Przegląd Religioznawczy 2(288)/2023
The Religious Studies Review

ISSN: 1230-4379
e-ISSN: 2658-1531
www.journal.ptr.edu.pl

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DOI: 10.34813/ptr2.2023.10

Amazonian transformations of shamanism: talking about action among the Arabela (Peru) and education in residential schools among the E'ñepá (Venezuela)

Abstract. In this article, we show how the category of shamanism may be useful in the analysis of social practices of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. We demonstrate that an expanded understanding of shamanism, as present in the contemporary Amerindian anthropology, allows for a better understanding of cultural phenomena that have hitherto been interpreted in terms of interethnic relations or educational research. We focus on two phenomena seemingly distant from ontology and religion. The first involves the constitution of social relations in a contemporary indigenous multi-ethnic society (Arabela, Peru), the second is related to the education of children and adolescents in residential Indian schools (E'ñepá, Venezuela). We will show that in both areas one may find shamanic understandings of corporeality and patterns of relations with Others, with controlled bodily transformation playing a key role.

Keywords: shamanism, indigenous people, Amazon, anthropology, bodily tansformation.

Shamanism: primordial religion, ethnographic fact of the Arctic shamanism or element of animistic ontologies?

There are three main anthropological approaches to the phenomenon of shamanism: religious, ethnographic and ontological. The first of these considers shamanism as a primordial and universal form of religious belief (e.g. Eliade, 1964). Its basic characteristic are: contact with spirits and the use of the technique of extasy ('travelling'

to heavenly or infernal worlds). According to researchers adopting this approach, such shamanism no longer exists in its original form, but manifests itself in most contemporary religions, beliefs and cults, sometimes co-existing with other 'advanced' religious forms, such as Buddhism. Such 'primal shamanism' is most salient in the practices and beliefs of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, Asia and both North and South America (e.g., Vitebski, 1995). Some researchers seek to demonstrate a continuity between primordial shamanism and contemporary quasi-religious phenomena in Western societies, such as New Age practices or neo-shamanism.

Within the approach to which we refer as ethnographic, shamanism is considered to be a specific ethnographic phenomenon occurring only in the northern Arctic (most often, Siberian shamanism). In brief, it can be defined through the figure of theshaman, i.e., a person who establishes personal relationships with spirits (allies, guardians, etc.). The shaman is predestined to make contact with the spirits, who often decide on their own to whom they relate. A key issue here is the shaman's ability to control the spirits using trance techniques. A characteristic feature of Siberian shamanism is the unique social position of the shaman, who performs the functions of a healer and a person who guides the souls of the dead into the afterlife. In this view, shamanism is a technique rather than a religious complex of beliefs and practices, and the shaman is a person who specializes in making contact with spiritual beings.

In the third approach, which can be tentatively described as ontological, shamanism is an element of a specific indigenous ontology – i.e., animism – which defines the patterns of understanding and of practising relationships between people and the surrounding animal, plant and human worlds, etc. This approach draws on anthropological work challenging the division between nature and culture (Descola, 2013) and the research into the symbolic economy of alterity within Amerindian studies (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). Here, shamanism is conceived as a technique of controlled bodily transformation used to establish relationships with other beings, human or more-than-human, positioned vis-a-vis the subject within a continuum of alterity relations.

Shamanism as a technique of bodily transformation

The reality conceptualised and experienced by Amazonian indigenous peoples is populated by a variety of human-nonhuman collectivities, with differing bodies, behaviours associated with them and different ways of being, but sharing an analogous interiority that enables them, under certain circumstances, to enter into interpersonal and social interactions with each other (Descola, 2013). In contrast with the Western naturalistic perspective, which distinguishes between humans (Indians, Metis, Whites), animals and plants (elements of the natural world, significant in the material and symbolic indigenous economy) and 'supernatural' beings (those belonging to the realm of the religious imaginary, guardian spirits of plants and animals, souls of the dead, various spectres), from the indigenous point of view, all these 'tribes-species' (Descola, 2014, p. 297) have an analogous ontological status and are collectivities of

social actors. Their distinguishing characteristic is the degree of alterity in relation to the people described by the ethnographer. What they have in common is that they are all strangers both to the Indians and to each other. The E'ñepá, for example, in their socio-cosmos distinguish humans (familiar relatives, alien affines, very alien and dangerous enemies) and non-humans, with the non-humans seen from their perspective as both the invisible rulers of certain animal and plant species, spirits, souls and other types of 'supernatural' beings, as well as representatives of the Venezuelan national society.

The Amazonian indigenous people enter different kinds of relationships with each of these 'species', oscillating between predation, taming predation, and various forms of exchange and gift (Descola, 2012). Every 'interspecies' relationship is, at the same time, a bodily transformation of the involved beings (Vilaça, 2005). The body of each being is unstable and subject to transformation, while the humans' aim is to control these bodily transformations – both their own and those of the 'species' with which they interact. All the knowledge of the subject is located in the body. It is the body that learns the reality, that experiences it, that acquires wisdom (e.g. McCallum,1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996; Rival, 2012). Knowledge is corporeal, individualised, specific, contextual and acquired exclusively through socialisation and personal experience, in which observing the actions of others and imitation are paramount.

