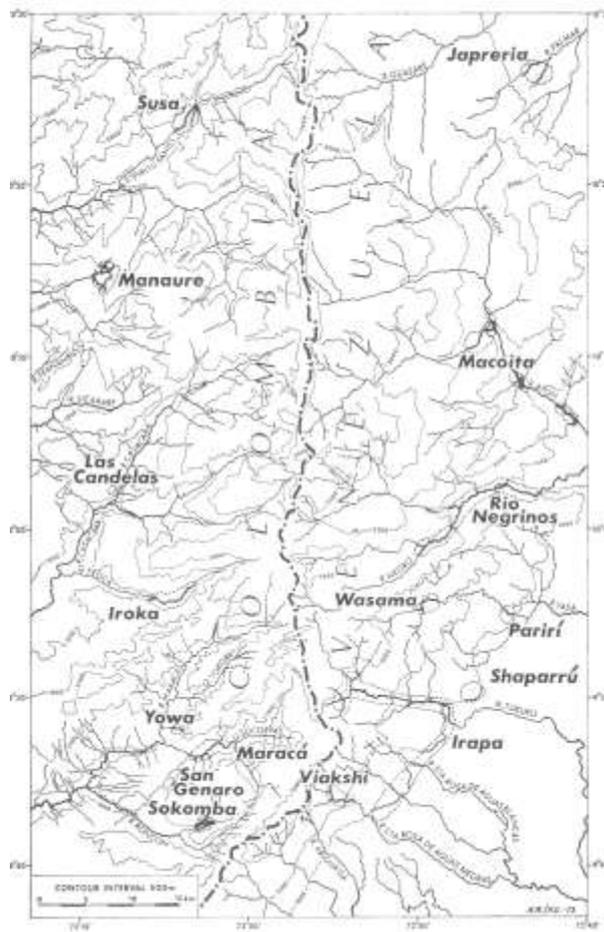


Figure 1. 'Location of Yukpa Subtribes' Ruddle (1974: 29)

Ruddle (1974: 29, see also 1971) located 16 Yukpa subtribes in a map that has become a classic: half of them live in Venezuela and the other half in Colombia.¹⁴ The names of the groups mentioned are a potpourri of Spanish or Yukpa ecological derivations such Rio Negro or Irapa (a mountain within the settlement area of this group), the names of senior headmen such as Viakshi, or nicknames applied by other groups.

According to Ruddle, two terms of auto-denomination were in use among the Carib-speakers of the region: Yukpa in Venezuela and Yuko on the Columbian side of the Sierra. He considers this distinction to be "not only a function of the international border, but it represents a division recognized by the Indians themselves" (1971: 20f).

The Yukpa-Yuko distinction

The Yukpa indeed recognize a distinction between Yukpa and Yuko. The etymology of the terms Yukpa¹⁵ and Yuko reveals notions of identity and personhood. The term *yu* on its own refers to sanies or a furuncle, but it is also referred to as Sun's spirit and its meaning seems to correlate with a substance radiating from Sun. The suffixes *pa* and *ko* indicate that the difference between Yukpa and Yuko is one between those with the same or a different *yu*.¹⁶ The suffix *pa* has the meaning of those belonging to a group, of forming "a common class of X", like, for example, *vorepa*, whose root derives from *ore* (vulva) and women becoming therefore the group of those with an *ore*. Whereas *ko* carries the meaning of difference and otherness and refers to a second (*ko-sa*) or different (*ko-pa-tka*)¹⁷ group. Yuko are those owning another *yu*, while Yukpa are those owning the same *yu*, forming a group of substance.

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1945:18) was the first to wrongly state that Yuko is the autonomination of the people he visited.¹⁸ The relational character of these terms was originally mentioned by the geographer Hitchcock who wrote that "(e)ach tribe employs the second term (Yukpa) when speaking of itself and the first (Yuko) when speaking of its neighbors" (1954:16). The Yukpa/Yuko distinction is one between self-reference and reference to the other and Yukpa is therefore, like the term *asháninka*, "not a name, but a deictic. It only makes sense when one knows who is using it to refer to whom" (Gow, this volume). Today, we know that Yuko has the meaning of enemy and that the contextual relationship between peaceful humans (Yukpa) and enemies (Yuko) lacks any reference to residence in Venezuela or Colombia (Halbmayer 1998).

The term Yukpa may refer to human beings who share the same *yu* in contrast to manifestations of spirits, specific animals, or enemies. A common *yu* is not just given or inherited by descent but produced on the local level by incorporating and sharing the same food and sexual relations. The incorporation of food and the sexual relations therefore have a transformative potential, which may lead to the production of persons with the same *yu* but also bears the risk of establishing dangerous contacts with potential beings of another kind, which may lead to illness or monstrosity.

