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Narratives of catastrophe: the zaparoan experience in amazonian Ecuador

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Introduction

The traveler going eastward from the Andean cordillera of central Ecuador into the Amazonian region must first pass through the deep canyon of the Pastaza River and then over a broad, eroded upland where the headwaters of various Amazonian tributaries arise. Further eastward, these tributaries broaden out and begin their slow meanders toward the Amazon River. The Curaray River is one of them. As far back as the historical and ethnohistorical record goes until the early 20th century, Záparos people have maintained a core territory between the headwaters of the Curaray in Amazonian Ecuador and its confluence with the Napo River in Peru. This paper explores the ways in which descendants of Zaparoan people (both Gayes and Záparos) recount their own history, and their disappearance as a distinct group. In this Amazonian region just east of the Andean cordillera, Záparos and other tropical forest peoples have a long history of direct and indirect contacts with the highlands. Their sense of history can therefore contribute to our understanding of mythic and historic constructs in both regions.

Today this area is inhabited by the Curaray Runa, Quichua speaking descendants of Quijos Quichua, Zaparoans, Canelos Quichua and Achuar who have settled along the Villano and Curaray rivers.

Traveling down the Villano River to the settlement at its confluence with the Curaray, the relatively cool uplands and clear swift, stony river dotted with treacherous rapids gives way to a hotter, drier, flatter forest and meandering and silt-laden waters; a true Amazonian riverine environment. The Quichua and other groups in the region control both upland and Amazonian environments along major rivers. Curaray Runa regularly travel upriver to the Runa settlement of Villano. From here they trek overland on trails leading to other Runa settlements on the Bobonaza River, or go upriver as far as the Lliquino to travel south to the Conambo River settlements. The entire Amazonian region of 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 occupy the former territory of the Záparos, who no longer maintain a distinct culture at this site. Curaray Runa possess a sense of identity as Runa (*people*, in Quichua) that includes reference to a distinct origin as either Achuar, Canelos, Quijos Quichua or Zaparoan. Achuar and Quijos Quichua continue to intermarry with Runa at Curaray but retain enduring links to their territory of origin. This same pattern of intermarriage extends into Achuar territory to the south (DESCOLA 1989: 42). Runa who are descendants of Záparos maintain a continuing identity as *Zápara* through oral narratives recounting their history, and perhaps some knowledge of the Záparos language as well.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, peoples of the Upper Curaray and Bobonaza rivers suffered the impact of disease epidemics, slave raiding and occasional putative expeditions. To a greater or lesser degree, they were also subjected to Christianization. Through the dislocating effects of these colonial forces, coupled with that of the rubber boom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these peoples emerged as a distinct Quichua speaking ethnic group. While ethnohistorical sources mention groups of Záparos, Gaye, Semigaye, Caninche and Canelos peoples in the Curaray-Bobonaza region, by the end of the Amazonian rubber boom era (c. 1935 here), all reference to these groups as distinct peoples ceases.

