

# GARDEN METAPHYSICS: Myth and Ritual among the Awajun People of the Peruvian High Jungle



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# Abstract

This master thesis explores the intricate ways in which the Awajun people of the Peruvian high jungle practice subsistence gardening. The Awajun garden comprises a dazzling display of flora heterogeneity, though the most important cultigen found in the garden is the sweet manioc, Awajun staple food. This root crop is surrounded by myths and rituals that give the garden a social character. Under special circumstances, notably during planting and harvesting, the manioc plants in the garden reveal their otherwise hidden human-like qualities. This potentializes communication between the Awajun horticulturalists and their plants. This relationship is realised by use of the transformative properties of different incarnations called *anen*. By use of these songs the Awajun gardener is able to, not only potentialize the non-evident humanity of her plant, but also to adopt the perspective of the mythical figure Nugkui, the master and mother of cultivated plants. By positioning herself in this way, the Awajun gardener nurtures her plants like a mother fosters her children through the dangers of the world. For the Awajun people, the garden is a realm in which the relations vowed between humans and plants make up a symbiotic circle based on co-dependency and nurture. Before reaching these focal points, the first part of this thesis will explore the general ecology of the Awajun garden, its sociality and historical change. Broader changes to their society will also be discussed.

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# Awajun Terms

The Awajun terms used in this thesis are spelled according to the guidelines provided by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. This being said, some of the terms used could be subject to some irregularities due to the various regional dialects that make up the Jivaro language.

The list that follows explains the meaning of the words most frequently used in this thesis (explanations in the text that follows will also exist).

***anen***: A general term for the many ritual songs used by the Awajun, and other Jivaro groups. An exact translation is hard to obtain, though the term “*anen*” had direct connotations to the Awajun term *anentai* (meaning: “heart”).

***anentai***: Awajun term, meaning “heart”.

***anentin***: A term for an Awajun woman that has obtained many *anen*.

***aents***: Awajun term, meaning “person”. This term also, under special circumstances denotes to a person that is a non-human.

***ajutap***: A term meaning “ancestral spirit”.

***apajui***: Awajun term for the “Christian God”.

***aja***: Awajun term for “garden swidden”.

***ajak***: Term for “old garden”.

***ipáamamu***: term for “communal work party”.

***nunka***: Meaning: “topsoil” or, “earth”.

***nugkui***: Mythological people/woman that lives in the garden.

***nijamanch***: fermented manioc, or “manioc beer”.

***mama***: Awajun term for “sweet manioc”.

***mama nantuji***: older part of manioc plant (or “old manioc stem”).

***mama dukují***: term used for “manioc mother” (also a term for Nugkui)

***mama muunji***: meaning “manioc master” (also a term for Nugkui)

***kakájam***: Awajun term for community leader (more frequently is the Quechua idiom *apu* used for “community leader”).