The exact etymology of the term *watia* (whites, mestizos) remains obscure, but some aspects may be mentioned: *wa* is a negation marker that carries the connotation of not good, bad, or unwanted. *Wayi* means nasty and ugly and is also the term for the lazy and slow or sloth-like. But *watia* also may be related to other terms like *watupe*, which refers to the masters of animals and of certain plants.¹⁹

The relations toward the *watia* are varied. While they were regarded as dangerous Yuko, they also offered access to goods, comparable to *watupe* spirit masters. Consequently, the *watia* were also integrated into Yukpa origin myths, and non-predative relationships were established with them. According to these myths, the first Yukpa women were fabricated by the culture hero *Amoricha* out of the *Maniracha* tree. Today, Yukpa may argue that *Amoricha* also made the *watia* out of trees but used *Kiriji*, a different kind of wood that was transformed to

become the body. Wilbert recorded a tale in which the whites emerge from two subsequent unusual and unsocial sexual acts: a girl is born from the relationship of a Yukpa women and a stone penis.²⁰ Her parents are killed by the Yukpa. She wants to avenge their deaths by inventing Western technology, like iron and firearms. The king vulture lures her up into a tree and abandons her. Being deceived by the Yukpa and the vulture she cries and her tears form the sea. She sets up to cross the sea and conceives a child by the water. On the other shore she gives birth to a white-skinned son, whose father is the sea formed from her tears. Out of the relationship between this son and his mother the whites emerge (Wilbert 1974: 92ff.).

A general Yukpa-like personhood – to be *Yukpape* (Yukpa-like) –is ascribed not just to humans but to many animals, some plants, and some spirits as well. Yukpa-like personhood is a common precondition of humans and animals, animals being ex-(proto)-humans (see Viveiros de Castro 1998). However, *watia* and most spirits are not considered to be ex-humans or ex-Yukpa. They are not differentiated out of a common Yukpaness, as animals are. They were, rather, made from the very beginning out of a different kind of wood (bodies) or are the product of an unsocial (masturbative, incestuous) sexual act between a Yukpa women and a non-Yukpa (a stone penis). Such sexual relations normally lead to monstrosity. Conceptualized as such, *watia* are related to monstrous spirits and powerful spiritual masters who may give access to Western material goods originally invented to kill the Yukpa. Many spirits among the Yukpa are not considered to be ex-humans, even if they appear in a human-like shape, as for example *chuta*, a small spirit in human form that tries to establish sexual relations with the Yukpa.

Food and Sexuality as markers of difference and identity among the Yukpa

The distinction between Yukpa and Yuko is also one between different social realms of exchange. Whereas food and sexuality are shared among the Yukpa, such exchanges do not take place with Yuko enemies since the relationship toward them is marked by predation, warfare, and the abduction of women (Halbmayer 2004b, 1999). If sharing in terms of food and sexuality is established with potential enemies, it will lead to a transformation. In this case, Yukpa become either transformed into the others and absorbed by the enemies, which has to be avoided, or former enemies become gradually transformed into the self.

In contrast to the standard anthropological image, peaceful relations between subgroups existed, including alliances, exchanges, and intermarriages (see Halbmayer 1998: 70). New subgroups were resulting from violent internal confrontations and subsequent separations. Subgroup borders were constantly redefined and fusions and fissions of subgroups were a central aspect of local history. With increased reciprocal relations and visits, friendly relations between subgroups could develop, which led to peace agreements (Wavrin 1948: 409), the establishment of marriage relations, or even to a fusion and integration of groups, as in the case of the Tukushmo and the Iroka (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1960: 162f).²¹

The practice of commensality creates different social spaces within the Yukpa subgroups. The resulting identification is highest among hearth groups living around a kitchen fire, consisting of a core family with unmarried children inhabiting a single house and sharing all food. A lesser degree of identification is produced at the level of local settlement groups, uniting various hearth groups with the obligation to share meat and freshly harvested maize. A third form of identity including a fair amount of difference is established through the trans-local participation in common feasts, uniting several local settlement groups within the subgroup. These feasts imply the collective consumption of maize

beer (*soja*). Generally, during these feasts no solid food or only a special class of food, namely *keuse* maize balls with meat, are consumed. The subgroups are therefore internally differentiated by forms and the intensity of sharing food as well as sexual relations and distinguished from an area where generally no such sharing takes place. In the context of feasts, however, poisoned drinks could be offered. Commensality could therefore not just be used to produce a common *yu*, but to introduce difference and transform an existing relationship into enmity. Poisoned food was used as a weapon.

The Reestablishment of Missionary Activities and the Creation of the New Yukpa

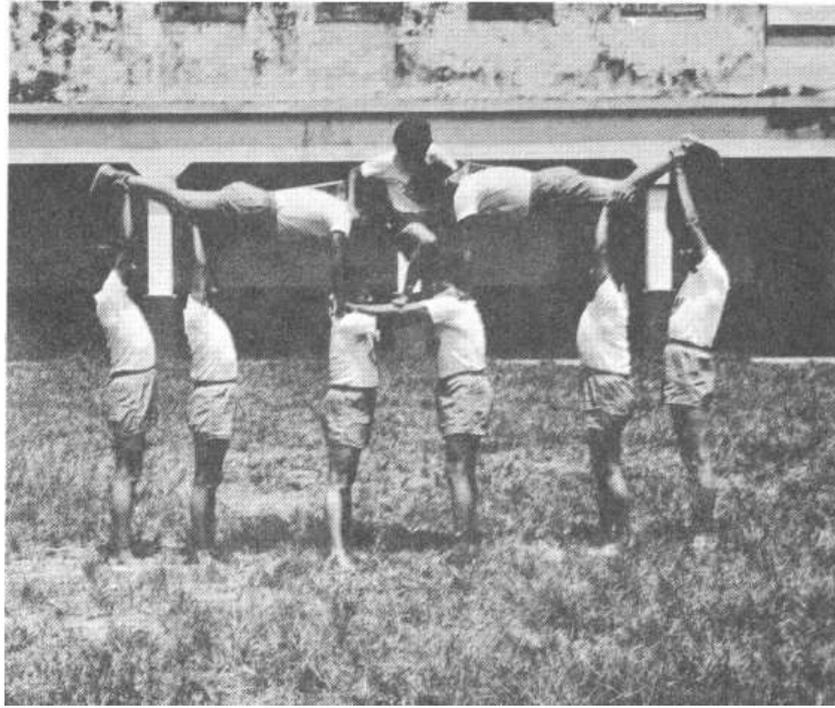
Capuchin missionaries started to establish themselves in 1945 in the backyards of the last haciendas in the frontier zone between the Barí and Yukpa (Vegamián 1972). In the course of this missionary influence, a new kind of Yukpa with distinct, creolized bodies, Christian souls, and new needs and desires were created.