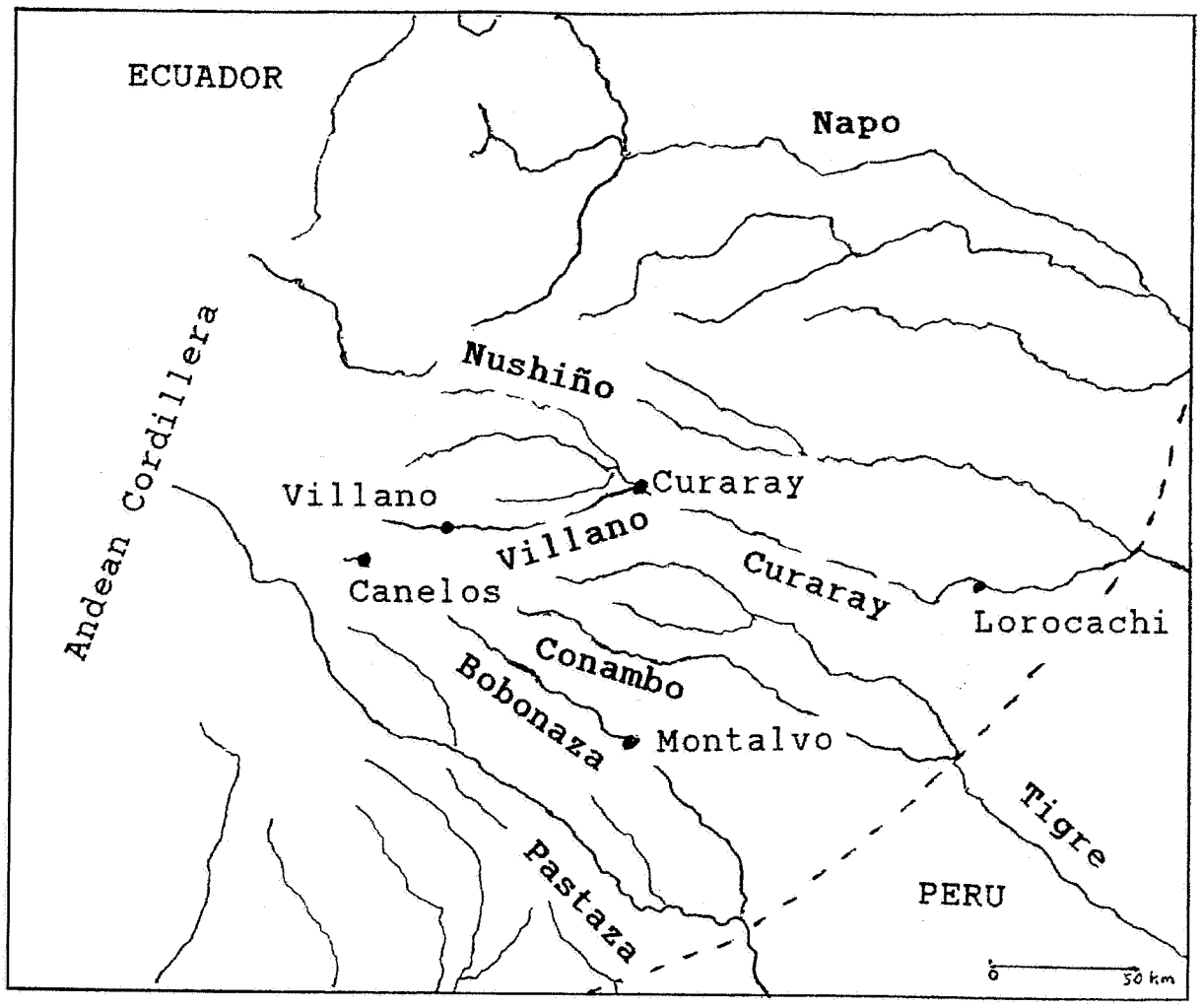
From about the 1890s, the Curaray River below the mouth of the Villano has been a site of incipient and intermittent international commercial exploitation. Up through the 1930s, rubber merchants maintained settlements along the length of the Curaray. Many Záparos, together with Quijos Quichua, worked for the rubber merchants, living at or adjacent to their settlements and making treks outward into the forest to collect rubber. In the mid 1930s a severe yellow fever epidemic swept through the area, killing most of the Záparos and Quijos Quichua peoples at these settlements. According to Curaray Runa, the few who survived fled the area, going to the Quichua settlements of Villano or to Canelos, while others returned to the Napo. At this point, with the exception of the interfluvial dwelling Huaorani, the Curaray River region became uninhabited. It ceased to be the core territory of the Záparos. The Záparos say that it was shamanic warfare which caused their demise. We will explore the implications of shamanic warfare in this history.

The problem of the apparent dissolution of distinct peoples in the Curaray-Bobonaza region must be placed within the context of the development of a multiethnic system. The history revealed through ethnohistorical documents indicates a gradual Christianization of the population coupled with the spread of the Quichua language; it is the european interpretation of the events leading to the territorial conquest of the region and spiritual conquest of its indigenous

inhabitants. However, it is argued here that indigenous peoples formulate a parallel history of events which is transmitted from generation to generation in oral narrative (e.g. PRICE 1983, SAHLINS 1981). Both views must be accounted for in order to understand the processes leading to the present multiethnic system of the region. Just as these Quichua speakers among themselves continue to be of Záparos, Gaye, Canelos, Achuar and Quijos Quichua origins, in this region they have become *runapura* (Quichua speakers among ourselves), in response to state expansion into their lowland territories.