***kuntin***: term for “game animals” or the “meat” of hunted animals.

***pinika***: term for traditional “clay bowl”, used for drinking.

***waimaku***: a term for a person that have received a vision for the ancestors

***wekan***: Awajunian term for “soul”.

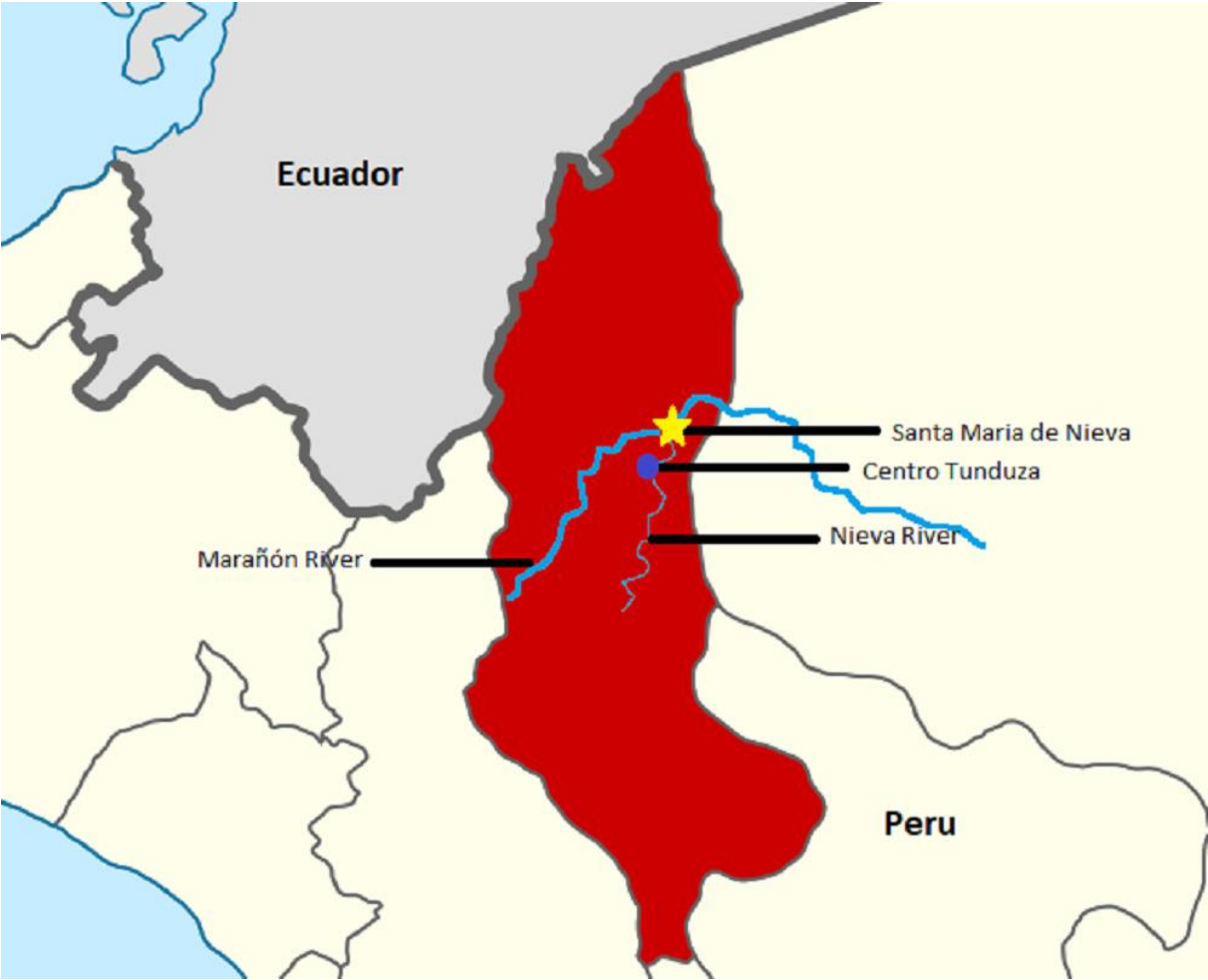
# Maps

Map 1|Region Amazonas, Peru.





Map 2|Rivers and community.



*"When I was a boy, I also wanted to look for the Ajutap, I wanted to listen to him, let him talk to me, so I could be a waimaku [a person that have received a vision for the ancestors]. But when the missionaries arrived at my school, they told me that Jesus is the new agent. Back then, I could not understand the introduction of the Gospel to my people. I suffered so to be able to define and clarify. If I did not, I would have a double robe: this is my real shirt, but I have another bag and that is not my real dress. That's what they've created in the sierra and in other villages trying to take away their own beliefs and spiritualities."*

*- From conversation with Santiago Manuin (Awajun political leader)*

## *Prologue*

*Our hammocks were attached across two main beams in the roof of the henhouse. We bought them one day prior to leaving Santa Maria de Nieva, the provincial capital of Condorcanqui, in the region of Amazonas, northern Peru. Finally had we arrived at Centro Tunduza, the community that would be our home for most of the fieldwork that would last seven months. Medium in size (approximately 200 people), and only reachable by the motorized river boats, called peque-peque, it seemed ideal for the task at hand. The community was located alongside the Nieva river and it engaged in relations with Servicio Agropecuario para la Investigación y Promoción Económica (SAIPE). The latter fact would prove most important. Close relations between the community and this non-governmental organisation would provide us with the logistics necessary for a prolonged stay among the Awajun - making us able to travel back and forth between the community and the SAIPE-headquarter in Santa Maria de Nieva, if needed. Founded in the mid-90s, on request from the local leaders of the Awajun and Wampis communities in the region, SAIPEs role was now a mixture of incentives focusing primarily on sustainable forest management, intercultural organisation building and education. Being enrolled in one of their forest programs, Centro Tunduza would host a three-day long workshop focusing on cacao cultivation, gathering representatives from the nearby communities.*

*We arrived at the community for the first time together with the four SAIPE officials responsible for the workshop one day in advance. Greeting us on the riverbank was an elderly man. Though small in stature his physical strength soon became evident: While pulling our boat up on the muddy bank, he tossed our monthly provision of rice nonchalant over his shoulders and continued making way through knee-deep mud. His name was Don Filizardo and he would, together with his wife Rosa, house us on their property for the time being. We quickly made our camp in the henhouse, close to the main living quarters, before Rose invited us in for lunch. Filizardo was a mestizo farmer and former cattle rancher that had emigrated down from the Andean highlands due to a series of droughts that had plagued the region in the 70s. He had married Rosa, who was an Awajun woman, and together they had three children. Two of them lived in the community with their own families, while the youngest had been sent to the coast for a Christian education. Filizardo was in many ways SAIPEs closest associate in the community. He would often, during our stay, make travels in and around the Nieva river nexus on the behest of the organisation. When doing so, he would teach in nearby communities and otherwise partake in projects relating to the planting of cacao gardens. Although Tania and I was able to build our own house in the community, we would end up living for most of the fieldwork together with Rosa and Filizardo. As a way of re-paying their generosity, we would*

*work in their cacao and manioc gardens. Being one of the most respected families in the area, their act of taking us under their wings would lead other families to share this initial hospitality.*

# 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION: Setting the Stage

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A sea of manioc (*untuk mama*) [Nils Haukeland Vedal, 2018.

