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Amazonian Quichua in the Western Amazon Regional Interaction Sphere

Mary-Elizabeth Reeve

Consultant: Global Maternal and Preconception Health

Amazonian Quichua (or Kichwa) occupy an area along the Napo, Curaray, and Bobonaza river systems. They are participants in a dynamic multi-ethnic system that includes Jivaroan Achuar and Shuar neighbors living southward to the Pastaza River and Waorani occupying the interfluvial area between the Upper Curaray and Napo rivers. Much of the area between and along the Curaray and Bobonaza rivers was formerly occupied by Zaparoan speaking Gaes and Zápara who were decimated by epidemic disease and internal conflict in the early 20th century. Survivors of this period of chaos married into Amazonian Quichua families living in settlements on the Bobonaza and Curaray rivers. Amazonian Quichua living along the Curaray River, who refer to themselves as Curaray Runa, are descendants of the Zápara who occupied the Curaray, intermarried with Napo Quichua, Canelos Quichua, and Achuar. Through in-marriage with Quichua speakers, descendants of the Zápara say that they “hid” their identity as Zápara. Today, this identity is no longer hidden. Zápara, along with other ethnic groups in this region, have created indigenous organizations and become visible in national and international political arenas. In this paper, we present ethnographic and historical evidence of a regional interaction sphere within the Western Amazon in which ancestors of Amazonian Quichua participated, and which is remembered today in oral history.

Amazonian Regional Systems in Prehistory and the Colonial Period

Amazonian Quichua and their neighbors occupy an area which was in pre-hispanic times and during the colonial period part of a much larger regional interaction sphere. Through historic documentation, we can reconstruct this sphere as encompassing the Upper Amazon/Solimões River and its major tributaries: the Napo, Ucayali, Marañón, Huallaga, and lower Ucayali rivers. Linkages from these rivers extended up into the Andean region to the west (Oberem 1967-68; Reeve 1994; Santos 1992; Taylor 1999) and overland up into the Rio Negro region to the north and east (Reeve 1994). Regional systems during the colonial period have been described also for the Vaupés and Orinoco (Vidal 1999, 2000; Zucchi and Vidal 2000) to which the Western Amazon regional system was probably linked through Tupian-speaking Omagua living along the Amazon/Solimões (Reeve 1994). In another area of the Amazon, a regional system extant during the colonial period has been described for the Upper Xingu (Heckenberger 2011a, 2005) and the Caribbean (Heckenberger 2011b).

Recent archeological evidence suggests that regional systems are of significant time depth. Much of the Amazon appears to have been occupied by ethnolinguistic groups that were fluid and linked together in far-flung regional trade networks (Hornborg and Hill 2011) that were characterized by multiple linked settlements, some of which supported large populations (Heckenberger et al 2008; Heckenberger and Neves 2009; Hornborg and Hill 2011; Mann 2008). Archeologists see a major cultural transformation in some regions of the Amazon around 2000 years BP. Life-ways extant since the early Holocene were replaced by a cultural formation involving a more highly shared social organization (Neves 2011:37).

Hornborg and Hill, in their important work on Amazonian regional systems (2011), have argued that three major expansions occurred: first by Carib, then Arawakan-speaking

peoples moving downriver from the Orinoco Basin, and finally Tupi-speaking peoples moving downriver from the Madeira headwaters area. Each group appears to have settled among those peoples already occupying the downriver areas. Hornborg and Hill argue that this process of settlement among other peoples stimulated development of a multiethnic and multilingual regional system which encompassed the major rivers, connecting also via overland routes to headwaters and interfluvial areas, and reaching into the Andean *montaña* and highlands.

There is significant archeological evidence of an early Arawakan trade network covering most of the Amazon Basin and linking to the Caribbean and the Andes as a regional system (Vidal and Zucchi 2000; Whitehead 1993). Sites associated with the Arawakan expansion provide data indicating that this regional system was organized around large sedentary villages supported by intensive cultivation and was characterized by hierarchical political structures and long-distance trade. The large villages were associated with smaller interfluvial settlements occupied, perhaps seasonally or periodically, as a place of refuge from what would have been more intense social interaction within the large riverine settlements (Hornborg and Hill 2011).