While much discussion has been generated in historical and anthropological analyses over the impact of direct colonizing efforts such as missionization and the economic exploitation exemplified by the rubber boom, the impact of epidemic disease has received far less attention. I suggest that without an appreciation of the role of disease epidemics, we have an incomplete picture of the transformation of indigenous societies over the past 400 years in both the Amazonian and Andean regions. Záparos oral histories may offer us some insight into this role.

Oral histories are told by the descendants of Zaparoans which explain the "disappearance" of their people as a distinct group. These histories are stories of shamanic warfare and physical combat. They are considered to be part of the corpus of knowledge from "beginning times". In this paper I will discuss three themes: first; the nature of the oral histories themselves, in terms particularly of the animal-human transformations, the significance of geography, and the distinctions between mythic and historic time as conceived by the tellers. Secondly, I will discuss the history of the Zaparoans and the influence of epidemics on ethnic group survival, using data from ethnohistorical sources. Finally, I will offer some interpretation of the explanatory role of these histories as indigenous exegesis of a particular experience of social upheaval caused, at least in part, by introduced disease.



Amazonian Ecuador.

Concepts of time-space

The Curaray Runa differentiate three concepts of time-space: mythic time-space, beginning times, and present times. All are recognized as following from the beginnings of life to the present, in the sense that knowledge gained in mythic time-space and beginning times is transmitted down through present times. The three are also seen as existing simultaneously in the present, as nonlinear, as living on in Runa experience today, each referring to a specific type of knowledge. There are many present times because there are many different peoples, each with their own system of knowledge. Quichua speakers of the Curaray River, including descendants of Záparos, possess as oral tradition, a corpus of accounts about beginning times, referred to as *callari uras*. For Curaray Runa beginning times includes the demise of the Zaparoans, the experience of the rubber boom and the end of long distance trading expeditions into the Peruvian Amazon (REEVE 1985: 113-117; 1988a: 101-105; 1988b: 19-34). At that point beginning times is transformed into present times, an indigenous interpretation that is paralleled in the ethnohistorical documentation by the disappearance of references to distinct non-Quichua speaking peoples in the area now controlled by the Canelos Quichua.

Beginning times are contrasted with mythic time-space, *unai*, the undifferentiated state of primordial beginnings. Texts set in mythic time-space contain Runa knowledge of a time when animals were human, or consorted with humans, by disguising themselves as such. Resolution in these accounts often involves the first differentiation of humans and non-humans. Mythic time-space also exists alongside of and interpenetrates present times. In contrast, texts set in beginning times, such as those concerning the Zaparoan demise, focus on interethnic relations between Runa and non-Runa peoples or between those peoples who became Quichua-speakers. The texts are part of a corpus of information transmitted from generation to generation and referred to as *ñucanchij yachana* (our cultural knowledge). This knowledge is shared just among Runa, including intermarried Achuar, Canelos Quichua, Quijos Quichua and Zaparoans. It is explicitly contrasted with knowledge possessed by other peoples. Additionally, each group of Runa maintains a slightly different version of the knowledge from mythic time-space, such that internal variation within "our cultural knowledge" is preserved according to ethnic groups of origin.

Stories set in mythic time-space describe events taking place in an undifferentiated domain in which human/animal transformations occur as the protagonists of each episode discover their true identity through their actions. The principle of differentiation and identification extends into beginning times. Narratives set in beginning times deal not with human/animal transformability *per se* but with relationships between peoples. These texts serve to establish a model of Runa distinctiveness based upon relationships of trade and intermarriage or warfare and exploitation with other groups, both indigenous and nonindigenous.

At the core of Runa historical thought is an indigenous theory of identity that contrasts "Quichua speakers among ourselves", *runapura*, with non-forest dwelling foreigners, *ahuallacta* or *huiragucha*, on the one hand and " those forest dwellers who have killed or captured our relatives", *auca*, on the other. The concept of *runapura* includes kin and potential kin; those believed to share a common origin in mythic time-space. Runa use stipulated shared descent as a symbolic statement of commonality that unites the several historically intermarrying ethnic groups as one people.