*And I...*

*Toward the talisman hill...*

*I will stop...*

*In the Kanus valley...*

*On the talisman path...*

*I will stop...<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Part of *anen* incantation sung by the Awajun women on their way to the garden.

## 1.1: Aims of the investigation and theoretical contextualization

This thesis strives to explain how the Awajun of Centro Tunduzza practice gardening. Not that long ago the Awajun people of northern Peru's mountainous jungle relied upon a kind of swidden horticulture<sup>2</sup> where individual households would shift the location of their gardens (*aja*) every so often. This happened approximately every three – five years, depending on the fertility of the soil (*nunka*). Re-location of the entire household would occur when the surrounding areas were depleted of game animals (*kuntin*). Today, the Awajun people live in more permanent locations called *centros*, or native communities, though they still retain their traditional subsistence gardens. In these gardens the Awajun cultivate some of their most important foodstuff, such as a wide variety of sweet manioc (or *mama*), used for eating and fermentation. Furthermore, the Awajun garden in general comprises a dazzling display of flora heterogeneity; besides staple species like the sweet potato (*kamút*) and the just mentioned manioc, one finds cultigens for just about every facet of Awajun life: For ornamental use they cultivate the black genipa (*ipak*) and red achiote (*shua*), both used for facial decoration, or the huairuro (*tajep*) which is used for making colourful bracelets and necklaces. In their kitchen gardens, one can find ayahuasca (*datem*), tobacco (*tsaag*) and toé (*baikuá*), all for shamanistic purposes. Scattered around the house and dispersed throughout the garden there is climbing plants for making fish poison, such as barbasco (*timu*) and huaca (*wasum*). For dying one's hair, the Awajun use wifo (*suwa*), and for making their small purses, they use the chambira (*batain*). And for curing ailments, the number of cultigens used are too many to list here.

In addition to their wide range of uses, some of the plants mentioned above possess human-like qualities: the manioc plants, when being cut by a machete, bleeds and suffers distress if handled too roughly, so the women sing to them incantations, or *anen*, to ease their pain. Wild weeds (*dupa*) grow in the garden and threatens the wellbeing of the domesticated cultigens, again making the women sing to them so to direct their attention away from their plants. Older cultigens like *mama nantuji* (or “old manioc stem”) teaches the younger sprouts how to grow – nurturing them like a mother fosters her children through the dangers of the world. For the Awajun people, the garden is a realm in which the relations vowed between humans and plants make up a symbiotic circle based on a kind of co-dependency, or nurture. This conceptual system does not fit our naturalistic model, nor does it adhere to our scientific

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<sup>2</sup> A term first coined by Napoleon Chagnon in his study of Yanomami people of Venezuela (Chagnon 1969).

ecology. Before delving into the specific nature of the relations between the Awajun people and their plants some theoretical contextualization within the general body of literature concerning human/nonhuman relations are in order.

American neuropathologist Terrence Deacon writes: “we tend to underestimate the complexity and subtlety of much non-human social communication” (1997: 31). In recent years, however, the ways in which people engage in relations with other-than-human entities has gathered the attention of anthropologists. For some time now the contributions to the literature on human-nonhuman relation has been growing in interesting ways: Eduardo Kohn’s new take on Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic model, in his study of the Quechan speaking Runa people of the Ecuadorian Amazon, resulted in a most fascinating monograph.<sup>3</sup> The intricate ways in which the Runa people conceptualize inter-species communication makes one realizes that, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, it matters how nonhumans perceive humans (Kohn 2013). Lewis Daly’s ethnographic work on the symbiotic relationship between Makushi horticulturalists and the plants they cultivate resulted in a doctoral thesis.<sup>4</sup> Through shamanic visions and dreams, the Makushi people are visited by their plants. In these visions, the plants answer the songs sung by the Makushi farmers (Daly 2015). Ethnographical experiences of this kind reach far beyond the Amazon rainforest: In his study of the Yukaghir, Rane Willerslev explore the relation between human hunter and animal pray in Siberia. Willerslev’s monograph<sup>5</sup> describes beautifully the seductive properties of mimesis and thus brings an additional dimension of exploration to the ways in which cross-species communication structures the relation between hunters and their pray (Willerslev 2007).

The study of human/nonhuman relations has gained much traction in the anthropological debate often found under the rubric of “the ontological turn”, a term first coined by Martin Holbraad (2003). First traces of an interest in an ontological methodology as a way of understanding non-western notions about the relationships between humans and the “natural environment” can be traced back to the mid-70ths. Philippe Descola, under the supervision of Claude Levi-Strauss, made use of the latter’s methodological structuralism, presented in *Mythologiques* (1964; 1966; 1968; 1971), in trying to understand the native ecology of the Jivaro Achuar (Descola 1994). In relation to this merger Luiz Costa and Carlos Fausto writes:

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<sup>3</sup> *How forests think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human* (2013)

<sup>4</sup> *The Symbiosis of People and Plants: Ecological Engagements among the Makushi Amerindians of Amazonian Guyana* (2015). The ethnographic experience of Lewis Daly is surprisingly similar to my own in that the Makushi horticulturalists exercise a conceptual system not unlike that of the Awajun people, in their gardens. Unfortunately, his work was unknown to me during much of the time I spent writing this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (2007).