An example of controlled bodily transformations is mimicry – the conscious, partial transformation of one's own body with a view to achieve partial bodily (and thus emotional and cognitive) resemblance to the being of another 'species'. Mimicry is evident during hunting, in which the hunter assumes the resemblance of the animal he is hunting (see Willerslev, 2004). The hunter makes noises of the animal, moves in a similar manner – all in order to give the animal an impression that the approaching being is an individual of its 'species'. Mimicry applies to the body, its surface, its behaviour, the sounds it makes, the smells it exudes, etc., everything that forms the basis for establishing communication with an entity of another 'species' while interacting. It is a technique of partial transformation of one's body applied in order to control the course of the interaction and to benefit from it. It involves entering into a behavioural-emotional interaction with the Other, a kind of feedback loop of emotions, senses and movements, the continuity of which guarantees success (in case of hunting, the hunter needs to constantly monitor and respond to the reactions of the animal; failure to maintain contact or a making a mistake results in the disclosure of mimicry, breakdown of the interaction and the escape of the game). Mimicry is not limited to such interactions with foreign 'species' during hunting. Another area involves interactions with 'supernatural' being during trance. Mimicry is applied wherever there are others, which also includes relations with representatives of the national societies of Peru and Venezuela (to which we refer here as Whites, with a proviso, however, that the category includes both mestizos and whites).

This is precisely where shamans and shamanic practices enter the arena of animist ontologies. As many scholars have stressed, Amazonian shamans act as interpreters, cosmological brokers who are able to communicate with nonhuman communities. According to Descola, Amazonian shamans are "the cosmic mediators

to whom society delegates the care of relations between the various communities of living beings" (Descola, 2013, p. 9; see also Carneiro da Cunha, 1998). Amazonian shamanism relies on embodiment, in a sense that bodily experience is crucial for the constitution of shamanic knowledge and action (knowledge of the hidden human existence of the nonhumans and the capacity to establish interpersonal relationships with them). Contrary to the dominant Western understanding of shamanism as a practice related to the supernatural or spiritual realm, the Amerindians understand it as a "bodily condition" (Viveiros de Castro, 2012, p. 123). Therefore, shamanic knowledge and action involve observation of stringent diets and use of hallucinogenic plants which, apart from inducing visual experiences, produce strong bodily effects (nauseas, sweats, etc.).

Although important parts of shamanic mediation between various communities of living beings may be reserved for initiated shamans and rely on shamanic knowledge (as shamanic practice has been organized in very diverse ways in different Amazonian societies), the main tenets of that knowledge, as well as scores of minor practices, are shared by all members of Amazonian communities. Amazonian shamanism is thus a phenomenon of continuity, linking institutionalized and esoteric knowledge of ritual specialists with everyday preoccupations and daily practices of ordinary people. Not only the shamanic management of relationships with nonhuman communities (in hunting or gardening) may not be restricted to ritual specialists, but it also tends to be practiced by all adults in a given indigenous society (Descola, 1994). In fact, what for the Westerners constitute the most basic, mundane facts and activities of profane domestic life, namely feeding and eating, sexual intimacy or living together, in Amazonian contexts can be powerful means and sites of transformation. Eating is a means of kinship constitution and transformation of strangers into kin (Gow, 1992), and a point of contact with different "tribes-species". As a consequence, there are two interlinked processes of transformation involved in eating other beings' flesh, „one which results from eating someone (cannibalism) and the other from eating *like* and *with* someone (commensality)" (Fausto, 2007, p. 500), and a great deal of effort in Amazonia is aimed at keeping both processes separate.

Also, the bodily transformation is not an extraordinary feat reserved for initiated shamans, but is shared by everyone, albeit to a different degree (both as a capacity or danger), from the earliest childhood to afterlife. On one end of a human timeline, the bulk of *couvade* rules are meant to guard the baby from unwanted transformations into a nonhuman being, resulting from predatory or vengeful attacks from nonhumans (Vilaça, 2002). For instance, among the Matsigenka (Peruvian Amazonia), pregnant women should abstain from eating the meat of certain animals, otherwise their children could be born with some characteristics of these animals (Baer, 1994, p. 167). Katukina mothers (Brazilian Amazonia) try not to give their children too much meat of a certain tortoise, because the children could adopt the habit of lounging in the sun and have an aversion to bathing (Coffacci de Lima, 2000, p. 61), whereas among the Arabela – who, along with other mestizo and indigenous groups of the Peruvian Amazonia, call these partial transformations *cutipa* – a baby whose mother eats meat of paca (*Cuniculus paca*), may become similar to that nocturnal

rodent and stop sleeping through the night (Rogalski, 2020). Similarly, on the other end of the human existence, the funerary rituals are generally focused on the corpse and its postmortem processes and are to facilitate the transformation of the deceased into the dead (Vilaça, 2000).

On the other hand, and especially in the context of initiation rituals, Amazonian people often take advantage of bodily instability and the possibility of transferring traits between representatives of different "tribes-species", in order to build resilient and performative bodies. One might say that they practice controlled transformation. They explore this possibility throughout human lives, from pre-birth through childhood and into adulthood, both in solemn ritual contexts and in everyday situations. The Arabela, for example, advise young mothers to rub their newborn's navel with the powdered claw of an armadillo to pass on the strength of this animal to the child, while pregnant women among the Yanesha (Peruvian Amazon) often drink a decoction of the *eñsesrech* vine (*Clusia amazonica*), a plant characterized by a hard and straight stem – which is to make the child's bones straight and hard (Bourdy, Valadeau, Albán Castillo, 2008, p. 101, quoted in: Santos-Granero, 2012, p. 190). This is one of the many remedies used by pregnant women and Yanesha mothers to equip their children with various physical and psychological traits associated with particular elements of the environment, as part of building up their bodies or as remedies for various ailments.