Knowledge from mythic time-space and beginning times serves as a guiding construct for the creation of meaning, reflects and gives coherence to world view, and provides metaphors for understanding present reality. History — not the simple recounting of events — is created by actors, in dialogue with listeners, with reference to a present shared reality. It is continually retold, re-created, as part of the ongoing process of social production. In this sense, history shares with ritual the process of reaffirmation and potential renegotiation of a shared social reality (see REEVE 1985: 138-178, 1988a: 121-156, on ritual).

On the Curaray, descendants of Záparos say that Zaparoans (Gaye and Záparos) no longer exist, having fought among themselves until only a few were left. These few married Quichua-speakers at mission sites, and became Runa. They learned to speak Quichua, taught their children to speak Quichua and (with the help of a priest) took a surname common to the Runa, which was passed on to their children. The Runa say that in this way the Zaparoans have hidden themselves from their enemies.

Among the Zaparoans, warfare between family groups was centered around shamanic revenge killings. Each extended family group was headed by a shaman who, using his knowledge of supernatural spirit substance, caused sickness and occasionally death in the extended family group of a shaman with whom he was in conflict. Shamanic feuds occasionally escalated into spearing deaths of whole families in surprise attacks on the household.

Former Záparos groups along the Villano included those of the Lahuano, Tzapino and Nushiño rivers, while those on the Curaray included the Auricuri, at the mouth of the Villano and the Guanino at the Namo River. These Záparos claimed territory down at least as far as the present site of Lorocachi on the Curaray. On the Conambo River lived a very different group; some of whom may have became Záparos through intermarriage with Záparos — learning the Záparos language. The Curaray and Conambo Záparos are considered as the "Záparos proper". The other major group of Zaparoans in this region were the Gayes who occupied territory north of Montalvo near the mouth of the Bobonaza, and on the Upper Bobonaza. The Záparos of the Curaray area went on long treks to visit the group living near Montalvo where they apparently also traded with and intermarried Andoans, and possibly also eastern Achuar. Descendants of both the Conambo and Curaray groups of Záparos, as well as Gayes from the Bobonaza, make up the a portion of the present day population of Curaray Runa.

Before the surviving Zaparoans were absorbed into the Quichua-speaking population, this large group and the Quichua had little contact. Descendants explain that although they occupied in some cases the same territory, they lived apart from each other and rarely interacted. They did not speak each others' language and when and if they met, it was in some area far from the main residence territory, while on a trek. Yet exchanges were peaceful.

Záparos descendants draw a major distinction between themselves and the Christian Runa by pointing out that the Runa were "tame" (*mansa*, in Spanish), they did not kill among themselves, while the Záparos were "fierce" (*piñashka*, in Quichua). These former Záparos point out that now it is only these Runa, just amongst themselves, who are increasing themselves. The last point is critical — the strategy always cited by Runa when they seek to explain the motive behind the desire of other peoples to "become" Runa is that of biological survival — to increase themselves, following a period of devastating intragroup warfare.

The Narrative

During the course of fieldwork in the community of Curaray, I listened to three individuals give their version of the history of Zaparoan warfare. One of these narratives was told as part of a corpus of accounts from *callari uras* to myself, a group of family members and a *compadre* during a drinking party. The other full account was told to me and a few close family members during an afternoon visit some six months later at the beginning of the annual festival (*jista*) celebration. The final account was told not as a *cuinta*, a narration, of the war, but as an exegetic explanation of the cause of the war and contrast between Zaparoan and Runa lifeways. This was given during an afternoon visit in which I was invited to listen to the teller play the *bigolin*, and was part of an introduction to mythic thought complemented by earlier work with the teller's wife on personal songs. The text reproduced here is that told to me shortly before the annual *jista* celebration.