“If [...] *Mythologiques* is the study of the passage from nature to culture [then], Descola’s work explores the interface between these poles by showing how Achuar praxis straddles the great divide and forces us to reconceptualize this overarching dichotomy” (Costa and Fausto 2010: 92). In re-conceptualizing this overreaching dichotomy, Philippe Descola paid homage to the almost forgotten concept of “animism”, resurrecting it from its murky past. The old concept was first presented, in its new context, as a “animic systems of praxis” or as a “scheme of praxis” regulating the interaction between culture and nature (Descola 1992). Now, the concept of animism stands as an ontology in its own right (Descola 2005), and thus no longer a way of knowing (epistemology) but a primary way of *being*. Descola’s “new-animism” postulates a conceptual continuity between humans and non-humans (1992; 1996; 2005), or as Viveiros de Castro puts it: “the space between nature and society is itself social” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 473). Humans and non-humans (the latter often being animals, plants and spirits) are bound by the same cultural and social maxims by way of a shared “interiority”. This interiority is often conceptualized to that which amounts to the “soul”, a shared capacity for subjectivity or intentionality despite their different bodily forms (Descola 2005: 140), thus straddling the *Great Divide*.

Another proponent of ontology and just as inspired by the tenets of Straussian structural anthropology as Descola was—and still are—the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Aiming for the heavens, he tried to account for the ways in which notions of divinity shapes the relation between the Araweté people and their gods (Viveiros de Castro 1992). This study paved way for the native sociology called “perspectivism”. This is a social philosophy that postulates, in many ways the same core notion as Descola’s “animism” – i.e. the conceptual continuity between humans and other-than-human selves (Viveiros de Castro 1998). Though, despite their apparent similarity, animism and perspectivism nevertheless differs in some important ways: Even though animism and perspectivism share an interest in the conceptual continuity across different species, one finds that a perspectivist sociology adds an additional clause. The claim often presented from “perspectivist point of view” is that non-humans see humans not as humans but as non-humans (either pray or predator). What matters in a perspectivist world(s) view—if one is to enter a human/nonhuman relation—is first and foremost not how one sees oneself, but how “the other” sees him or herself. The “you” in the equation is first and foremost a product of the others point of view on him or herself. From that realisation one is the draw the conclusions about the nature of the human/non-human interaction. This additional dimension is an object of continues debate. Whereas Descola claim that “perspectivism” is a product of regional-specific animism (2005: 143), Viveiros de Castro argues that perspectivism



is “an ethnoepistemological collary of animism” (1996: 122), meaning that animism first and foremost is an anthropological analytical category and thus belonging to our *etic* conceptualization of the “native’s” that *emic* conceptual system. I will not here continue any further explorations of the respective notions presented above. They will re-emerge in the context of my own ethnographic experience later in the thesis (notably chapter 3 and 4). Though I will already here claim that due to the Awajun garden being inhabited by non-humans with distinct and differing point of views—all needed to be accounted for and negotiated by the Awajun horticulturalists—that a perspectivist analyses similar to that of Viveiros de Castro will be explored closely further. Let us continue with the general theoretical contextualization.

The anthropological projects of Descola and Viveiros de Castro have in common, as we have seen, a joint interest in exploring the different mediations, or *conceptual continuity*, existing between humans and nonhumans. Their two concepts (animism and perspectivism) are drawn from their early ethnographic work which examines the relation between, respectively: animals and humans (i.e. *nature* and *culture*), and humans and gods, (i.e. *culture* and *supernature*). In taking what was formally viewed as an human universal, the well-known opposition between nature and culture, presented by Levi-Strauss, the two authors explore how Amazonian peoples do not necessarily adhere to these binaries as historical trajectories following a passage from one to the other, or as Levi-Strauss would say: from the *raw* to the *cooked* (Levi-Strauss 1964).

Being heavily influences by the father of structural anthropology some of the old criticism aimed against Levi-Strauss finds new bearings in Descola’s and Viveiros de Castro’s neo-structuralism. Their early studies of Amerindian ontologies have been, and still are, the subject of much criticism: Tarrance Turner, in his much-cited critique of Viveiros de Castro’s work challenges the latter, saying that the Viveiro de Castro “simply” re-produces the binaries of structuralism since his work “just” turns two metaphysical propositions on their heads (Turner 2009: 11). The same critique is presented by Magnus Course when he states that if we are to escape the shackles of western metaphysics, we are none the wiser in doing so if we are just to turn the cardinal opposition of nature and culture (put forward in the works of Levi-Strauss) on its head (2010: 253). In other words: if Levi-Strauss *reduced human culture to nature*, then Viveiros de Castro traps his project in the same epistemological quagmire when he *reduces human nature to culture*. Viveiros de Castro answers this criticism by saying, paradoxically, that: “to produce a non-dualist conceptual alternative to the conceptual dualism that organize and constitute the field of anthropology: individual and society, nature and culture, traditional and modern” (Viveiros de Castro and Goldman 2003) the only way to do so is by