Initially, the missionaries undertook expeditions to remote Yukpa settlements, visits that the elder Yukpa remember even today. These expeditions were used, among other things, to distribute Western goods and food, to give sermons,²² and to remove children from their traditional settlements to raise them in the mission boarding school. According to some Yukpa, these children were given to the Capuchins because they were so persistent while others state the children had been kidnapped. Old people from remote villages still remember how they had to hide in the bush as small children at the arrival of the missionaries.

Preferably, children who had difficulties in finding someone to care for them were given to the missionaries. Among them were children recently (half) orphaned or left with a single parent after a domestic quarrel or divorce. Due to the strong uxori-local tendency, Yukpa boys especially were given into the custody of the missionaries, as they would marry out anyway and the political basis of the elders resting on their control over daughters and in-marrying sons-in-law. Javier Armato, who was orphaned after a conflict between the Viakshi and the Irapa, entered the mission on the age of five. Today, he states that he was “sold for a pair of trousers” to the missionaries. So a mixture of forced pressure, direct (unequal) exchange for Western goods, and soon strategic considerations of building a relationship to this newly emerging pool of Western goods and resources were reasons for giving children to the missionaries.

Contacts between missionaries and the Yukpa were not always peaceful, but they managed to establish relations with some important leaders, such as Anane and Pekare, who began to settle near the mission and whose children were among the first to go through the missionary school. Today, the mission Los Angeles de Tukuko is the biggest Yukpa settlement with more than one thousand Yukpa from several subgroups living there.

In a society where co-substantiation, co-residence, and sharing are fundamental and the same word (*me*) is used for saying that a person has definitely left a community and that someone has died, to live in a boarding school has fundamental consequences. Children separated from their families gradually became the missionaries’ children: they adopted them, raised them, taught them white ideas and fed them bread and milk. Those who feed have the right over the child, the Yukpa say (Halbmayer 2004b), and, in the end, those fed by the Capuchins could read and write but were hardly able to economically survive in the forest. They had become subjects of Catholic, Spanish-only educational drill and discipline with hardly any traces of a bicultural education until the recent past.



Physical education of the indigenous boarders (Vegamian 1972: 355)

New forms of dress and clothing, eating, sitting on chairs, using tables, riding bicycles and driving cars were introduced, and the use of Spanish, writing, numerical counting and calculation, and the Christian faith and soul were established.



Sleeping room of the boarding school (Vegamian 1972: 374)

Through this missionary influence, the difference between being civilized, accustomed to and skilled in dealing with the *watia* or not entered Yukpa ideology. This process established new forms of internal differentiation and external relationships toward the *watia*.

Mission, knowledge and commensality

Thus, new Yukpa were created in the context of the Catholic mission. This process implied a change in cognitive concepts, social practices, and the worlds with which the Yukpa had to deal. The whites became the central Other and at least partially replaced animal and plants spirits and mythical beings who nevertheless

still play a central role in traditional subsistence strategies. Becoming native to the new contexts of the mission and the state implied far-ranging changes in the relevance of specific knowledge and skills. New knowledge and skills were adopted, partially integrated and transformed while parts of classical knowledge, traditions, and practices became irrelevant and were no longer practised, and therefore forgotten. In this process of indigenous creolization, new and old knowledge and skills became transformed, achieving new relevance and meaning.

The people raised in the mission became the Yukpa's modernizing elite, in the best case indigenous leaders, teachers, and representatives, but often just cheap *macheteros* and cowboys working at farms or as wood loggers in the timber industry. New forms of leadership and, for Yukpa standards, big villages were established. The education provided by the missionary school was, as the Yukpa became part of the nation, increasingly considered a necessary resource to deal efficiently with the nation and allowed the Yukpa in the long term to take over many of the new roles and responsibilities that evolved in the confrontation with national society (see Turner 1993 for the Kayapo).

Separated from their families and traditional forms of production in the artificial environment of the mission boarding school, children from different subgroups were raised together, fed Western foods, and indoctrinated in the Christian faith. The children raised in the boarding school formed a substance group of their own beyond the classical Yukpa subgroups. These new Yukpa were largely unaware of their traditional kinship system and established marriage relations across the subgroups, transgressing thereby traditional subgroup boundaries. At the same time naming,²³ initiation, and seclusion rituals were transformed or substituted by Catholic rites.