To summarize, Amazonian shamanism is grounded in bodily practices and experiences, with a notion of transformation at its core. It is as much a matter of interpersonal relationships with nonhuman Others, as it is a practice of controlled bodily transformation of humans (shaman and non-shamans alike, although to a different degree) into those Others.

Shamanic transformations between members of one community (Arabela)

The people who identify themselves as Arabela live (or were born) in two indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazonia, on the banks of the eponymous tributary of the Napo river. Most of them are descendants of a small group of Indians, sole remnants of one of the Zaparoan tribes who used to occupy the vast region between the Napo and Pastaza rivers. In the 1940's, this group of around twenty persons left their interfluvial habitat and established durable relationships with the Peruvian indigenous and mestizo society. Maintaining close relationships with Peruvian traders (*patrones*) and the North American linguists-missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (in the second half of the 20th century), intermarrying with Kichwa speaking Napo Runa, as well as with the indigenous and mestizo newcomers from other parts of Peruvian Amazonia, they have grown into a diverse population that today includes several hundred persons (most of them living in the Arabela communities, but numerous also migrated to other parts of Peru, from Iquitos, to Lima, to Puerto Maldonado). Very few of them still speak the Arabela language and the

language of everyday communication in both communities is Spanish. Their public life revolves around schooling, public works (construction of pavements, electrification projects), intercommunal relationships (football championships), regional administration (local electoral campaigns), wage work for oil companies, extraction work for lumber *patrones*, commercial hunting travels (to Iquitos or Lima), etc.

While living in this diverse community and trying to grasp its logic, I (FR) also approached the oldest Arabela speakers to learn as much as possible about the way of life of the ancient Arabela. In particular, I wanted to gain an insight into the original Zaparoan Arabela ontology and patterns of relationships between them and their environment (particularly with animals). Following many hours of conversations, I concluded that the Arabela world was based on animist mode of identification (Rogalski 2016b), where the Arabela humans were only one among many communities of sentient and self-conscious beings within a vast, human-and-nonhuman socio--cosmos. Typically, as in other animist cosmologies, the notion of transformation played a central role in the Arabela world, which was particularly evident in myths about human-nonhuman interpersonal interactions, as well as in practices and ideas related to hunting. Humans (and other beings) were prone to becoming-Other as a consequence of getting into close relationships with nonhumans (through living and eating together or through having sex). For instance, the myth of a man abducted by peccaries (the Arabela version of a common Amazonian story, see, for instance Calavia Sáez 2001) recounts the story of a man who went out hunting while his woman was menstruating and, as a consequence, was kidnapped by the chief of the peccaries, who incorporated him into his tribe; after a time when he lived with them, the man started to undergo physical transformation. The human-to-nonhuman transformation is also a conceptual background for the notions of disease – many corporeal troubles are understood as partial (or progressive) transformation of a human into a nonhuman, resulting from nonhuman aggression. My reconstructions of the Arabela ontology were mostly based on stories told to me by direct descendants of the ancient Arabela, who still spoke their language. However, it appeared to me that this ontology was still evident for many of them. Some Arabela, even those who do not speak Arabela anymore, claimed that they or their kin were able to maintain interpersonal relationships with masters of the forest or aquatic animals, and that they never lack fish or game meat. For others, the animist world tended to be relativized to other times and distant spaces. They held that it was easier to enter in contact with nonhuman persons in the past and/or in distant places located upriver, and that downriver territories were too "civilized" (*civilizado*) and non-human presence was not evident there anymore. They told me, for instance, that only distant saltlicks were still inhabited by spirits/the masters of animals, *ratu camaru*, whereas the local, nearby ones were devoid of their presence.

However distant from the Arabela's everyday preoccupations the animist notions might have seemed to me, early on my fieldwork I was struck by an overwhelming sense that even though there was not much left of the (hypothetical) original Zaparoan Arabela animism, the animism was still somehow present. As soon as I got this feeling, I set about trying to put my finger on the concrete manifestations

of such elusive animism. One of the first things that drew my attention (attuned to animism) was a peculiar way in which the Arabela talked about their actions. I noticed that they very often joked, saying that what they were doing (or had done or were about to do) was actually "doing" another person – they denoted the action with an eponymic verb, most often a compound verb based on the scheme < *hacer* N > ("to do N"), where N was a name of a person (living or dead), a personal type or a nonhuman.[1] Let me cite a few examples:

Adan, who was resting in a hammock, grabbed a copy of *Selecciones* magazine (the Spanish-language edition of Reader's Digest) lying on the floor, and said: *Voy hacer Chapan, voy mirar puro dibujitos*, "I'm going to do Chapan, I'm going to look at the pictures only," referring to his little brother, nicknamed Chapan, and thus, as it were, excusing himself for going through the magazine without reading (he probably could not read). One day, a boy named Levi, watching a youngster nicknamed Soldado („Soldier") putting on long pants over shorts, exclaimed: *Ua! Soldado está haciendo Murayari!* meaning "Oh! Soldado is doing Murayari!" (where Murayari was the surname of Levi's uncle – his FZH). Similarly, my hunting companions, recalling how I walked barefoot through the woods carrying wellies under my arm, said that I was "doing Adolfo" (an Arabela man, long-deceased). The sons of my hosts also used to announce that they would "do Julia" (their grandmother) to communicate that they would go to bed without bathing. When they intended to serve themselves something to eat outside of family meals – especially when overtly manifesting their hunger (contradicting the common Amazonian reluctance to show hunger or pleasure in eating) – they would invite each other to eat by saying, *Vamos hacer Educo* ("Let's do Educo!"), which corresponded to the rumor that their uncle Educo was such a glutton that he even picked food off the plate of his little daughter. (They also used a variant expression: *hacer eduqueada!* which suggested a derivational sequence *hacer Educo* → **eduquear* (not attested) → *hacer eduqueada*). Also, when a group of hunters waited in a canoe for a companion, one of them called out in the direction of his house: *no haga Sapo!* "don't do Sapo," where Sapo ("Toad") was the nickname of notorious latecomer.