experimentally reconceptualization these and other binaries, to bring them to contact with their own “limit” (Viveiros de Castro 2013: 481-3). On this important point my thesis argues that the states of nature and the state of culture is a matter of actualization in *the context of immediate experience*. In my ethnographic context, these kinds of “experiences” will be the type of human/nonhuman communication allowed for by the ritual use of *anen*. When the Awajun gardener sings these incarnations, she allows herself to be submerged in the garden as the words of the *anen* enables her to communicate with the other-than-human selves that inhabits the garden realm. A communication otherwise not allowed for—by the absence of the use of *anen*—by the nature of the perspectivist model the Awajun garden adheres to.

As is evident I will position myself within the ongoing anthropological debate on the relationships between humans and non-humans. However, by doing so I will present every-day situations in which these kinds of social relations take a concrete form. A need for ethnographic-specific cases involving the relations between humans and non-humans is sought after by both Descola himself (2015: 142) and others that advocate for a deeper understanding of the specific ways in which humans and non-humans partake in meaningful social relations (Fausto 2007; 2010, Kohn 2007b)

Another well put critique of the “ontological turn” focuses on the relationship between cosmology and ritual action. Because early studies of Amazonian ontologies (notably the already mentioned works of Descola and Viveiros de Castro) focused mostly on cosmology, myth, and systems of classification at the expense of practical activity, they are therefore open to criticism of on these grounds, in much the same way as Lévi-Strauss has been criticized for privileging structure over action and myth over ritual. Again, Luiz Costa and Carlos Fausto brings attention to this: “Ritual has always been something of a poor cousin [...] obscured by the brilliant descriptions of cosmology.” (2010: 94). To this I wish to argue that, in the context of my ethnographic data, that the realisation of human interaction with non-humans (mostly plants and spirits) is first and foremost given a concrete form in the context of *ritual action* in the garden. The Awajun gardener must be able to potentialize the non-evident human-like qualities of her plants if she is to successfully conduct gardening. The link between Amerindian cosmology—given a regional-specific form in this thesis—and ritual practice will be closely examined throughout this text and especially in chapter 3 and 4.

Before finally entering the ethnographic material from my stay among the Awajun I will shortly address a last point. Ontologies such as animism and, especially, perspectivism focuses to a large degree on the relationship between hunter and pray. Is perspectivism the ontology of male hunters only? (Costa and Fausto 2010: 98). If hunting (largely a male-dominated

undertaking) is the main ethnographic source for our understanding of human/non-human relation in the Amazon, then perspectivism and animism would be constructed based on male-dominated modes of relation, thus excluding women from our study of Amerindian ontologies. If so, this is most problematic, but to this point my thesis argue that the predatory idiom of animism and perspectivism is very much the mode of relation that enables the Awajun women to partake in social interaction with other-than-human selves in the garden. In the Awajun garden, as we will see, predation is first and foremost the *predation of the point of view of the "other"*. The woman gardener must position herself in such a manner that she is able to take the point of view of the many non-humans found in the garden. This allows her to win the other-than-human subjectivities over to her ontological realm by negotiate forth her desirable outcome that is the well being of her garden. This last point, being the capacity to "win over" the subjectivity of "the other", is closely related to shamanism as well as hunting (mentioned above). This text will not directly entertain either of the two (shamanism or hunting), though I will show that the predation articulated in the garden is very much akin to the predation that structures the hunting songs (*anen*) belonging to the Awajun men.

## **1.2: The Awajun and their relation to Peruvian major society**

The Awajun, together with their neighbours to the east, the Wampis, and their Ecuadorian brothers to the north, the Shuar and Achuar, make up the Jivaro linguistic complex. The term *Jivaro* (or *Jibaro*) is believed to be a Spanish corruption<sup>6</sup> of the endonym "Shuar", meaning "people" (Bottasso, 1982:11). I have never heard the Awajun call themselves Jivaro, and only on very few occasions did elder people referred to themselves as Aguaruna. The latter term is the exonym under which most of Awajun ethnography is found, though they themselves prefer to be called Awajun. The term *Aguaruna* is derived from Quichua. It is a combination of the words *runa* (meaning "people") and *aguache*, the name of a palm known to grow on in Awajun land. Early contact between neighbouring Quichua speaking people, possibly the Canelos of Pastaza, Bobonaza and Napo rivers close to the Ecuadorian Andes, could serve as an explanation for this.

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<sup>6</sup> Janett Wall Hendricks writes that: "According to Bottasso, the early Spanish lacked a sign to write the "sh" and substituted "x," which in recent centuries was transformed into "j." Thus, the term evolved from "shivar" to "xivar" to "jivar" to "jivaro" or "jibaro" (Bottasso, 1982:11 in Hendricks 1986: 25).

El Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI) stated in 2007, that the Awajun people is the second largest ethnic group in the Peruvian Amazon with a population of 55,366 inhabitants (INEI 2008).

Inhabiting the rough terrain of Peru's and Ecuador's high jungle, the Jivaro peoples have resisted incorporation by the Inca Empire as well as the later Spanish insertions into their lands. First recordings of the Jivaro people was done by the Inca when Túpac Yupanqui and Huayna Cápac campaigned to absorb Jivaro lands into their Inca Empire (Brown 1984). Later, first contact between Spanish Conquistadores and representants of the Jivaro took place when the city of Jaen was founded. Further contact intensified when the town of Santa Marie de Nieva was established in 1549 (Harner 1972). The Spanish Empire would never enjoy long time rule over the Jivaro: a series of revolts against taxations, in the form of gold dust from the mines on indigenous land, led to the Spanish rule being overthrown in 1599, driving them out of Jivaro lands (Ibid). Being then called, by the Spanish, "The Great Nation of the Jivaro" (Brown 1985: 26), these people have until this day enjoyed a kind of autonomy that other peoples of Amazonia have not.

The Jivaro language remains strong in everyday life, as well as in the bilingual educational system. Though many aspects of their "traditional" culture are eroding away, Awajun sense of identity remains vibrant. Traditional aspects have taken new forms in the changing socio-political landscape. Michael Brown concludes his monograph (1986) on the Awajun by addressing the pending gap between newer and older generations: The latter's bewilderment over the conduct of the young, their lack of knowledge about the old ways and their dwindling interest in "life-giving visions". Brown writes: "So far, the signal drums [...] lie forgotten and silent" (ibid: 184). The old ritual drums, signalling the start of the ayahuasca ceremony, may have lied silent for some time, though a new generation of aspiring political leaders have started to rely upon this almost abandoned knowledge once more. The use of the three "ancestral plants", those being: ayahuasca (*datem*), tobacco (*tsaag*) and toé (*baikuá*), strengthens the Awajun person: "[The plants] raise morale, elevate dignity and self-esteem", one political leader told Tania<sup>7</sup> and I, prior to our departure for Centro Tunduza. And once there, old men would sing about their past *Ajutap*<sup>8</sup> visions during drinking parties.

The Jivaro are known in the popular literature for their ferociousness during wartime and for their, now abandoned, practise of head-shrinking (called *tsantsa*). Till recently one

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<sup>7</sup> Tania followed me into the Peruvian Amazon and served as my translator and intellectual partner for most of the time spent in Centro Tunduza.

<sup>8</sup> The ancestral warrior, which young Awajun men search for in drug induced trances.

could marvel at the fist size leathery face of the shrunken heads on displayed at the National Museum, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, now tragically burned down. Images like that of the shrunken head, taken during the war expeditions of past times, still foster the western imagination of the Jivaro peoples as brute savages. More nuanced ethnographic work on the Jivaro emerged with the writings of Michael Brown (1984; 1986), Philippe Descola (1994) and Anne-Christine Taylor (1984; 1985; 1996) in the mid-80ths, though Rafael Karsten (1935) and Michael Harner (1973) had prior to this done detailed descriptions of the material culture, shamanic practises and kinship relations among of Shuar people of Ecuador.

This be said, the xenophobia of Peruvian major society showed itself in 2009. Just after the sitting president at the time, Alan Garcia, had called the indigenous population in the area *perro del hortelano* (meaning: “dog in a manger”), special forces from the Peruvian government’s military clashed with an indigenous coalition on June 5<sup>th</sup> - the majority being Awajun and Wampis people. The conflict had gathered massive media attention during the time leading up to the confrontation and prejudice was ramped in the national discourse. At least 32 people were killed in the clash at Devil's Curve, a narrow passage on the highway leading from Bagua into region Amazonas. The incident had been foreshadowed by a series of events that transpired after Peru established a free trade agreement with the United States. When in effect, the trade agreement allowed private companies access to natural the resources in indigenous lands.

During the days after the incident at Devil’s Curve more life was lost when indigenous protestors killed nine police officers. This happened when people armed with machetes and spears stormed a petroleum facility belonging to the national oil company Petro Perú. Tensions continued to grow though the Peruvian government gave in and Congress repealed the laws. The repeal happened on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, and the protestors lifted their blockades into the Amazon region shortly thereafter. Although tragic, this kind of mustering of forces, when facing an outside threat, seems to be characteristic for the Jivaro people. Harner brings up an interesting event that further shed light on this: When faced with a possible onslaught by the Ecuadorian army, during the war between Ecuador and Peru (1941-42), Shuar households, on the border between Peru and Ecuador, ceased all inter-tribal feuds, so to brace for the pending attack that in the end never came. (Harner 1972: 33).