Guacamaya Cuinta

Chi imashti kay Villano umaibimi tian mangapaki urcu nishka, jawa urcu.
Chimanda Montalvoi manga urcu nishka tian.
Chaywan Gayes, Gayespartiguna shuc guerras tucunaraia.
Puro lansata rijun - mana shuc ninaun kay entero.
Chaywan caspiukmanda, chaywan chanda shuc bobera nishka cazi rundu.
Chaywan shuc wañunacucuganara.
Aska kaymanda chi imashtimanda risha wañunacucunashka manga urcui, kay Villano umawan.
Imasata jistai purinoun cajawan, cashi ricunara, pero micunacunaun, micunoun paygunaga wañuchisha wanganami, nisha animalmi.
Sachai shuc plaza tiashcai, guerra rana plaza, anchumi.
Ña chay pactaripi tiaricunashka chasna fila, fila, fila, fila, fila, guerras pishinara, shuc partiwa salyata.
Chaywan tucsinacucushkai.
Chi luririwan casarca tiarisha, chaywan ricusha, ña may compaña, may pakina tiempo, ña shuc apacai sakiwata casan
chayman yanunguna picashka.
Ña cha, cha, cha, cha, chasna shuc wañucusha causacunara.
Chay ña, ña wanuita nishka, ña cutillata sakinoun.
Sakisarinoun ña payba llacta.
Chimanda manga urcu randi chayman pactaraimushcai guerrasha payba salyata, salyata.
Chay sakinaun payguna randi.
Chasna shuc causacunarai.
Chasnaishi ña unai guerrata apana rauskishina (?).
Kaymanda rinoura imashti Gaes parti, manga urcuman, chaywan manga urcuman, chaymanda manga partiman.
Chay ricuna puñushcaun ña pactanam.

There at the head of the Villano [river] there is Broken Pot Hill, they say, a high hill. From there, at Montalvo is Pot Hill, they say.
In that place the Gayes, the Gayes people had a war.
Only lances were seen. Not just one, they say but all.
With these [lances] of wood, with these also a shield, almost round.
With that [they] began the killing. Many, having come from whereever died at Pot Hill, at the head of the Villano.
They looked as in the *jista* walking with drums, but they ate, they ate the killed *wangana*, saying they are animals.
In the jungle there was a plaza, a wide plaza made for war. Now arriving there they formed lines [waiting], the war was not finished.
With that they began spearing, with the shield[s] they stood hunting. They appeared thus, ... now capturing one they left off hunting, from there to cook the cut up [meat].
Now in that way one dying they lived.
That one now dead, it is said, now again [the war] was left off. They remained in their settlement. From there again they went to Pot hill, they arrived to fight in the same way.
There they left off again.
That is how one [they] lived.
Now like that the war went on a long time.
From there the Gayes went to Pot hill.
There a dream vision arrived.

Arriving, that guacamaya came, that guacamaya came in the middle of the night.
This now began to cry out.
From the morning until evening, one old person said.

Pactanaibi shi guacamaya shamura chaupi tuta.
Chaupi tuta shuc guacamayalla shuwayrimura.
Kayta chirira ña wakasha.
– Chishi, tutamandaga shuc rucu nishka.
Mana nishashi nira.
Cunaga kay manga urcui llambu guerraspi tucuchi tucugarounchi nishka.
Chiga riscauna, chiga manga urcui tucllata churashcaun ña shuc jatun ruyac, jatun, uchupoto ninchi nucanchi.
Kay tianchi enteru bulachisha tarampata shinasha rasha chapashcouna nambibi casa waycumanda.
Chayabi sham ña urarimushcaunai, ña cajawangai.
Chima cuentan.
Chi chaupi urcu payguna ushaishi chi tarampata pitishcauna, ña tas, tak, pitishca ruyacga volarisha rijun.
Lata runataga ña, ña win shuc llashi kishpicira ña chay, chay shupica.
Chasna wakasha parlasha guacamaya cuenta.
Chya shuc tucuricunara.
Chay guerra ña sakishcauna ña, tucurishca ña.

Now at Pot hill we finish off in war, we all will be finished it was said.
Seeing in that way, in that way they laid a trap on Pot hill now they layed down a huge tree, a tree we call uchupoto.
With the trap made in this way they waited at the trail from the river gorge.

There they now came making noise now with their drums. It is told thusly.
Then [at] mid hill they cut the trap, now tas, tak, the cut tree went flying.

Now all Runa but one died in that place(?)

This is the sad tale of the Guacamaya.
In that way [a people] were finished. That war is now left off, now finished.