First indigenous children raised in the boarding school at their first communion (1952)(Vegamian 1972: 370)

The traditional differences established by Yukpa kinship classification and subgroup borders became blurred and these new Yukpa nourished themselves to a significant extent by *watia itagatbo*, non-indigenous, white food. This food produced and provided by the *watia*, was not collected, harvested or hunted. The Yukpa themselves were made familiar with cattle raising, and new agricultural techniques, and the girls with housekeeping and Western ways of cooking. The aim was the Yukpa's definitive insertion into the national society through school and work.

As a consequence, the children raised in the mission school hardly paid attention to avoidances implied by traditional kinship, subgroups, or rituals. The

transformation of Yukpa kinship and its partial substitution by Spanish kin terms are reasons why the Yukpa from the mountains, who live outside of the direct reach of missionaries, say “they (the Yukpa of the mission) have intercourse with their brothers and sisters; they don’t care, like dogs.”

The Yukpa of the mountains are engaged in hunting and shifting cultivation, activities that establish relations with the world as understood in their non-Christianized conception of the world. These Yukpa argue that those in the mission will die young and get old early because of these incestuous relations, because of the *watia*’s food, and because they share food and sexual relations indiscriminately, disrespecting necessary avoidances.



First class to finish missionary primary school (1965)

Guadalupe Makre, Hermelinda Yespachi, Felisa Guerri Chizpika, Maria Begoña Schape, Andrés Pekare, Ana Jorgito Pekare, Jesús Ramon Tutua, Adolfo Maikishi, Jesús Pete, Pedro Bote, Arístides Romero, Pablo Amílcar Miyiyi (substituted in the photo by Carmelo Makiaschi) (Vegamian 1972:467)

In short, the emergence of these creolized Yukpa changed the internal differentiation among the Yukpa and their relationship toward the *watia*. New complexities transpired and the border between national society and indigenous forms of life entered the practices and discourse among the Yukpa. It became an internal distinction, also expressed by the emergence of new classes of those with the same *yu* and creolized *watia*-like bodies.

Eating the same without eating with: becoming watiape, staying Yukpa

Even if the Yukpa of the mountains argue that the creolized Yukpa will die young and get old early because of the *watia*’s food and the sharing of food indiscriminately, it is not true that the Yukpa living in the mission station or the cities share indiscriminately food or sexual relations with *their* outside. And the Yukpa of the mountains do not, as one could expect, avoid the food of the whites. So how may the relationship with the *watia* in terms of food sharing and sexual exchange be characterized? What form does food exchange and sharing between the Yukpa living in the mission and those in the mountain villages take?

Carlos Fausto's distinction between eating *someone* (cannibalism) and eating *like* and *with* someone (commensality provides the starting point to analyze the Yukpa case. This case reveals a difference between eating *like* and eating *with* someone, which will be used to ask which kinds of similarities and identifications may be produced by eating *like* and *with* someone. I will argue that among the Yukpa, only eating the same food produces consubstantiality and gradual forms of identity.

While the commensal key is characterized by "eating and sharing food in order to produce kinship," in the cannibal key eating becomes "a way of identifying with what is eaten" (Fausto 2007: 503). However, such identification is generally avoided and only takes place in special occasions. "(T)he consumption of the other as a person (or in the condition of a person)" in contrast to "the consumption of that other in the condition of food" (*ibid.* 504) is therefore the central distinction in Fausto's argument. Game animals (and one could also add plants like maize and manioc) are not natural objects; much more, it requires ritual work and the process of cooking to transform them into food, as an "animal subject needs to be reduced to the condition of an inert object" (*ibid.* 503). "Indeed, if animals—or some animals—are persons, to devour them in this condition is to appropriate their qualities as subjects. Cooking animals, in contrast, means removing this condition and transforming them into objects suitable for daily consumption" (*ibid.* 504). Inertness, however, must not mean complete inactivity. This condition may not be completely removed, which is why cooked food, especially meat, remains dangerous for the ill, the weak, the pregnant, and for those you have killed human enemies (see also Conklin 2001).

Among the Yukpa, irrespective of them living in remote villages or in the city, a significant distinction between *eating like/unlike* and *eating with/without* may be observed. What does it mean to eat like or unlike? Eating *like* may imply several things: eating the same food as others, or eating in the same way as others. This double distinction opens an ambiguous zone. Some beings eat the same kind of food as the Yukpa but they do so in a different way (e.g. without culinary elaboration) or they may eat more or less in the same way the Yukpa do (with culinary elaboration), but eat different kind of food (like the *watia*).

Eating the same kind of food establishes among the Yukpa a *similarity* between different kinds of beings. Such a similarity may become dangerous as soon as it turns into sameness or identity that generally has to be avoided. Such similarity gradually turns into identity through commensality (eating with) but also by eating the same food. Eating the same food without eating with the other is therefore an indirect and often unintended form of producing identification through the ingestion of the same matter.