At about 1000 BP, Tupian peoples expanded their influence across the Central and Western Amazon, possibly following earlier Arawakan routes. There is evidence of a link between Tupian expansion and the spread of Amazonian polychrome ceramics. The polychrome tradition associated with Tupian peoples spread from sites in the upper Madeira River region (around 1300 BP) downriver to the lower Amazon and then westward up the Amazon and its tributaries almost to the Andean *montaña* in present-day Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. By 800-700 BP, most floodplain areas of the Amazon and Solimões and their tributaries were occupied by peoples making polychrome ceramics. Evident in this expansion are fortified sites, indicating that unlike the earlier Arawakan expansion, Tupian peoples may have entered into conflict with long-established local groups (Hornborg and Hill 2011).

Correlating with the archeological data on ceramics is evidence that the Tupi language probably emerged in present-day Rondônia east of the Madeira River, then spread with expansion of Tupian speakers down the Madeira and up the Amazon arriving shortly before European contact up into the Napo River to the north, where an earlier language appears to have been replaced by Omagua, and up into the Huallaga and Ucayali to the south, where earlier languages appear to have been replaced by Cocama (Hornborg and Eriksen 2011). The decorated polychrome ceramics for which the Canelos Quichua of Ecuador are well-known (Whitten, D. 1981; Whitten and Whitten 1988), were likely influenced by the polychrome ceramic tradition associated with Tupian peoples who settled along the Napo River. Correlating with archeological and linguistic information is colonial documentation of Tupian migration from the eastern Amazon into what is now northeastern Peru. Clastres (1995) has suggested that the dynamics of Tupian political and ritual hierarchies, rather than external – especially colonial – pressures stimulated prophet-led migrations to the “Land without Evil”.¹

In summary, there is clear evidence of at least three regional interaction spheres extant within the Amazon at different times from 2000 BP, up to the point of European contact. During the colonial period, regional systems were either radically transformed or entirely destroyed due to enormous population loss and displacement, and concomitant extreme social upheaval (see e.g. Reeve 1994). A key interregional linkage maintained by the Tupian Omagua living along the main body of the Solimões/Amazon was decimated, as was the Arawakan Manao regional trading system based along the lower Rio Negro. Two of the regional systems to which Tupian Omagua of the Amazon linked; those of the Western Amazon and the Vaupés–Orinoco, were completely transformed during the colonial period.²

While to date, comparatively little is known about the Tupian expansion in prehistory and its transformation during the colonial period as populations were decimated and fragmented, we have a significant body of ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and archeological data regarding the Arawakan expansion and subsequent development of a multiethnic and multilingual regional system; a system remembered today through shamanic narrative and musical performance which conserves memory of an interaction sphere encompassing the entire northwest Amazon and beyond (Hill 2009; Hill and Santos-Granero 2002; Santos-Granero 2004; Wright 1993-94, 2002, 2013). This paper, and the contribution by Uzendoski, point to

the need for comparative data from Tupi-speaking peoples and from Amazonian Quichua and other peoples with whom Tupians interacted following their expansion into the Western Amazon region. It is only with these data that scholars will have a clearer understanding of the Tupian regional interaction sphere that once dominated the area encompassing the Western Amazon and its tributaries up into the Andean *montaña* and highland areas; its transformation during the colonial period, and its memory as conserved in myth and historical narratives.

Amazonian Quichua ethnographic data on marriage and formal friendship provide evidence of continuity of regional interaction linkages between individual extended families that extend across several ethnic groups, creating and maintaining porous and fluid interethnic boundaries. We can suggest that the degree and form of such linkages were – and continue to be – key to the nature and reach of the regional social system. Trekking across the vast distances between and along river systems would only be possible to the extent that people living along the routes maintained a shared understanding of control over resources found along the routes by which people traveled from one group of friends/allies to another. Such passages would have been, at times and in certain places, fraught with anxiety and danger, as will be evident in the myth of the Twin Brothers presented in this paper.