The Arabela also enacted in this way personal types or generic members of other ethnic groups. Calixto, serving himself a bowl of manioc beer (instead of waiting to be served) announced: *Voy hacer tomalón*, "I am going to do a drunkard" (personal type). Arnulfo, when a woman asked him (teasingly) to bring her peach palm fruits from the forest (*aguaje*, *Mauritia flexuosa*), declined her request saying: *abuelo así, para cargar aguaje!?*, "[What am I] a grandfather to carry peach palm fruits!?", suggesting that collecting those fruits is appropriate for old men. And Walter, after missing a macaw (*guacamayo*, *Ara* spp.) said to me with self-deprecating irony: *He hecho cazador*, "I have done a hunter," referring most probably to the figure of the mestizo or white hunter, since the Arabela themselves among themselves and

[1] I have discussed the ethnographic material presented in this section in two previous publications. For a detailed description and analysis in terms of Amazonian ontologies and relational schemas see Rogalski, 2021. For an analysis in terms of bodily transformation see Rogalski, 2022.

non-ironically never use the term "cazador."[2] In another comment, Walter's brother evoked an ancient group of enemies from Arabela ancient peoples' stories: contemplating the idea of going hunting with spear, he asked: *Quién tiene lanza? Para hacer cashiquiori*, "Who has a spear? To do cashiquiori", pretending that he would go out hunting with a spear, like the enemy group of ancient Arabela (see Rogalski, 2016b).

Finally, the Arabela also "did" nonhumans. For instance, when Artemio's wife noticed a spoiled fish among the catch that had fallen into their net the night before (they were both cleaning the catch), he said: *Ponle aparte, para hacer mi gallinazo*, "Put it aside [for me] to do my vulture," meaning that he was going to eat it anyway, like a specific scavenger, the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*). On another occasion, when an unusually large number of fish fell into the nets and the morning meal turned into a feast, Artemio, finishing his last portion, pushed his plate away and said: *Qué vale peje, lobo así!?*, "What are fish worth, what am I an otter!?"

To summarize, when the Arabela see someone performing (or themselves are about to perform) an action that they deem peculiar, they represent that action as typical of another being and the performance of that action as "doing" that being. Stripping names from their bearers (deonymization) and using them to designate other people and their actions (apelativization) is not unique for the Arabela. Arguably, any human language offers such possibilities. However, the Arabela seem to perform these operations especially often in their daily lives; during my fieldwork I documented dozens of examples, most of them during a five-month stay in one Arabela village of about a hundred inhabitants. I argue that the prevalence of this phenomenon is an evidence of its importance for Arabela. I will show now how both operations (the attribution of an action to another being and the notion of "doing" that being) may be seen as transformations of Amazonian shamanism. Indeed, the practices of evoking other beings show interesting parallels with phenomena more typically associated with Amazonian shamanism.

First of all, a global look at actions and behaviors that the Arabela highlight using these practices shows that they refer to corporeality and are thus rooted in the dominant Amazonian ontological patterns of animism and perspectivism. The actions or behaviors that Arabela emphasize and objectify in their practices of evoking other beings form a coherent whole. They all refer to a limited range of bodily functions or areas of practice. The most common are related to alimentation – eating raw or stale meat, excessive appetite for certain types of food, gluttonous eating – then there are idiosyncrasies related to clothing (carrying rubber boots instead of wearing them, wearing a pair of trousers over shorts), personal hygiene (bathing, or rather not bathing), and dwelling places (see Rogalski, 2022). The attention that the Arabela pay to these aspects corresponds to the Amazonian concept of the body, in which the corporeal "ethogram" of each being (what a being eats, how it frames its body, where it dwells) determines its place in the human and non-human socio-cosmos. Eating is by far the most important of those parameters. For example, among the

[2] When they refer to hunting in the most general sense – instead of referring to specific types of game (*buscar choro*, „to look for woolly monkeys," *Lagothrix lagotricha*) or techniques (*linternear*, "to [hunt using a] flashlight") – they use the term *montear* (of euphemistic origin, as "walking in the woods," from the local *monte* "forest," literally "mountain"), and designate the hunter with the word *montaraz*.

Ashaninka (Peruvian Amazon) the true Ashaninka self is defined primarily by the consumption of the right (*sanori*) food, obtained and shared in the right way (Caruso, 2012, p. 96). The Arabela mother, who condemns her son for taking only pieces of meat from his plate without touching the manioc (which amounts to "doing Julio Jaime"), confirms Stephen Hugh-Jones' observation that "throughout the Amazon, eating meat without cassava or corn is morally condemned as savagery" (Hugh-Jones, 2019, p. 103). Whereas when she scoffs another of her sons for eating undercooked fish (a raw blood was visible along the spine) exclaiming: *Ua! Murayari!* (the same Murayari who allegedly used to wear trousers over shorts), she evidently draws from the same cosmological logic, which is present in numerous Amazonian myths, where a person's hidden jaguar identity is revealed by their habit of eating raw meat. I argue that in their "doing someone" comments, the Arabela transpose the above logic from the level of socio-cosmology – where the ways of eating define stable socio-cosmic communities and are used to discern human or nonhuman identity of the subject – to ephemeral, momentary changes in people's bodies. Moreover, as the above examples demonstrate, the poles of transformative attraction – those Others whom one emulates (willingly or not) – may be humans from the same or neighboring communities (Julio Jaime, Murayari) as well as nonhumans (vulture, otter).