The Awajun peoples strives for political autonomy, access to the resources of their land and right to self-determination have not only manifested itself in the tragic events of the “Buguazo incident”, just mentioned above. Some years prior, in January of 2002, a group of Awajun men staged a night-time assault on a frontier settlement in the Department of Cajamarca

(Brown 2014: 183). This resulted in the death of nine adults and seven children. Prior to this had the leaders of the surrounding Awajun communities for years tried to evict the settlers because of the latter's unlawful "squatting" on indigenous territory, though efforts to do so had stalled. When all political efforts were exhausted, the Awajun people of the area saw no other option than to attack the "militant" farmers (Ibid).

Although confrontations between Awajun peoples and new settlers sometimes result in bloodshed, most resistance put forward by the Awajun (and other Jivaro peoples) is non-violent. Ambitious political leaders educated in the bi-lingual education system adhered to in most native communities have thrown themselves into campaigns of political mobilization (Brown 2014: 178). Some of the strategies of resistance is fund-raising among interterritorial organizations, and vocal denunciations of the violations posed against Awajun civil and territorial rights. One Awajun man called, Evaristo Nuguag, is the winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize and the Right Livelihood Award. Another prominent leader, and a close supervisor of this thesis, is Santiago Manuin. He is the winner of Spain's Queen Sofia Prize for his environmental and human-rights work (Ibid: 179). Manuin's approval of my study, resulting in this thesis, allowed for a bond of trust not only between myself and his family, but also between myself and the native communities in the region where I worked and lived for seven months.

### **1.3: Methodology**

This master thesis has been realised by use of the classical principles of participatory observation. As this text will show, I followed my main host family in their everyday chores, asked questions about their/our immediate experiences as well as more formal collections of quantitative data through interviews. The latter being the most relevant in cataloguing the different plant species in the garden, fish trapped in the river and animals hunted in the nearby vicinity of the garden. My host family consisted of three generations of Awajun people. The oldest representative being a woman in her mid-70s<sup>9</sup>. Her name is Harina and together with her two daughters, Rosa and Amelia, they became central to the study of gardening chores among the Awajun of Centro Tunduza.

Here I will give attention to methodological choices taken during my ethnographic fieldwork. Questions concerning language barriers and the use of translator will be discussed

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<sup>9</sup> The age of the elders in the community is hard to define because most of them lack birth certificates and the like.

together with the ethical aspects that follows some of the themes discussed later in the text. Important ethnographic moments transpiring a lengthy stay in a foreign context may be hard to characterize in mere methodological terms. In narrowing this exercise down, I will therefore focus on two main “fields” of inquiry<sup>10</sup>: the Awajun garden swidden (*aja*) and the magical songs (*anen*) used to enhance the growth of the cultigens that grow there. Being the two most important domains for the analysis to come and closely related to each other, they nevertheless presented different types of entry to the object of my fieldwork. In addition to the two fields varying degree of practical entry, their respective ethical dimensions proved to differ substantially. Allowing a greater chance for participant observation, everyday gardening and the occasional construction of a new swidden allowed for a straightforward, more practically accessible entry to its domain. On the other side, the spiritual and mythical aspects of the garden realm proved to be the most challenging part of my ethnographic work. Before exploring the themes mentioned above in the light of these two areas, I will begin with an outline of my first meeting with the Awajun people of Centro Tunduza and the process leading up to the community granting us entry. As I hope to achieve, this master thesis will also reflect the nature of my gradual entry into the everyday lives of the people I was so lucky to spend time amongst; granting the reader a deeper understanding of the garden realm as we explore the different themes of this thesis.

#### **1.4: First time in the community**

Around mid-day Tania and I met up outside the community centre. Sometimes called “the club” by the people of Tunduza, it was a traditional constructed communal house used for formal meetings and occasional festivities. Narrow and oval, the building stood tall at the edge of the residential area, side-by-side the muddy soccer field commonly used around these hours of the day. The field was now empty as we stood waiting for the community members to gather. They had agreed to listen to our proposal, asking them if we could live among them with for some months to conduct fieldwork. Many of the elders in the community was well acquainted with the role and conduct of anthropologist, as the latter often visited together with health workers conducting surveys – as of late, these surveys were concerned with the prevention of sexual transmittable diseases such as HIV/AIDS. While Tania and I nervously waited, talking among ourselves, the SAIPE-engineer that had accompanied us on this first visit approached. At the

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<sup>10</sup> Separating everyday gardening from the magical songs used by the Awajun is done here only for heuristic purposes. As the chapters to come will show it would be absurd for the Awajun to approach their gardens by posing a separation in this way.

behest of the director of SAIPE, the SAIPE team, now at our side, had agreed to let us join their workshop. The workshop seminars would be held in the communal house over a period of three days and, it was concerned with the planting of cacao gardens. As a first step towards acceptance by the community, the relations established during these three days would determine any chance of staying behind after the formal visit was over.