Where warfare, slave raiding, and/or disease epidemics decimated local populations, integration of remnant peoples into a larger shared system through ethnolinguistic exogamy underlies ethnogenesis, whereby a new collective identity is assumed by formerly distinct peoples (See Hill 1996 for a definition of ethnogenesis and detailed analysis of this process). This social construct emerged in the form that it did – as ethnogenesis – following upon earlier patterns of interaction among peoples widely spaced across both riverine and interfluvial areas. Among individuals and extended kin groups, absorption into a larger and/or dominant ethnic polity can lead to conscious efforts to preserve linguistic, and some cultural distinction as a form of memory in earlier ethnic origins. Although further research is needed, the vastly complex linguistic diversity of the Western Amazon may in part be due to such processes as they occurred over several millennia during which the area became integrated into wider Amazonian regional and interregional systems. Such research could be complemented by attention to what Whitehead (2003:x) has called “an ethnography of historical consciousness.” Among Amazonian Quichua in the ethnographic present, it is extended family linkages to other peoples, as well as memory of ancestry perpetuated in myth, in narratives of “beginning times” and graphically in pottery design, that perpetuates the regional social system (Reeve 1988a, 1988b, 1993-4, 2008; Reeve and High 2012; Whitten 1976, 1985, 2008).³

Curaray Runa Mythohistory of Long-distance Trekking

Curaray Runa recount long-distance trekking across a geographic space that extends downriver from tributaries of the Napo River, then along the Napo and up the Huallaga River in modern-day Eastern Peru. The mythic segment regarding long-distance treks to the Huallaga which I was told while doing field research on the Curaray River is a segment of the well-recognized myth of the twins/brothers, as the first Runa.

The twins/brothers myth, identified as “Hero Twins Mythology,” is widespread among Amazonian peoples (Métreaux 1946). Carneiro (2009) notes that this myth has been recorded among Carib and Panoan, as well as Tupi-speaking peoples. In all of these versions, the twins are born of a woman captured by jaguars, the woman dies but the twins escape from the jaguars and go on to attempt to kill all jaguars, have several other adventures, and finally go into the sky as celestial beings.

A detailed analysis of two versions of the twins/brothers myth is presented by Uzendowski (this volume). Below is a version of the myth I recorded in the community of Curaray, an Amazonian Quichua-speaking (Runa) community located at the confluence of the Villano and Curaray rivers. As an origin myth, it is set in mythic time-space (*unai*), but incorporates references to “beginning times” (*callari uras*). In narratives of “beginning times,” the narrator tells a story of the events, with reference to the parallel mythic structure of these events. The

corpus of knowledge from “beginning times” is replete with references to specific geographic locations, particularly hills having a mythic significance, and also features episodes of human-animal transformations, especially involving jaguars, peccary, and various types of birds. In these histories, mythic time-space existed alongside of beginning times, just as it does today (Reeve 1988a, 1988b, 1993-94). The narrative, set in mythic time-space, shifts to beginning times with references to treks in which Runa traveled and traded with other peoples far to the south and east along the Huallaga River. Finally, it shifts back to a mythic time-space frame that ends with the twins becoming celestial beings.

The myth begins with reference to the moon and his lover, Jilucu (a night-jar, the common potoo). After Jilucu smears *buituj* (*Genipa americana*) on the face of her lover, she discovers that he is the moon, who is her brother. Pregnant, she sets off in search of her husband-brother and comes upon a house of jaguars. At first, the mother jaguar hides her in a large cooking pot, but she is discovered by the jaguar son and becomes his wife. The myth continues with their life together until the jaguar son discovers that his “wife” is human. He becomes angry at this discovery and kills her, eating her in a meal shared with the other jaguars of the household. They do not eat the guts, which the old jaguar-grandmother hides. Hiding them, she cuts out the babies, two boys, and rears them secretly. When they discover the truth about their mother, they go into the forest to kill all jaguars in order to avenge her death.

The narrative continues as follows:

Coming to a place where a huge tarapoto tree lay across the river, they wait, as the jaguars habitually crossed there. The two boys, one older and wiser and the younger impetuous and foolish, argue about which one would kill the first jaguar. The younger brother insists that he kill first, and misses. The jaguar that he misses is a pregnant female. From her all jaguars are now descended. After killing the other jaguars, the two brothers decide to cross the river. Two huge black caiman came to help them cross, carrying them on their backs, but caution them not to look as they crossed. The younger brother disobeys and the caiman carrying him becomes angry and bites off his right leg so he could not walk. The older brother finds this caiman and cutting it open, takes out the leg which he gives to his brother, who could then walk again. The caiman also lives again.