Secondly, and on a more general level, the very noticing of an unusual detail in another person's behavior as typical of another being is a recurring element of shamanic practices and discourses related to interactions with nonhumans. For example, it is the core of diagnosis of illnesses occurring in young children as the result of nonhuman aggression provoked by the child's relatives' violation of *couvade* prohibitions (Rogalski, 2020). It is also a common motive of myths depicting the interactions of a human protagonist with a person who is ostensibly also human, but whose nonhuman identity is betrayed at some point by a minor detail of his or her behavior: „a dish of rotting meat politely served reveals vulture-people, an oviparous birth indicates snake-people, and a cannibalistic appetite points to jaguar-people" (Descola, 2013, p. 135). In this light, the exclamations that someone is doing someone else may be seen as a kind of shamanic diagnosis of alien influences in a fellow human. Therefore, these peculiar ways of talking about human action present a clear affinity with other modes of entering into relations with the environment, typical of animist ontologies and shamanic practices embedded in them (partial or complete, desirable or undesirable transformations of humans into non-humans in contexts such as couvade, initiation rituals, curing sessions, etc.).

The practices of invoking other people (and non-humans) and linking them to characteristic ways of acting and speaking are not just part of a particular local poetics of everyday life, but are embedded in the general patterns of Amazonian ontologies. Statements like "I'm going to do X" or "Y is doing X," through parallelisms and repetitions, express the implicit general idea that various entities (human and non-human) have particular ways of behaving (including speaking) and lifestyles that can be transfered to others against their will or adopted by them to achieve certain goals. The Arabela example shows that in becoming other, the possibility (and danger) of transformation is not something mysterious, esoteric, and does not necessarily

involve relationships with supernatural beings or animals, but is something that happens every day, at all times, between people belonging to the same community, in contexts where shamanic or animist ideas are not openly evoked. Thus, the general and major themes of Amazonian ethnology operate at the micro-level of everyday interactions within a community and in relation to the most ordinary elements of the environment – particular foods and ways of eating, activities and ways of dressing and covering the body, browsing magazines, places where one rests, punctuality, characteristic sayings and ways of speaking, etc. Moreover, the material I collected demonstrates that these themes are also present in the Amazonian communities that speak regional Spanish on a daily basis.

Residential schools as place of shamanic transformations (E'ñepá)

This part of the text is based on my (TB) research on school and schooling among the E'ñepá people in the Venezuelan Amazon.[3] In particular, I intend to focus on practice of learning in residential schools among the E'ñepá. I will try to show that the cultural logic and pattern of entering into relationships with Others, present among those E'ñepá who wished to become teachers, are very similar to the animistic pattern of acquiring the skill of controlled bodily transformation.

The significance of schooling for the indigenous people of Amazonia has already been addressed by some anthropological studies. The vast majority of these considered schooling as attempts made by the indigenous people to acquire tools that would enable them to defend themselves against exploitation and domination by members of the national society. According to their authors (e.g. Aikman, 1999; Rival, 1996, 2002; Gow, 1991), indigenous people adopt schooling in order to acquire numeracy, literacy and reading skills in the dominant society language and, more generally, in order to construct themselves as subjects in relation to national societies (to be the so-called *gente civilizada*), which has most often been marked in their settlements by the *comunidad* status, the presence of school institutions and of indigenous organisations. However, it seems that such understanding of schooling as an instrument of social development is thoroughly Western and strongly diverges from the place the way indigenous people situate it in their universe. In my reflections, I follow the few

[3] The E'ñepá inhabit the Venezuelan Amazon and speak a language from the Caribbean language family. According to the 2011 Venezuelan census, they were a population of over 4,600 people divided into three regional groups: western, eastern and southern E'ñepá. The southern E'ñepá, a group of around 1,400 people, live in relative geographic, cultural and socio-economic isolation from the Venezuela's national society. It is an egalitarian, autarkic community, with a social organisation based on the Dravidian kinship system, subsisting on hoe-farming, hunting and gathering. Their settlement pattern is semi-nomadic, with settlement sizes ranging from a few dozen to a few hundred people. Their place of residence usually depends on social (the importance of emotional ties between members of the settlement) and economic factors (based on the abundance of resources in the natural environment and access to goods from the Venezuelan national society) (see Henley 1982, 1988, 1994). The only state institution that has been widely adopted by the E'ñepá is schooling (since 1964). The E'ñepá strive to establish schools in their settlements, with teachers sourced from among the indigenous population (since the 1990s), and approximately 85% of the population of school-age children attending such local schools (Bulinski, 2018, p. 195). This article is based on Tarzycjusz Buliński's research among the southern branch of the E'ñepá, living in the Cuchivero and Ventuari basin.

anthropological works that consider indigenous schooling practices as corporeal rather than intellectual or political (e.g., Collet Gouvea, 2004; Tassinari & Cohn, 2009), as well as studies that point to important similarities between teachers and shamans among the selected Amazonian people (Gow, 1991; Tassinari & Cohn, 2009).