Yukpa and jaguars (*isho*) eat at least partially the same kinds of beings that are prey for both of them. Humans and jaguars are similar in this and in other respects but they are not the same or identical. They are prey for one another. But they – at least among the Yukpa – have to avoid eating from the same prey and they obviously eat in different ways. While jaguars eat their prey raw and cannibalize it according to Fausto's logic, most humans generally try to reduce their prey to the condition of an inert object, through ritual means and/or cooking.²⁴

Jaguars (*isho*) may kill and eat humans. Yukpa may also kill jaguars but they never eat them. Jaguars belong to a group of inedible dangerous animals (like different classes of poisonous snakes, *kiripo*, or the blood sucking bat, *bono-cha*) which kill and/or eat humans. Such animals are killed only if necessary, especially after attacks, but never eaten. The killing of these animals is generally avoided and implies taboos and food restrictions similar to those after having killed a human enemy. Human enemies were, to the best of my knowledge, also not eaten among the Yukpa. They instead served as food for others and were considered to be a gift to the cannibal sun and his companion the vulture.²⁵ So animals and enemies that predate on the Yukpa may occasionally be killed but they do not serve as human food. They become food for third parties. By killing them, the Yukpa nourish their spiritual enemies. Thus, dangerous animals are

killed, if necessary, by the Yukpa to be eaten by dangerous and cannibal beings, enemies are used to nourish enemies.

Potentially dangerous, but mainly vegetarian non-predatory, animals are treated differently. They are hunted and eaten but must not be eaten by the hunter himself (such as the spectacled bear – *mashiramo*, *Tremarctos ornatus*). Beside that, most animals that are not dangerous for the Yukpa are generally hunted and eaten. The only restrictions are to hunt not more than is needed and to kill the game properly, otherwise one could become a victim of the respective master (*watupe*) of the animal species. And there is the idea that the animals' bones have to be properly collected and returned to the forest to enable the reproduction of the species.

Beside the logic of similarity based on the consumption of the same kind of food, food may connect and create identity, even between different species. Therefore, prey hunted by the Yukpa showing scars of a former jaguar attack is considered to be inedible, as humans consuming such game would eat jaguar's food, or food hunted by the jaguar. The jaguar food is especially dangerous for humans; it is enemies' food. It transmits the enemies attack to the Yukpa. Eating jaguar's food would create a dangerous identity between the predator (jaguar) and the Yukpa (his potential prey) and a Yukpa eating jaguar food would not so much acquire jaguar qualities, but become its potential victim.

In the same logic, if a banana has small holes in it, which indicates that it had served as food for bats (*pichigatcha* – lit. young of birds), this banana is considered inedible. The Yukpa say that the consumption of such a banana would transmit and cause illness. The same is the case for eating cooked food that was not consumed the previous day, as the spirits of the dead (*okatu*) might have eaten from the food during the night. Sharing the same food with these "species" would produce a unity and identity that would cause illness and death. If the Yukpa in the mountains argue that the food of the *watia* causes early ageing and death, this is a weak reflection of the same logic. They assume that an identity between these Yukpa and the *watia* is produced. For the creolized Yukpa, white food became their food, the food they have been brought up with. Consuming this food makes them similar to but not identical with the *watia*.

Commensality and food exchange may therefore not just be used to create kinship and peaceful relations. Eating the same as and with others is therefore a risky endeavour. Potential enemies may only pretend to create peaceful relations, but in reality use food as a weapon. An enemy's food may be poisoned or it may be poison for the Yukpa as it is non-Yukpa food. The myth of the sun and moon gives an example of such behaviour. The sun attacked two Yukpa who had gotten lost in the forest and kills one of them. He invites the other Yukpa into his house and offers him a *chicha* drink of tobacco leaves. The Yukpa refuse this, arguing that Yukpa only smoke tobacco but do not drink it. With this drink the sun intended to make the Yukpa drunk and to kill him afterwards (Halbmayer 2004a).

Analogue explanations are given about fishing with *barbasco*. The Yukpa say that the fish poison is like maize beer, making the fish drunk. A collective fishing expedition is conceptualized as a common feast that the Yukpa, hiding their true intentions, use to kill. During maize beer feasts, the consumption of maize beer is not always used to establish and reinforce kinship ties through commensality. These feasts regularly lead to fights (Halbmayer 2001) and the beer offered may be poisoned, as many stories testify. The Yukpa say that the poison made from an unidentified plant is either put into the food or under the thumbnail and when offering the beer the finger is put into the beer, thereby poisoning it. Thus food becomes poison and commensality produces not kinship and peaceful relations but conflict and death. In short, eating with and like may become a form of predation. Sharing food offers opportunities for hidden attacks and, through food, dangerous qualities may be conferred to someone (see Halbmayer 1999).

There are several ways to avoid identification with those who eat in the same way and the same food: avoidance and tabuization of commensality and of

eating the same food figure prominently. However, if eating the same kind of food creates a similarity, this may also be used to become like an other. The Yukpa of the mission consume large amounts of *watia itagatpo* and the consumption of this white food also produces a similarity with whites and their bodies. However, eating the same kind of food produces a similarity, a likeness, without actually producing an identity. There is a significant difference expressed by the Yukpa suffix *-pe* between being an other, for example a *watia*, or being or becoming like an other: *watiape*. As the Yukpa in everyday life hardly ever eat with the *watia*, and do not eat the same food from which the *watia* have already eaten, they generally do not produce a common corporality, sociality, and kinship with them and they therefore do not become *watia* or create a common *yu* with them.