The narrative then switches to a beginning times (*callari uras*) frame:

The twin brothers had to go downriver, to the Huallaga River, to get salt. So they found a tree suitable for making a canoe and the older brother said ‘I will topple the top with my arrow, and you the base.’ Again they argued and the younger brother convinced him to do it in reverse. The younger brother, because he always spoiled things, again missed with his arrow, while the older brother split off the base of the tree. Nevertheless, they went downriver to the Huallaga to get salt from a high hill there. On the hill lived a man-eating hawk. Many Runa went downriver and did not return because of this hawk. The brothers prepared themselves by making overcoats of rubber from a large ball of rubber that they had collected. When they got to the hill, they slept on the beach [along the river], and while sleeping the hawk came and took one, then the other brother, trying to kill them with its claws. It thought it had killed the brothers, but only succeeded in cutting through the rubber. The hawk had carried the brothers way up to its nest in the crags. Then the hawk went to sleep and the brothers decided to kill the hawk family. The older said ‘I will kill the mother and the little babies and you will kill the father.’ But again they argued and did it in reverse. The younger brother killed the mother, but the babies escaped. Then the brothers called for help to get down from the nest.

The narrative then switches back to a mythic (*unai*) frame:

A type of caterpillar that eats the leaves of manioc and has a crooked back hears them. She was very old, older even than a grandmother. She had been

cutting firewood at the base of a hill and hearing the cries came up the hill to help. First she carries the older brother down, instructing him not to open his eyes on the way. She does the same with the younger brother, but because he thought he was stronger than the older, he opens his eyes. The caterpillar then falls off the cliff and breaks her back. The younger brother falls into the water and is swept downriver. The older goes in search of his brother. Finally, he finds a beach with many dead logs. The logs had fungus growing from them. Being very hungry, he pulls off some of the fungus [to eat it]. The fungus cries out saying, “I am your lost brother!” Then the older one recognizes his brother. Because they had many quarrels, the two brothers went to the sky to opposite parts. The downriver star is the older brother and appears in the evening, the younger is the upriver star.

The myth demonstrates the depth of time in which Runa have embedded a consciousness of regional trekking to obtain highly desirable resources, as well as the dangers from other beings: most probably humans-as-animals in this mythic time-space, which were encountered on such a trek. The inclusion of a segment set in beginning times preserves a memory of regional integration extending from the Curaray River area of Ecuador up into the Huallaga River of Eastern Peru. The myth and its inclusion of beginning times communicates a collective territoriality and historical experience similar to – for example – that described for the Yaneshá of the Peruvian Amazon (Santos-Granero 1998), and that far more elaborate system described by Silvia Vidal (2000) for Arawakan speakers as sacred routes which integrated a regional political, religious, and trading system. Arawakan long-distance travel was associated with sacred spaces preserved in petroglyphs along the upper Rio Negro region and historically and ethnographically in myths and sacred chants (Hill 2011, 2009; Hornborg 2005; Wright 1993-94, 2013).

Ethnohistorical Documentation of Trekking and Trade across the Western Amazon Regional System

Colonial period documents serve to link the archeological and ethnographic data by demonstrating the continued existence of a regional interaction sphere dominated by Tupian speakers in the Western Amazon. There is evidence of an extensive system centered on the Amazon/Solimões and reaching overland from there northward linking into peoples of the Northwest Amazon; and westward up into the lower Ucayali and further along other rivers into the Andean *montaña* regions: up the Napo to Hatunquijos, up the Marañón into the area of Borja and Macas, and up the Huallaga to Moyobamba, Chachapoyas, and Lamas (Reeve 1994). The principal trade language in the Western and Northwest Amazon during the colonial period was not Quichua, but Tupian Nheengatú (*Lingua Geral Amazônica*) (see Stenzel 2005: for the Northwest Amazon).