In my reflection I focus on the phenomenon of learning in residential schools that the E'ñepá attended in order to become teachers. In the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there were two types of schools that the southern E'ñepá attended: schools located in indigenous settlements and schools located outside the region they inhabited, in cities, i.e., in the world of the Whites. While the first levels of primary education took place in schools of the first type (grades 1–4), the next levels of primary education (grades 5–9), as well as secondary education (further 2 years), was only possible in schools of the second type, to which I shall refer as residential schools. These were schools bringing together all the students from the region who wished to purse higher education, both indigenous and mestizo. Most often, such schools had an agricultural profile and were run by Catholic religious institutions. Here, I shall only focus on the indigenous students who attended such schools and how they perceived their stay in school. I begin with a brief characterisation of the E'ñepá who undertook their education in such residential schools, followed by a discussion of their narratives about their experience while attending the school. Finally, I describe the parallels between the period spent at a residential school and the shamanic transformation.

A total of 67 people from the southern branch of E'ñepá had attended residential schools.[4] The characteristic features of this group are that, first, it is small in number (6% of the population), with very few people choosing to go to a residential school. In comparison, at different times, between 57% and 85% of the population attended primary schools in indigenous settlements. Second, students from this group tended to stay in residential schools much longer than the usual period of study at this stage of education, on average 3–4 years longer. Almost all these students were repeating grades. Most also changed schools, the most common situation being that a person attended the first school for two years (sometimes repeating a grade), then transferred to another school and studied there for another 2–3 years (often repeating a grade as well). Most individuals dropped out and did not complete their schooling. Third, all these persons went to a residential school at the pre-reproductive stage in their lives, i.e., before the birth of their first children. There is not a single person who started their education in the world of the Others having already started a family. Fourth, there was a clear gender pattern – men entered residential schools more often than women (though the difference was small, with 55% and 45% respectively) and were later more likely to get a teaching job in an indigenous school (the difference here being more significant, with 26% and 12% respectively). In addition, after their stay in a residential school, women returned immediately to their kin group, while men

[4] Data collected during my fieldwork periods cover the entire living population of the southern E'ñepá, i.e.,1,094 people, and a period of more than half a century, i.e. from the introduction of schooling in their region (1964) to the end of the first decade of the 21st century (see Bulinski, 2018).

were involved in other activities among the Whites, finding employment in the mines or doing military service.

At this stage, it is already possible to point to some parallels between learning at school and the practice of shamanic body transformations. A small percentage of people have also been involved in shamanic practice, learning the trade before their reproductive period in life (before conceiving children). Most importantly, for the indigenous persons, staying in a residential school constituted a very similar type of activity as that in mines and military service. They all involved a prolonged, solitary stay in the world of Others, which changed the body and resulted in the acquisition of knowledge of how to survive in such a world. Learning to communicate during trance with invisible beings as part of shamanic practice looks similar – it involves a solitary, long-term retreat. Shamanism is a masculine domain and, in the same way, being a teacher is definitely more masculine than feminine domain (few comparative data available on the Amazon area confirm the trend I noted for the E'ñepá, i.e., indigenous teachers are mainly men, who start before they reach reproductive age; see, e.g., López de Castilla, 1990; Cohn, 2001; Lopes da Silva, 2008; Grupioni, 2008).

Let us now look into how the experience of education in residential schools was perceived by the indigenous students themselves. What aspects and issues were salient for them? The answer will perhaps allow us to assess to what extent their schooling involved a type of animist transformation of the body.

First, in the reports by the indigenous students attending school in the world of the Whites, the figure of the school itself was rather missing. The students were eager to talk about their life in a strange place, among strangers, about their activities, work, the daily routine, and, except specifically asked, they did not mention school activities. It seemed as if these particular activities were of little importance to them. It was the residence hall that was the main organising category of their recollections, i.e., a separate place in space-time having its own characteristics and specific beings that inhabited it. I should add that residential schools in Venezuela were usually isolated from the urban areas in two specific ways: 1) spatially (geographically, located far from the city or, sometimes, on a mid-river island, or in terms of architecture, separated by means of walls and fences) and 2) by means of people management (through procedures that strictly regulated the movement and behaviour of people outside the school). The school building was usually part of a whole complex, which consisted of the dormitory, the administrative offices, the utility facilities, livestock pens, and often a chapel or a church.

Also, indigenous students described staying in a residential school as leaving their world to live not only outside their own family group, but generally outside the region where the E'ñepá live. The journey to school was a salient element in their narratives. In their accounts, the dormitory was always in a faraway place (regardless of the actual distance), somewhere in the world of the Whites, where one had to travel alone.[5] The lonely journey to a residential school (which involves taking different

[5] The southern E'ñepá students attended residential schools in all regions of Venezuela, from the Orinoco Delta to the Venezuelan Andes. However, regardless of the actual distance, with school being both relatively close (2–3 days away) or far away (5–7 days away), in the mountains or by the sea, the narratives about the students' stay at residential schools displayed similar characteristics.

buses and many connecting busses) made at a young age (around 10–14 years old) was described as a difficult experience that the narrator successfully negotiated. The E'ñepá usually described their arrival at a residential school focusing on two details: the change of clothes upon receiving the school uniform (long trousers or skirt, long-sleeved shirt, shoes), and the allocation of a bed in the school dormitory (whereas the E'ñepá sleep exclusively in hammocks in their homes), which was full of strangers (mestizo students and other indigenous people of Venezuela). Entering a residential school marked the beginning of a long solitary stay in a foreign place – during the school year, the E'ñepá did not visit their family and could only come to the region inhabited by the E'ñepá during the school holidays.