Similarity should be distinguished from identity and while eating the same kind of food creates similarity, only the common consumption of the same food the “eating with” creates a common *yu* and identity. While buying and eating non-indigenous food indiscriminately and wearing *watia* clothes (see Vilaca 2007, Santos Granero 2009) – in short, transforming themselves into beings that appear like the *watia* – the question with whom one eats, or where one eats, remains one of central importance and is equivalent to the question of who cooked and prepared the food, who rendered it eatable. The decision with whom to share food is crucial as it goes hand in hand with a transformational potential. Eating with (or without) still remains at the core of creating a common *yu* even in urban contexts.

Commensality among the Yukpa and with *watia*

Those born and raised in the mission often go to the city, but hardly ever go to live for longer periods in the mountain villages. The only ones who go there on a regular basis are indigenous teachers trained in the mission station, equipped with a mule loaded with Western supplies, not for distribution or collective consumption with villagers but for their own needs. Being dependent on foreign supplies without establishing relations in terms of sharing food is in itself a symbol of difference in terms of substance. Even if the village population offers their food, as they generally do, teachers or other visitors from the mission or the city rely at least partially on *watia* food, which they brought with them and seldom share. And most of them return to the mission as soon as they run out of supplies. Generally, several weeks or even months may pass until the teachers return for a few weeks.

The eating habits of the Yukpa living in the mountains may even appear strange to the Yukpa living in the mission. On my return from the mountains, the people in the mission frequently inquired about the things I had been eating in the mountain villages. When I mentioned things like *arishawo* (capuchin monkey), *suru* (snails), *mikarkea* (palm worms) or *pochta* (rhinoceros beetles), many argued they had never and would not ever eat such things. How do the Yukpa who speak the same language and may trace kinship ties but who became quite distinct in terms of their *yu* connect with another? How do they reactivate a common *yu*?

Those from remote villages inaccessible by modern transport and without electricity are included in the money economy mainly in terms of the coffee cultivation, the harvest being sold once a year. Nevertheless, they are eager in consuming ice-cooled soft drinks, white bread, sweets, beer or rum when coming to the mission. This is generally interpreted as their longing for Western goods and the commonly resulting alcohol abuse as a sign of culture loss and ethnic disintegration.

Beer and rum as substitutes for maize beer are permanently available in the mission. As mentioned above, the sharing of maize beer constituted the weakest form of co-substantiation within a Yukpa subgroup, which implied a fair amount of difference and regular conflict. The eagerness with which the Yukpa from the mountains consume white food and drinks in the mission may

hardly be adequately explained by a general longing for Western goods or by ethnic disintegration. It must be understood as an activity that reestablishes a common *yū*, as an act of co-substantiation with the Yukpa living in the mission, as an activity less oriented towards the *watia* but to recreating a common *yū* across the established differences that have emerged within the Yukpa as the new forms of life were internalized.

As mentioned, the Yukpa living in the mission station or the cities do not indiscriminately share food or sexual relations with *their* outside world. Several years ago, a street vendor opened a small kitchen in the mission and started to sell cooked meals. While Venezuelans and Colombians visiting, working, or living in the mission ate there, the Yukpa bought only soft drinks, but they obviously never ate cooked food there. Being in the city with the Yukpa one may also easily notice that a special personal relationship with the cantina's owners is a prerequisite for their food being considered "good" and eatable. Such relations are maintained and as long as the relationship is unproblematic, no one ever seems to come up with the idea to "try someone else".

Today, exchange relationships with *watia* and/or other indigenous groups – though still limited numerically – have been established that include commensality, sexuality, and co-residence. However, these creolized and *watia*-like Yukpa with their Christian souls and hybrid bodies do not become *watia*. Much more, co-residing *watia* are transformed into Yukpa and increasingly become real humans by participating regularly in exchanges with the Yukpa. By successfully incorporating these *watia*, their knowledge and skills, the Yukpa transform themselves. Becoming an other through social incorporation of others, without becoming the Other, is at the core of the Yukpa's logic of creolization.

Many more Yukpa women establish relations with non-Yukpa men than Yukpa men do with non-Yukpa women. In a society where notions of bride service and uxorilocality are the norm, the marriage of a daughter with a *watia*, which would have been unthinkable several decades ago as long as the *watia* were enemies, establishes a relationship in which from the Yukpa point of view, the bride-giver is hierarchically superior to the son-in-law and the son-in-law the one who becomes familiarized. In terms of cooking, a Yukpa household is established in which a non-Yukpa person is integrated. From the Yukpa point of view it is rather unproblematic to integrate and gradually turn non-Yukpa into persons with a common *yū*. Nevertheless the Yukpa are relatively uneasy when they have over longer periods to rely on food prepared by *watia* or *wajiru* (Wayuu), since by doing so they become integrated into a non-Yukpa household. This would also be the case with a Yukpa man marrying a *watia* or a *wajiru*.