Between 1538 and 1767, the date of Jesuit expulsion from the region, Jesuit missionaries, as well as colonial slave raiders and *encomenderos* bent on the utilization of indigenous labor, dramatically impacted the Western Amazon, an area known in the colonial records as Mainas. The missions of Mainas encompassed an area that included the Napo River to the north, eastward to the border region along the Amazon/Solimões claimed jointly by Spain and Portugal and south up into the Huallaga and Ucayali rivers. That this vast area was considered a single mission territory is due to the underlying regional system that the Jesuits transformed through the missionization process. It is important to remember that transformation of the regional interaction sphere took place during a time of terror: from secular Spanish and Portuguese slave raiding, from punitive military expeditions into indigenous zones of refuge, from inexplicably violent and devastating disease epidemics, and from intra-indigenous warfare provoked by these pressures. That a system of regional exchange could continue in any form under these threats suggests that it was a core social construct for peoples of the Western Amazon (Reeve 1994).

Jesuit missionization proceeded from one missionized group outward to their friends and allies located primarily along the major rivers, thus ensuring that expansion followed existing social and political structures. At the same time, indigenous groups experiencing the worst effects of contact with Europeans fled into zones of refuge. In such areas, as well as at the mission sites, distinct groups shared territory, exchanged goods and knowledge, and intermarried. Critical to this process was the degree to which the disparate groups shared a common underlying system of meanings, values, and practices. The process was further amplified by severe depopulation (Reeve 1994, Heckenberger 2011a). As disease epidemics, slave raiding, and internal conflict decimated local populations, many remnant groups were brought into the missions, a few families at a time; allies of each other but commonly from distinct ethnicities. Co-residence at mission sites engendered a process of ethnogenesis at these sites which was to continue long past the Jesuit expulsion.

Throughout much of Amazonia during the colonial period Jesuit manipulation of existing exchange networks and creation of new linkages transformed patterns of interaction among indigenous groups. Data from two areas, the upper Napo River and the Huallaga River, exemplify this process. In 1538 and 1540, Spanish explorers recorded that the Tupian Omagua occupied the islands of the Upper Amazon River and vast territories along the Napo. The account of Orellana's exploration in 1540 recorded Tupian Omagua as living in large settlements along these major rivers in peace with their neighbors (Reeve 1994:109). A document from 1620 records that the Omagua traded their [polychrome] pottery and woven cloth with other local peoples. Omagua living along the Napo were in contact with the Quijos living near the base of the Andes. At first Spanish contact, the Quijos had direct ties also with neighboring Andean peoples through a system of periodic markets. Hatunquijos was a center of trade at which weekly markets (called *gato* in Quichua) were held (Oberem 1974:47; Porras 1974:23). From these markets, Andean professional traders traveled westward and northward, thereby linking the Amazonian region into networks extending throughout the Northern Andes and Pacific littoral.

The Quijos were one of a number of Andean montaña societies interconnected with both Andean and Amazonian groups via in long-distance exchange networks. The traditional Quijos territory extended from the montaña eastward to the confluence of the Coca and Napo rivers, overlapping with Cofan territory to the north and with that of Tupian peoples [Omagua] that likely occupied the Napo as far up as its confluence with the Coca River. During the early colonial period, the Quijos of the Baeza area were recorded as speaking both Quichua and their own language (Uzendoski 2004). The Omagua and Quijos served each other as allies. Omagua supported the Quijos in their rebellion against the Spanish at the town of Avila. The Spanish crushed the rebellion and the surviving Omagua fled downriver to take refuge among a group of Omagua living along the Amazon. By the 17th century, disease epidemics, availability of iron tools for which captives were "ransomed" and European slave raiding severely destabilized the region and led to depopulation, population dislocation, and inter-ethnic warfare (Reeve 1994). The alliance between the Omagua and Quijos had deteriorated and the Omagua began raiding on the Napo (Oberem 1967-68).