Staying in residential schools was invariably portrayed as very difficult and challenging. The indigenous students pointed to several particularly distressing aspects of the boarding school reality. The first was lack of family and loved ones – which was the most important feature, all students mentioned loneliness and the absence of relatives, the fact that they lived surrounded by strangers. Effort was the second aspect that was commonly mentioned by students involved constant work, lack of any opportunity to get bored and do nothing, with all days at the residential school being filled with some kind of collective activity (students only had few hours for individual activity on Sundays), the whole day was strictly planned and life from morning to evening followed a rigorous hourly schedule, with life at a residential school being marked with constant effort to participate in lessons, housekeeping, cleaning work and homework for classes. The third aspect was restrictions involving control over bodies – students were prohibited from a range of bodily and social activities, they could not run, argue, fight, clean, they were expected to fall asleep, get up and eat on command, all sexual relations were forbidden. The students reported that it was difficult to be subjected to the authority of others and unable to do what one felt like doing. The fourth aspect was aggression from other students – it was not uncommon for the E'ñepá students to experience some form of harassment from other boarding school residents, and they reported their property being stolen, or they were accused of theft, there were also cases of physical assault. The fifth aspect was the scarcity of food – a theme that appeared in the students' memories of the residential school, of the food being insufficient and monotonous (the same food over and over again), included a reflex of food rationing and the requirement to control feelings of satiety and hunger.[6]

Also, it is intriguing to see how the indigenous students remembered what they were learning. The students talked about three areas in which they had been edu-

[6] Apart from difficulties and distress experienced at boarding schools, I was also interested in what students remembered as positive and what they found enjoyable about this period. It was interesting that the vast majority of their positive memories related to the few outings during Sunday free time. The students described trips into the woods, into the 'wild', where they were unsupervised, and could fish to one's heart's content (the fish did not run away and there were still abundant), where there was open space and plenty of time for unconstrained activity. Other narratives referred to going out into the city, where one could eat a great deal of delicious food at a friendly mestizo's place (there followed detailed descriptions of food). Only one woman referred to the enjoyment she got from the practical classes where students made dolls. Overall, the stories about residential schools and the world beyond displayed a range of oppositions: scarcity (e.g. school food)/abundance (e.g. fish), insufficient supply/more than enough, control/freedom, diffcult to bear/pleasurable. They all seem to adequately reflect the experience of living in a residential school.

cated. They mainly talked about learning how to handle and use livestock animals. This element almost always appeared at the beginning of the narrative. Knowing how to handle hens, pigs, rabbits and sheep, what and how often to feed them, how to saddle a horse, how to vaccinate cattle - the students remembered it all very well. The second area was practical skills, learning simple carpentry work (such as making a table or a bench), making a fence for cattle, or making cheese. Some people learned more advanced technical matters: how to operate a car, a tractor and a motor boat, or even how to spray houses with DDT powder using adequate equipment. The third area was knowledge of body-related issues: drinking, eating, cutting hair in the fashion typical of the national society members, things that involved sports and music. The E'ñepá mentioned that, while at the boarding school, they had learned to drink beer (of the factory-made based on cereals, not the indigenous beer made from manioc), coffee, eat foreign food (such as grilled chicken or fried noodles), smoke cigarettes and play football. Some people talked about learning how to play guitar and quarto (a small string instrument, popular in Venezuela and Colombia). One woman also mentioned mastering the technique of cutting hair in the mestizo style as an important skill (which she indeed practised regularly after returning to her settlement, cutting men's and boys' hair). The residential school stories never included any mention of the knowledge that, for us Westerners, is quintessential to a school education – literacy, mathematical skills or geographical or historical knowledge.

Importantly, the theme of controlling the level of alcohol intoxication featured prominently in the accounts of learning how to drink – these stories were about learning to drink beer or whisky in such a way that enabled one not to be drunk, which is quite common for both indigenous people and Venezuelans.[7] The same involved smoking cigarettes, an important social skill. In the world of the Venezuelan national society, offering cigarettes and smoking them together is one of the popular social practices to briefly establish or maintain contact. Most mestizos smoke cigarettes (although women do not). The E'ñepá men used this way to establish or maintain relationships with mestizos. A significant proportion of conversations and encounters between mestizos and them begin with enquiries from the indigenous men about cigarettes and then smoking them. The majority of the E'ñepá who are reasonably familiar with Whites and able to hang out with them smoke cigarettes (tobacco is rejected only by those among the E'ñepá who have adopted the model of abstinence from stimulants promoted by Protestant missionaries). However, despite the prevalence of this practice among the Venezuelans, I have never – and I should stress never – met an indigenous person who smoked cigarettes with other E'ñepá people or alone. The practice is confined to relationships with Whites. Despite the E'ñepá use of cigarettes, the phenomenon of compulsive smoking has not emerged among then.

[7] According to the E'ñepá, controlling alcoholic intoxication, involves separation of substances, in this case different types of alcohol. For example, it is important to consume the alcohol drunk by the Whites (beer, vodka, rum) in their habitat (in the city), while the E'ñepá alcohol can be consumed in an E'ñepá environment (settlement, patan). It is also important not to mix these two types of alcohol. Another way to avoid alcohol intoxication is to drink a glass of cold water or juice after drinking a few beers. In both cases, control over alcohol is gained by separating it from other substances.