One of these creolized Yukpa, let us call him Jorge, today in his sixties, with a comparatively large piece of land near the mission station, raised cattle, produced cheese, and employed other Yukpa as workers on his farm. He was also an indigenous representative working and travelling regularly to Maracaibo. His sister lives there and is married to a *watia*. Her daughter, who never learned to speak Yukpa, is married to the manager of a large clothing company. For this man, going to the mission and to his wife's mother's brother's land is an adventure on Indian territory and the jungle. Jorge's house is a traditional Yukpa house with a palm leaf roof and an open outdoor fire for cooking, and despite the fact that there is electricity, a TV and a refrigerator, this is a sign of authenticity that is also stressed by Jorge himself, who defends his wife's cooking on an open fire as "Yukpa tradition".

Another Yukpa, comparable to Jorge in age and involvement in national society, told me one evening after a few beers that he had a Guajira girlfriend. He was attracted to the women and at the same time ridden by doubts. These doubts did not concern his unfaithfulness or the quality of love involved in this relationship, but it was his first relationship with a non-Yukpa woman and he worried about the consequences of sexual intercourse with a Guajira woman in terms of possible danger and illness that occur when mixing and connecting

substances that may be too different. Not only commensality but also sexuality may therefore be dangerous.

As a consequence of such beliefs, marriages of Yukpa men to outsiders are still extremely rare. When the son of a Yukpa friend established a relationship with a Guajira woman, the parents, while formally not against the relationship, complained informally and argued that there were so many beautiful Yukpa women to choose from. When the respective daughter-in-law cooked for the family, regular laments of her way of cooking could be heard.

Thus, in these contexts, the distinction between Yukpa and *watia* becomes blurred in a specific way and a space marked by a *watia*-likeness of Yukpa and a Yukpa-ness based on the production of a common *yu* that may include *watia* emerges. These processes, however, never end, neither in the eyes of the Yukpa nor in the eyes of the *watia*, in the Yukpa turning into *watia* or the *watia* into Yukpa.

Conclusion

Identity formation and Yukpa personhood result from a permanent production of gradual differences toward different relevant outsides. This is a process in which the production of a common *yu* based on commensality and sexuality plays a central role. Yukpa living under most traditional conditions distinguish themselves as *amicharano Yukpa - contemporary Yukpa* - from their *antancha* ancestors. The latter had no Western tools, no machetes, no metal cooking pots, and no Western clothes. They lived free from missionary influence and the pressure of whites on their land. So even the most traditional and often still monolingual Yukpa are not just exposed to Western influence, but use the distinction between those influenced and those not, to develop their contemporary identity. They perceive themselves as superior to their ancestors, as having managed to obtain and incorporate Western items and the respective knowledge and skills to use them. These Yukpa successfully adopted and incorporated knowledge and cultural goods, as did their ancestors before them, by acquiring fire from the frog (*kopirchu*), agriculture from the culture hero *Osema*, or cotton and the knowledge of weaving from the hummingbird (*gushma*).

At the other end of the continuum, the Yukpa living in the mission station or urban centres like Machiques or Maracaibo are integrated to a far reaching extent into the national society, but they are far from being assimilated. The great majority speak the indigenous language and may easily be recognized as Yukpa. While trying to appear as *watia*-like and civilized as possible, they stress in confrontations with *watia* the continuity with their ancestors and their originality.

While the distinction between Yukpa and *watia* is blurred in a specific way, it is not abolished, despite processes of creolization among the Yukpa and the establishment of new internal forms of differentiation. By adopting aspects of the *watia*, by transforming the other into the self, the Yukpa transform themselves and become *like* these others and through this are able to deal successfully with the Western world and national society. Thereby the Yukpa definitely become others and change, but this “Other-becoming” is a way to recreate new forms of Yukpa-ness without implying that they become the Other, or *watia*. Today, different forms of becoming others without becoming the Other may be observed in urban settings or remote mountain communities and in relation to different actors. Still, they all rely on a partial transformation of the Other into the Self. In this process, an enduring indigenous hybridity is reproduced, but if we look at the Yukpa living in the mission and urban contexts, in many cases this hybridity is no longer determined by Others that are animals or spiritual beings. At least among the Yukpa, indigenous creolization also implies becoming an other without becoming the Other. New blurred forms of identity are created in these processes of indigenous creolization as other Others become relevant

and contribute to the formation of other Selves in the process of becoming native to new contexts.

This context is therefore not necessarily a region or a place to which one becomes native. The social, political, juridical, economic, and technological environment may change and one may adjust to it without leaving a place or region. Indigenous groups may stay native to a region and will have to become native to new contexts such as settlers, the state, missionaries, or global politics. Newly creolized indigenous forms stand both in continuity and discontinuity to these contexts and their own indigenous heritage. Multiple indigenous modernities come to the surface generating newly emerging complexities.

Notes

¹As expressed, for example, by the Venezuelan God-Queen Maria Lionza described in Michael Taussig's surreal *Magic of the State* (1997) or in the celebrations of the festive state as described by David Guss (2000).

²Ribeiro's theory of ethnic transfiguration focused on social integration, which however did not necessarily imply conversion or acculturation.

³Such as the prospering of indigenous movements and indigenous political parties (Van Cott 2005), which have become a significant political factor (e.g. Jackson and Warren 2005, Maybury-Lewis 2002), a rapid indigenous demographic growth in the South American lowlands (McSweeney 2005), significant successes in the granting of indigenous land rights and cultural autonomy and even processes of reindigenization. Indigenous groups have become global actors and have been successful in establishing their own place within the international political system (e.g. Muehlebach 2001, Martin 2003). In other words, a cosmopolitanization of indigenous groups has taken place.