A parallel development appears to have occurred among the Tupian Cocama living along the Ucayali and Huallaga, who traded with various Cahuapanan groups living between the Marañón and Huallaga, who in turn traded up into the Andean region in Moyobamba, and with other groups who traded with indigenous peoples of Lamas and Cajamarquilla. According to the historical record from the 17th century, Cocama occupied the lower Ucayali River, with a major settlement along a large lagoon near the mouth of the Ucayali. The Cocama are recorded as traveling upriver into the Huallaga each year during the time of annual flooding. The documents describe these treks in which Cocama would leave the Ucayali in large groups of 40 to 60 or more canoes, traveling the entire length of the Huallaga in search of tools, captives, and heads. However, the historical record indicates that in addition to warfare, they also traded for iron tools in exchange for canoes and decorated woven cloth. Both Cocama and the Cocamilla living on the Huallaga are recorded as traveling into the Pastaza region where they would have had contact with Jivaroan peoples (Reeve 1994:110-112).

Jesuit missions were established on major rivers throughout the region between 1638 and 1767. The majority of missions existed precariously; only a few survived and became major centers of population. Several of the larger missions existed long enough for the

groups brought together to establish multilingual, multiethnic polities centered at the mission. For example, the present day polychrome ceramics made by the Panoan Shipibo and Conibo can be traced to their close co-residence with the Cocama at mission settlements during the 17th–19th centuries (Hornborg and Eriksen 2011). In another example, the mission at Andoas on the Pastaza River in what is now the Peruvian Amazon was comprised of two distinct groups, Zaparoan Andoa and Shimigae, living in separate sectors of the mission settlement (Reeve 1988a). Co-residence may have actually strengthened inter-ethnic ties and helped to preserve the regional system in the face of severe population loss and dislocation due to warfare, epidemics, and slave raiding.

New relations were cemented with the missionary through provision of European trade goods. The Quijos in the Napo as well as Cocama/Cocamilla on the Huallaga initially benefited from the new patterns of exchange, as access to European trade goods strengthened the power and hegemony of these riverine groups (Whitehead 1993, Reeve 1994). Yet the supply of European trade goods was sporadic. Trade eventually became centered on regionally available resources, including salt from the Huallaga, blowgun dart poison produced by the Tukuna and Yagua and oil from turtle eggs collected along the beaches of the Lower Ucayali. Salt, blowgun dart poison, and turtle egg oil, as well as European tools, were important to existing regional exchange networks. The Jesuits seized upon indigenous exchange networks in order to sustain the mission enterprise. Salt, in particular, became a key commodity. As Jesuits established their mission system and began commerce in salt, they sent people annually from as far away as the Napo and Upper Amazon rivers to the Huallaga for salt, which was then distributed by the Jesuits to the new missions, to missions on the Pastaza, and to the town of Lamas upriver on the Huallaga.⁴

Significantly, the treks for salt continued after expulsion of the Jesuits, either for a white trader, or by indigenous people on their own account. During this time, peoples from as far as the Quijos and the Omagua regions came together annually in the Huallaga, exchanging craft items for which each group was known also among themselves. Over time, this trekking and trading came to include peoples from the Upper Pastaza-Bobonaza and Curaray area (Reeve 1994:126-7). The indigenous interethnic exchanges made possible by long-distance travel and trade in salt created a post-colonial reformation of the regional interaction sphere which remained intact until the mid-twentieth century, when conflicts between Peru and Ecuador finally provoked the closing of the international border. The regional system signified in long-distance travel for salt remains alive today as memory passed on in oral histories. The Curaray Runa “origin myth” of the twin brothers focused, in the telling that I received, on trekking to the Huallaga for salt. This suggests that many of the people who carried out these relationships are ancestors of present-day Amazonian Quichua, and that the myth serves as memory of these earlier far-flung relationships.

Curaray Runa History

Curaray Runa self-identify as *runapura*, which translates literally as “Quichua speakers among ourselves”, but it connotes all peoples who are potential kin, being those who share a common origin in mythic time-space. Curaray Runa occupy an extensive territory along the meandering, silt-laden Curaray and lower Villano Rivers. This area was formerly the core territory of the Zápara, who went on long treks to visit the Gae/Shimigae group of Zaparoans living near the mouth of the Bobonaza, where they apparently also traded and intermarried with Andoans, and possibly also eastern Achuar. Achuar and Quijos/Napo Quichua continue to marry Curaray Runa, residing in Curaray but retaining enduring links to their territory of origin. Runa who are descendents of Zápara maintain this identity through oral narratives recounting their history, and among a very few individuals, some knowledge of the Zápara language. The entire region of Amazonian Ecuador is linked by trails crossing river systems and ethnic boundaries in a network that has long mirrored social relations in the region. Curaray Runa families sustain their contacts with other families in distant communities through a combination of river and overland trekking across headwaters regions, and increasingly, by road or small aircraft.