To summarize, in the eyes of the indigenous people, the effects of living in a residential school invariably boiled down to one thing: the acquisition of skills that enabled one to live among Whites through partial bodily transformation. Indigenous students learnt how to live in a particular place in the world of the Whites, and each subsequent stay, each subsequent school-place, increased their bodily disposition to operate within the reality of the Whites and to communicate with the Whites. The process, however, also worked the other way round, of which my interlocutors were aware. The longer one lived in a residential school, the more one was likely to forget how to speak the Eñepá language, one's relatives, being an E'ñepá (people claimed that the process of forgetting happened faster in girls than in boys). Living in a residential school was thus both dangerous and desirable. On the one hand, it offered an effective way of learning about life among the Whites, their speech, behaviour, food and drink, techniques for making things, getting around on buses, using money, personal hygiene techniques, and so on. In brief, it involved learning everything that makes up the perspective of experiencing the world from a White person's point of view. On the other hand, however, it also involved a real threat of permanent bodily transformation into a White person.[8]

The southern E'ñepá's approach to learning in residential schools is not an isolated phenomenon. Other anthropological accounts have traced similar features in this type of experience in other indigenous people's narratives. Representatives of other indigenous groups tend to characterise their stay in residential schools as an effort, marked by a lack of personal autonomy, by physical subjection, parental absence, corporal punishment, sexual prohibitions, and being forced to speak Spanish (see, for example, the Muinane of Colombia, Londoño Sulkin, 2004, p. 208–209; Vaupes region in Brazil, Lasmar, 2009; the Makuxi of Brazil, Amodio & Pira, 1988, p. 131–133). There is also a widespread consensus in Amazonia that the assimilation of knowledge of the Whites is useful and necessary.

If we now choose to look at the above descriptions of residential school life from a slightly different point of view, we would find that it is very much similar to a shamanic experience. What would happen if, like in case of shamanism, we remove the content associated with the school and focus on those features of the experience that are associated with othernes? What will such exercise reveal? Learning in a residential school is living in a foreign habitat. In order to reach the foreign habitat, one has to leave one's own and travel alone in a foreign world. It takes place before the reproductive period of the E'ñepá person's life. It involves a lenghty experience spanning several years, is associated with the disruption of the normal human

[8] The process of bodily transformation that takes place in a person while living among strangers is well illustrated by the case of Sofía (name has been changed), who returned home after four years of uninterrupted study at a residential school. She had spent this entire period in a school run by Catholic nuns and had not once been back in her settlement. After her, unwilling, return to her group, the girl became apathetic. She spoke Spanish, not E'ñepá, avoided talking to her relatives, limited her activities to teaching her class (she was a teacher), helping the nuns at the mission centre and lying in her hammock. She took particular care of her body and clothing (typical of the Venezuelan national society). She perceived the other E'ñepá, their houses, clothes and bodies as dirty, and spent a lot of time keeping her body and clothes clean. This changed after a few years and Sofía got married, had children and stopped working as a teacher. She became the E'ñepá person once again. This case was not unique. Among the Yanomami, Kelly (2003) described how a girl ceased to be human after returning from boarding school (she did not speak human language, was not spending time with people, did not eat human food, did not behave like people do).

perspective and the assimilation of the perspective of the Other (longing for relatives and the feeling of loneliness are manifestations of the ontological uncertainty of the person who cannot affirm his or her perspective; in a normal, everyday situation, such confirmation is gained through the actions of one's relatives who, seeing reality as we do and acting in accordance with us, confirm the veracity of our perspective). It is physically and emotionally difficult, requiring control of one's body, especially in terms of aggression and sexuality, although the person is himself or herself exposed to attacks from other beings (theft). Thus, one can learn to live in the world of Others and to behave like the Other.

All of the above characteristics occur in the process of shamanic learning. Therefore, for the E'ñepá, the process of becoming a teacher (through a period of stay in a residential school) is very similar to the process of becoming a shaman. A teacher, like a shaman, chooses a voluntary, long-term stay among alien beings. A teacher's initiation resembles that of a shaman, it involved a very powerful bodily transformation, entailing a dramatic change in the person's perspective, which not all E'ñepá are able to bear, hence the need, for some people, to interrupt their studies and change schools (place-habitats). The caregivers from the national society (priests, nuns, missionaries), assumed that the reason was the lack of cognitive abilities in indigenous children, which translated into poor academic performance and the need for them to repeat a grade. For the E'ñepá, the reason was their inability to preserve oneself in a foreign world, the feeling that something was being lost, although it was not entirely clear what it was, as expressed in the idiom of longing and forgetting. Some people reported that, towards the end of the stay at a residential school, students sometimes fell seriously ill. Once recovered, they would make key decisions in his or her life related to their stay in the world of the Whites (e.g., deciding not to become a teacher but a paramedic, or a president of an indigenous organisation). All of this makes the stay in a residential school increasingly akin to a period of shamanic training. Also, the role played by the E'ñepá who graduate from residential schools and start working as teachers in local schools located in the E'ñepá settlements indicates their similarity to shamans, since they are mediators in their community's dealings with representatives of the Venezuelan national society, both locally, i.e., in the region inhabited by the E'ñepá, and externally, in the world of the Whites (cf. Gow, 1991).

Conclusions

In this article, we have used the category of shamanism to explain the social practices and phenomena that, at first glance, are not related to indigenous religion or cosmology. We have shown that shamanism, as it is understood in contemporary Amazonian ethnology, allows for a better understanding of specific Amazonian cultural phenomena, such as everyday interactions in a diverse indigenous-mestizo community or modes of indigenous response to formal education. An expanded view of shamanism enabled us to trace the presence of ontological concepts and the

resulting patterns of how people initiate relations with external entities, not only in rituals, festivals, and healing sessions, but in everyday practices that, at first glance, are only distantly related to "spiritual" or "supernatural" phenomena, traditionally associated with shamanism. Our analysis constitutes yet another contribution towards better understanding of Amazonian shamanism within the indigenous ontological frameworks of animism and perspectivism.

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