In the text, the narrator begins by identifying the relevant geography — as territory of a specific people and as place in which conflict took place. He identifies the protagonists in the conflict. [The Gayes and "they", being other Záparos identified by another narrator as groups such as the Ushpa Auca and Tayac Auca]. He then proceeds to tell the story as a series of events, with references to the parallel mythic structure of these events. Warfare is analogous in Runa thought to hunting, such that the warriors are mythically transformed into animals: the victims are peccary, and the victors "eat" them. The outcome of events is forecast as a dream vision in which a parrot serves as a messenger to humans. Seeing the vision, the dreamer is "in" mythic space-time. In the third segment of the text, the time frame is switched to the present, with commentary by the narrator on the result of the conflict, the disappearance of a people.

Accounts set within the frame of beginning times contain a parallel reference to mythic time-space in which human/animal transformability and the role of nonhuman agents in guiding and informing human action are paramount (see URTON 1985 for a full discussion). Mythic time-space existed alongside of and occasionally infused beginning times, just as it does today, in present times. Events in the past shape the present as well as make sense of it, giving to mythic time-space, beginning times and present times the characteristic of interpenetrability. This characteristic sets up a problem for our understanding of indigenous exegesis: in both Amazonian and Andean societies, the distinction between a corpus of accounts that could be called "myth" and others that we might label "history" appears to be of little value; fragments of myth break into narratives that look to us like history. Furthermore, in both Amazonian and Andean societies, history is often not told in narrative form but by commentary and illusion interspersed in conversation or encoded in art, in ritual, in geography, in genealogies, in rights to territory and so forth (*see* ALLEN 1984; PRICE 1983; D. WHITTEN 1981; N. WHITTEN 1978, 1985).

The interpretation of mythic time-space, beginning times and present times is evident in the knowledge-seeking, knowledge building formulations of individual Runa. Runa interpret mythic time-space as accessible through night dreams, through vision states induced by datura or *ayahuasca*, through artistic means such as song, the playing of musical instruments or the making of pottery, and collectively through ritual. In performances and experiences, human/animal transformability becomes part of everyday experience. It is important to realize that there is *no single vehicle* for this transformative process, and that it is a part of all Runa's personal experience. Nevertheless, the capacity to interpret and manipulate experience from mythic time-space is possessed by knowledgeable Runa, who are able to guide others (see N. WHITTEN 1985 for a complete discussion of the knowledge and vision-seeking process among the Canelos Quichua; see also HARRISON 1989 and BROWN 1985).

The geography referenced in the texts about Zaparoan warfare forms another linkage between mythic time-space, beginning times and the present. Ethnohistorical documentation corroborates the text references. The original territory of the Gayes lay along the north bank of the Bobonaza and the upper Curaray, including part of the upper Tigre. The Jesuit Fathers SUÁREZ, HURTADO and LUCERO reported in 1663 that many Gayes resided on the Bobonaza. A mission was established there and augmented by people from the upper Tigre and Curaray. Some years later, several Gayes murdered the missionary, the settlement was burned and the population fled into the forest. Gayes relied on their allies among the Roamaina to the south and the Záparos and Semigaye to the north for protection against Spanish reprisals. Two years later, however, Spanish soldiers from Borja succeeded in capturing many Gayes, dispersing them in settlements throughout the Jesuit province of Mainas (REEVE 1985: 88-89; 1988a: 83-84). The majority of Gayes, however, lived outside of mission settlements and retained their territory to the north of the Bobonaza up through the early part of this century.

The Curaray River has always been the core area of the Záparos (PIERRE 1983: 85). Contacted in 1665 by the Jesuit Father CUEVA and visited by Father SUÁREZ in 1667, a Záparos mission was established in 1699. In 1738, ZÁRATE noted that there were seven distinct groups of Záparos on the Curaray (1904: 395). It is unclear whether the Záparos occupied lands as far south as the Bobonaza until the beginning of the 1700s (GROHS 1974: 66). By the early to mid 1700s, however, Záparos were living with Gayes at mission settlements in this region and were also dispersed between the Corrientes and Curaray rivers. In this region, they were described in the mid 1800s as "covering an immense territory and with a number of population nuclei of 100 persons or more, each separated from the next and each surrounded by an enormous chagra..." (CASTRUCCI 1925: 167-174).