Curaray Runa recount in narratives set in *callari uras*, “beginning times” narratives, (in contrast to myths, which are set in *unai*, “mythic time-space”), the events that recall the history of interethnic relations between the groups living in the region, including accounts of the demise of the Zaparoans, the experience of the Amazon rubber boom, and the end of long-distance trading expeditions into the Peruvian Amazon (Reeve 1988a, 1988b, 1993-4). One corpus of texts recounts the destruction of the Zápara and Gaes peoples in a series of conflicts between shamans that erupted into warfare in which the few Gaes survivors were incorporated into Quichua extended family groups, in this way hiding themselves from their enemies. Another text focuses on an epidemic that swept through the Curaray. Historical records identify the epidemic as smallpox and date it to the 1930s. In response to the epidemic, Zápara and in-married Napo and Canelos Quichua families fled, Canelos Quichua to the Villano area and settlement of Canelos on the Bobonaza, while Napo Quichua families fled up into the Napo. The Curaray River remained depopulated for a generation. Runa say that the epidemic lingered there. However, during this time, Waorani living north of the Curaray came into the former Zápara and Amazonian Quichua area. As a succeeding Zápara-Amazonian Quichua generation returned, conflicts occurred with these Waorani. Families who lost kin still remember these killings.

Extended Families, Exogamy, and the Regional Social System

Considering this history, who are the Amazonian Quichua? Zápara, Gaes, Quijos, Jivaroans, Waorani, perhaps remnant Tupians, perhaps other peoples who escaped documentation by the Jesuits and other chroniclers of the colonial period, or all of these? How do people maintain a sense of ethnic affiliation within a shifting and permeable social space? While some scholarship has cast Amazonian Quichua people as degraded, civilized, and Christianized remnant populations living in mission settlements, a closer look reveals the extensive evidence of ethnogenesis as Amazonian Quichua undergirded by a long-term pattern of interethnic trading and marriage ties across the region encompassed by the Napo, Curaray, and Pastaza river systems. Overlaying the entire area are dense, interconnected, extended family linkages that knit together people who are Amazonian Quichua, Zaparoan, Jivaroan, and Waorani.

For Curaray Runa and other groups of Canelos Quichua, the extended kin group, *ayllu*, has no bounded geographical location, but is composed of members living in a number of communities, some of which are located in areas controlled by members of other ethnolinguistic groups. Runa explain that such far-flung *ayllu* ties provide access to locally scarce resources such as specific clays for pottery decoration, varieties of manioc, access to game resources, and potential marriage partners. The complexity of these relations for the community as a whole is evident in situations of conflict, such as that which continues to exist between the Curaray Runa and neighboring Waorani.

The Waorani, at least those groups living in the western part of their territory, have over the past 40 or so years developed formal friendships (trading partnerships) and marriage ties with Napo Runa and other Quichua speakers (Yost 1981; High 2006; Rival 2002). For Curaray Runa and their Waorani neighbors the situation is complex. As mentioned above, for historic reasons, the Curaray River, and particularly its northern tributaries, has been an area in contention. During my field work in the community of Curaray, one Runa extended family maintained ties with a neighboring Waorani group and permitted these Waorani to visit in Curaray. A woman from this Runa family had been abducted as a girl and was married into the Waorani extended family that made these visits. Now older and with a number of children, this woman served as mediator and translator on the visits, which also allowed her to see her kin. Visits to the community took place in an atmosphere of high tension, as families who had lost members in an earlier killing feared that Waorani could come again to kill. Years after my fieldwork in the community of Curaray, this killing did occur.

In a paper with Casey High, who has done extensive fieldwork among a group of Waorani having ties to Quichua on the Napo and Curaray rivers, we explore the nature of intermarriage in the context of on-going tensions (Reeve and High 2012). By working through

data from the two groups over the past 50 years, we explore the ambiguity of Waorani–Curaray Runa relations. For the Curaray Runa, it is those with kin ties to specific Waorani families who maintain friendships, while other Curaray Runa families live with a very realistic fear of attack.