⁴For a critical examination of actual Venezuelan Indigenous Politics see Mansutti & Alès 2007, Alès & Mansutti 2009, and Halbmayer 2012.

⁵There are 742,592 Venezuelan Amerindians according to the XIV Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2011.

⁶See also the formation of "secondary tribes" (Fried 1975) due to the impact of the state, the transformations in the "tribal zone" (Ferguson & Whitehead 2000) or the conception of the interethnic situation by Turner (1988).

⁷While in other examples the indigenous dimension is ignored and submerged in favour of identities perceived as non-indigenous (e.g. Gow 2007) or processes of reindigenization and newly emergent indigenous identities may be observed (ISA n.d.).

⁸The word creolization is derived from the Latin word *creare* (to create, to imagine, or to settle) which assumed in Spanish the double meaning of *crear* and to *criar* (to raise, to bring up, to foster).

⁹Such a purely Caribbean focus is obviously too restricted as Creoles may be found in many other regions of the world as for example Louisiana, Cape Verde and Mauritius

¹⁰East Indians in Munasinghe's case.

¹¹As Diaz writes "In Native Pacific studies, it has become almost customary to underscore the *N* of *Native* as a corrective against another historical and cultural effect of colonialism: the conflation between self-identified Native peoples and the nativism of "local" discourses created by settler" (Diaz 2006: 577).

¹²The concept of creolization developed in 19th century linguistics and is associated with pioneers of the so-called Creolisitic such as Hugo Schuchardt, Dirk Christiaan Hesseling und Francisco A. Coelho. See also Halbmayer (2011).

¹³Thereby the older term Motilones, which included the Chibcha speaking Barí and the Carib-speaking Yukpa, was abandoned. Rivet and Armellada (1950) came first to the conclusion that two languages were spoken in the region. Ten years later, Wilbert (1960) proposed to abandon the term "Motilón."

¹⁴Cariage (1979: 22-23) argued that for the Columbian side, especially north of the Maraca, San Genaro, Socomba and Yowa Ruddle's location of subtribes is unreliable. He shows that several local groups live on the Sicarare and Fernambuco Rivers, which were both unpopulated in Ruddle's account. The northernmost group identified by Cariage are

the Manaure (see Reichel-Dolmatoff 1960: 162; Ruddle 1971), who live south of the village San José de Oriente on the Chiriamo River. He does not mention the Susa, whom Ruddle (1971, 1974) and before him Reichel-Dolmatoff (1960: 162) located even further north on the Spiritu Santo River. Today there are six recognized indigenous resguardos on the Colombian side of the Sierra. These are from south to north the resguardo Sokorpa in the municipality of Becerill, the Iroka and the Menkue-Misaya-La Pista reserve in the municipality of Codazzi, as well as the resguardos El Rosario-Bellavista-Yucatan, Caño Padilla and La Laguna-El Coso in the Municipality of La Paz.

¹⁵ The “k” is generally voiceless.

¹⁶ The suffix *yu-* is also found in many designations of soft body parts such as the flesh (*yupo* - often translated as body, see Surrallés 2010), blood (*yumuru*), fat (*yukara*) or the heart (*yuatruru*), *yubpu* (hair, coat), *yupusku* (navel), *yuri* (penis), *yushi* (leg), *yushru* (skin), *ywapara* (rib), *ywasa* (head), *ywapku* (lung), *yutore* (liver) (see also Cariage 1980: 15, Halbmayr 1998). According to Largo (2011) these are intimate or possessive substantives that always indicate who is the owner.

¹⁷ *Kopatka* – other. This term is formed from *ko-* different *-pa* class of *-tka* just (just a class of difference)

¹⁸ He originally translated Yuko as “gente del monte” (people of the mountain forest). In a paper published together with Alexander Clark (1950) he already gives another interpretation of the term, namely “gente brava” (brave or wild people) and in 1960 he translates Yuko as “indio salvaje” (wild or savage Indians) and Yupa as “indio manso” (tame Indians). In neither of these later publications does he explicitly change his initial statement that Yuko is an autodenomination.

¹⁹ X *watupe* is the master of species X. For example *pishi watupe* (master of the birds) or *pijaju watupe* (master of the healing plants).

²⁰ Masturbative (stone penis) sexuality and procreation by way of tears, leading to an incestuous relationship with the sea out of which a son is born who has sexual relations with his mother.

²¹ For further ethnographic evidence of these processes see, for example, De Booy 1918: 186; Wavrin 1937: 379f, 1948: 409, 1979: 235, Lhermillier and Lhermillier 1982: 19f, Halbmayr 1998.

²² Which is, however, hardly mentioned or remembered by the Yukpa, having significantly less impact than the availability of Western goods.

²³ On this topic among the Yanomami, see Alès, this volume.

²⁴ I am however not aware that the Yukpa take any ritual measures besides cooking to transform hunted meat into consumable meat.

²⁵ This seems to be a weak reflex of the idea that Sahlins (1978) has put forward to explain the Aztec human sacrifices, which went hand in hand with cannibalism: they nurtured the gods (the sun) and without them the universe would come to an end. For an analysis of a Yukpa myth in which the sun is a hunter and cannibal see Halbmayr (2004a).

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