Although few of the total population of Zaparoans lived at mission settlements, there were Zaparoans at the missions along the Bobonaza and on the Curaray. Both Záparos and Canelos Quichua were living at the mission of Curaray Alto, above the current mission site, in the mid-1800s. By the late 1800s, the original diversity of groups along the Curaray had dwindled. Father PIERRE described the Záparos as occupying both banks and divided into two major factions; the first occupying the lower Curaray to the Napo and upper Tigre. The other had as its center the population of the upper Curaray and Lliquino. Contemporary Záparos descendants recall these two divisions, the upper one having ties with the Záparos of the Conambo, while the lower group was carried off in its entirety and perished during the rubber boom.

Present times: negotiating catastrophic change

The narrative stands as a statement of the sharp break between beginning times and present times — a break defined by the demise of the Zaparoan peoples. Biological survival continues as Quichua speakers, and a cultural record remains in the memory of warfare kept alive through the telling of this history. The possibility of this outcome, however, predates the events. The processes of transculturation and ethnogenesis are evident at the Curaray mission by the early 20th century. In a 1910 record of baptisms performed in Curaray Alto (Dominican Archives; Puyo, Pastaza Province), the origins of parents and grandparents indicate that Záparos, Achuar and Quijos Quichua were marrying into and moving into the mission, which had, as a base population, a number of Quichua families from Canelos on the Bobonaza. Those from the Napo married persons of Záparos origin and Achuar married Canelos Quichua. There is no case of Achuar-Záparos marriage. It appears that in this region, no Achuar-Záparos marriage ever took place before an intermediate generation marriage to a Quichua speaker, and probably rarely even then. Further, it appears that the distinctions between those who are originally of the Canelos-Achuar intermarrying group and those of the Quijos Quichua-Zaparo intermarrying group remain a salient division upheld geographically and expressed ritually during the annual *jista* in the contemporary community of Curaray.

From the forgoing documentation, it appears that Zaparoans maintained a great resilience to the effects of missionization at a few sites as well as periodic epidemics between the 17th and 19th century. Yet their own history points clearly to a major catastrophe — a series of shamanic feuds which stimulated ongoing warfare — and brought about the end of Zaparoans as a people. These histories, like myths, are structured so that the outcome is a cataclysmic change. They necessarily impute the beginning of a new order. As Lawrence SULLIVAN so aptly states: "The imagery of disaster proves essential to apprehending all instances of breakthrough. Only through the symbolism of disaster can one come to grips with a completely new mode of being. The myths of catastrophe exhibit the violence of novelty and change..." (SULLIVAN 1988: 619). The histories, like myths, impart meaning to the predicament of Zaparoan descendants today. Cut off from their past, they remain "hidden" from their enemies and so are able to increase themselves. The development of a dynamic multiethnic system in this region of the Amazonian Ecuador facilitates their survival.

We are left wondering about what might have stimulated the intense shamanic feuding which led to the death of so many. Or was the shamanic feuding a response to the death of many ? Recently, Pedro PORRAS uncovered in Rome a document written by a rubber collector who lived first on the Napo and then on the Curaray from the late 1880s into the early 20th century. The writer describes a smallpox epidemic on the upper Napo in which "The Indians, struck down by the terrible *muruy* [smallpox] had recourse to sorcery and only spread the disease more quickly... Many families, already affected, emigrated to hide themselves from the disease and left their route littered with many sick and dying who were left unburied after suffering cruel agonies... Indians who had been vaccinated or who had seen vaccination performed, believing that the fluid of the vaccine had been extracted from the smallpox pustules, inoculated healthy persons with the disease and spread it forthwith even more widely.The villages were left abandoned and when they were reorganized, 65% of the population, including sorcerers, had perished" (PORRAS 1979: 28-29).

As an eye-witness, or close to eye-witness account, this commentary provides us with chilling imagery of the terror and confusion which accompanies an epidemic of this magnitude. Historically, the arrival of an epidemic has stimulated warfare. ZÁRATE in 1739 recorded that a Jesuit attempted to settle a group of Ticuna at the Pevas mission (near the current Peruvian-Brazilian border), when an epidemic broke out there. The residents, believing that the Ticuna had brought the sickness attacked and killed 20 or 30 of the Ticuna (1904: 371). Other historical documentation, although sparse, indicate that this was not an isolated incident.