The example of the Curaray Runa and Waorani points to one aspect of a regional system; the shifting nature of interethnic relations, which range in this case from shamanic attack to marriage alliances. Even during times of heightened tension and conflict, specific families within each group maintain on-going relations of exchange through formal friendship ties and, occasionally, intermarriage. These extended family linkages serve as nodal relationships that potentiate shifts from hostilities to friendship between the two ethnic groups; shifts which occur within the context of a regional interaction sphere in which formalized exchange relations and intermarriage across ethnolinguistic groups are carefully cultivated and maintained. The Waorani, as much as the Napo and Pastaza Quichua, Zaparoans, Shuar, and Achuar are a part of this system.

What emerges from this analysis is the observation that if we as anthropologists focus on large settlements, “communities,” or on linguistic groups, we tend to see bounded ethnic groups. If we look at the *ayllu*, or its similar formation in neighboring societies, however, we see the regional interaction system in all of its dynamic fluidity. We see how abduction can become a successful marriage, allowing the former captive to gain the prestige of an intermediary between formerly hostile extended families; we can trace the historic movement of extended families from one river system to another and back again; we can see how individuals fleeing warfare can “become” members of another ethnic group through in-marriage and adoption of the host language; and we can see how memory of specific extended families can lay the foundation for a resurgence of formerly “disappeared” ethnic groups such as the Zápara, and recently also the Quijos and Andoa.⁵ Extended family ties define and perpetuate the regional social system of interethnic relations maintained through formal friendships and intermarriage, in which bilingualism in Quichua and another language (or in two dialects of Quichua) is common to the majority of individuals. This process of complex interethnic ties created and maintained through individual and family social networks is not unique to portions of the Western Amazon, but occurs in areas as disparate as the Alto Xingu (Basso 2011:156-158) and the well-documented Northwest Amazon. What all of these areas have in common is a regional social system. That said, each ethnic group within these areas maintains distinct kinship and marriage alliance patterns; patterns of exogamy, that determine the potential level and reach of integration into a regional social system.

That this dynamic process can occur even during interethnic conflict is evident in the work on which Casey High and I collaborated, which suggests that extended family linkages can serve as nodal relationships that potentiate shifts from hostilities to friendship between two ethnic groups occupying contiguous territories, for whom on-going conflict is a problematic reality. That this social formation is ancient and enduring in the Western Amazon appears evident from the archeological data and is substantiated in historical data.

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Notes

¹ Based on the analysis by Clastres (1995) it is possible that migrations triggered by factors internal to Tupi-Guarani societies could have occurred periodically during Amazonian prehistory and into the colonial period.

² Transformation of regional exchange was by no means unique to this area of the Western Amazon. The Omagua along the Amazon had occupied a key position linking up into the Western Amazon (from the Napo to the Lower Ucayali and the Huallaga) but also, branching northeastward into the Orinoco and Vaupés. Scholars have identified this branch of the vast regional system as the Northwest and Central Amazon macro polity. The present-day Arawakan, Tukanoan and Makuan regional system of the Northwest Amazon developed during the 16th and 17th centuries through a process of ethnogenesis triggered by the catastrophic changes experienced by the Manoa and Oniguayal (Omagua) Northwest and Central Amazon macro polity into which they were integrated (Vidal 1999; 2000). As Vidal notes, colonial powers competed with each other and indigenous leadership to control the regional exchange networks integral to the macropolity. Also, see Heckenberger 2011 and Basso 2011 for transformation of the Upper Xingu regional system during the colonial period.

³ See Stenzel (2005) for discussion of contrasting historic processes in the Northwest Amazon.

⁴ Farther south, the salt cakes produced by the Arawakan Campa of the *montaña* served as a medium of exchange along trade routes reaching deep into Amazonia. The Campa, as well as the Arawakan Mojo and Piro also made regular trips to Cuzco to trade forest products for Andean products including silver and gold, which were then traded to Panoan Conibo and the Tupian Cocama (Hornborg 2005:594).

⁵ I am indebted to Norm Whitten (personal communication) for information about the emergence of Quijos and Andoa ethnicities in recent years.

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