During the colonial period, epidemic disease in western Amazonian thought took on a corporal manifestation; traveling in various terrifying human guises, it was said to walk about at night (URIARTE 1952: 225-256). As a spirit force, then, it was potentially manipulatable by shamans. Shamanic killing

was tied to epidemics, and what began as sickness ended in warfare.

Runa say that the epidemic which raked the Curaray region in the 1930s was so severe that the entire area was left depopulated. The disease was said to have lingered, and a generation was born before anyone returned. The extent to which a certain tie can be made between the shamanic warfare among Zaparoans at this time and the disease epidemic is a matter of conjecture, yet within a belief system in which death is not "natural", but often seen as the result of human manipulation, the potential role of disease epidemics in historic patterns of warfare remains significant.

While ethnohistorical and anthropological research has focused on the impact of overt colonial action on indigenous populations, the unintended consequences also merit attention. It is to these processes that TAUSSIG (1987: 372-373) eludes in his discussion of the colonial experience as creating a "space of death"; the memory of lost souls and former epochs lying so uneasily on the living that they demand continual negotiation. While in the Andes, this may take the form of rituals of placation, in the Amazonian region, the acknowledged great power of former souls is evoked in many ways; from the soul stones used to polish pottery, to shamanic curing and to the telling of oral histories.

Their territory now almost completely lost, a few Zaparoans continue to live in areas remote from contact with outsiders. Yet the Quichua language continues to spread throughout central Amazonian Ecuador and Runa say these people are becoming bilingual. They imply that even outside of mission settlements, where the majority of survivors went, those who remain are very few and intermarriage with Quichua speakers may be necessary for survival. The adoption of the Quichua language is for the Runa the marker by which a profound change in status takes place. As Záparos descendants tell their history, they keep alive also knowledge from beginning times. The dynamic interpenetration of the past with the present and with mythic time-space continues to be transmitted from generation to generation.

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Summary

Mary Elisabeth Reeve studies a short myth of the Curaray Runa, a people belonging to the Quichua language group in the piedmont of Ecuador, which tells about the disappearance of the Gayes people. The author explains that the Curaray Runa have three kinds of traditional recitations which can be distinguished by their different times. The "beginning times" deal with the origin of the Curaray Runa until the recent period of the rubber boom, including the disappearance of the Záparo people; these times allude essentially to the relationship between peoples. "Mythic time-space" is concerned with history and knowledge of the world when humans and animals were relatively alike. Finally the "present times" continue the "beginning times", arising when the peoples who still did not speak Quichua lose their language and their specific identity. Reeve speaks of parallel history to evidence that these three original genres are three different kinds of narrative. The short myth presented here must be interpreted jointly in the three styles: even though it recounts the disappearance of the Gayes people, it represents in fact the Záparo experience of being annihilated through wars and epidemics. Thus, at the same time, it gives the reasons for which Záparo people eventually adopted the Quichua language in order to escape from their enemies.

Resumen

Mary-Elisabeth Reeve estudia un mito corto Curaray, un pueblo de lengua Quechua de la llanura ecuatoriana, que relata la desaparición de los Gayas. La autora explica que los Curaray runa practican tres clases de narraciones tradicionales, que se distinguen entre sí por los tiempos que evocan: "el tiempo del principio", que parte del origen de los Curaray runa hasta la época reciente del boom del caucho, pasando por la desaparición de los Záparos, y que evoca sus relaciones con otros pueblos; "los tiempos míticos", que constituyen el conocimiento y relatan la historia del mundo en la época en que los animales y los hombres estaban relativamente indiferenciados; y por último, "los tiempos actuales", que prolongan "el tiempo del principio" a partir del momento en que los pueblos que no hablaban Quechua desaparecen. Reeve habla de la historia paralela para demostrar claramente que estas tres clases de narraciones son tres palabras de origen que continuan igualmente perpetuándose en nuestros días. Así, el breve relato que nos presenta debe interpretarse simultáneamente de las tres maneras. Aunque se nos explica la desaparición de los Gayas, su destino representa en realidad la situación de los Záparos expuestos a sus enemigos y a las epidemias, y, al mismo tiempo, las razones por las cuales han terminado por adoptar el Quechua para escapar de sus enemigos.