Gradually people began to arrive. At the entrance of the communal house a group of women gathered. A couple of them were young mothers carrying their children in back carries, while letting the older youngsters play between their colourful skirts. The children kept a safe distance from us, though some teased each other by pushing their smaller siblings in our direction. They screamed and bolted at the first sign of us trying to reciprocate their approach. Laughter broke out among the women at the sight of the children being in a state somewhere between joy and terror. This went on for some time until the atmosphere suddenly changed. One of the women had started to cry abruptly. While being comforted by what seemed to be her mother, she constantly looked in our direction. Later, that same day, we were told that the woman crying had just lost her oldest child to disease. The young man had been in his early twenties and had returned to the community when he became sick. After returning home his health had gradually deteriorated until he died some months prior to our arrival. While living away from the community, in an urban border town to the Amazon, he had dyed his hair blonde red. This had seemed to draw resemblance to the fact that my own hair had the same colour, though natural. This small affair could seem anecdotal for the events that transpired shortly after, but hopefully it will be apparent to the reader shortly the death of the young man would play a role in the community's decision making.

The tense situation was finally relieved by the arrival of the men. Now that they had returned from their daily chores in and around the community, we could finally enter the communal house. Shortly after taking our seats at the far end of the house, we became aware that our wishes for a prolonged presence in the community was not the only concern on the agenda that day. About once a week, representatives of the families living in the community would discuss important matters pending. The community leader, called *kakájam* or more commonly *apu*<sup>11</sup> (the latter being a Quechua word that in this context draws connotations to "headmen"), serves as a moderator on these events. He was now preparing for the meeting together with his assistant who was sitting by his side ready to take notes, so to document the

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<sup>11</sup> Various places in his ethnographic description of the Jivaro Shuar, Rafael Karsten translates the term *apu* to mean "great peasant". This is probably referring to the fact that Jivaro lands has for a long time been in first-hand contact with Quichua speaking farmers such as the Canelos (Karsten 1935).



outcome regarding the most important matters. The *apu* had newly been elected through a democratic process that would secure his position for four years - this was one of his first meetings held in this capacity. More generally, the *apu* is the person that represents the community's interests in intervillage meetings and in relations with government officials (Brown 1985:43). His influence is secured by the number of close kinsmen he has, together with personal traits such as his capacity for leadership, temperament and skills as a public speaker.

The benches that followed the walls down on each side of the long room was now packed with close to a hundred people, all locking in our direction in anticipation. After a formal greeting, stating the topic at hand, the *apu* asked us to join him in front of the assembly. We presented us and continued to outline our reasons for being there. Many of the people present already knew about our interest in their garden practises. Some of men had earlier the same day talked about allowing us to stay with them, though when asked about the opinions of others, they would shrug and laugh the matter away. They knew as well as us that this could be a difficult feat to achieve. Rumours of talk among the elders had already begun to circulate, and a couple of them seemed hesitant about excepting the intentions now put forward by Tania and me as sincere.

As tensions started to rise a middle-aged woman rose from her seat. She presented herself to us as Amelia and continued to talk hastily but strongly in Awajun. After some time, several of the people in the room started to laugh and applaud. The tension that had previously filled the room had now seemed to disappear, and the conversation was back to the mutual understandable Spanish. What had just happened was nothing more than a mere stroke of luck. Amelia had convinced the somewhat reluctant elders of the community into accepting our presence. By personally vouching that she herself and her family would be taking care of us, she had reassured most of the people present that we would not drift around from household to household as "freeloaders". Amelia had also requested, from the people gathered, that they should share with us their knowledge of gardening and general culture. This was because, she said, that Tania and I, in turn, could teach them "our ways". To this last point Tania and I, at the request of several people had small lessons in English language at the community secondary school. We would also buy to schoolbooks to each of the children in the community.

After the community had excepted us to live with them for some time it became clear that it was not by mere accident that it was Amelia who was the person first arguing on our behalf. Amelia was the woman who had previously that day been crying outside the entrance to the communal house. Her son had died a few moths prior to our arrival, as mentioned, and

she told us later that she cried when she saw us because her son had dyed his hair making it look like my own natural colour. She wished to know us for this reason, she said when we some days later talked about the events that transpired in and around the communal house.

From our first day in the community Amelia and her family took care of Tania and I, though we would never live under their roof. Our main sleeping quarters became the henhouse of Amelia's older sister, Rosa, and her husband, Don Filezardo. Though we would meet up with Amelia and her family almost every-day, joining them in their routinely visits to their gardens and other related activities.

### **1.5: Ethical dimensions concerning intellectual properties**

As mentioned, this master thesis is concerned with how the Awajun people practice gardening. I started this chapter by addressing some key methodological issues to be addressed. One being the arena of mythological thought. In this regard my use of the Awajun people's magical songs also called *anen* later in this thesis, presents some ethical considerations one needs to address. The incantations used in my analysis of the perspectivist nature of the Awajun garden were given to me by one of my closest Awajunian informants. In her youth, the same songs were passed down to her by her maternal aunt. In chapter 4 we will explore the concrete nature of the "granting" of one's *anen* to another. The process of this "granting" is bound to ritual steps that often is undertaken in privacy; the only two people there is the granter and the receiver. Tania and I never undertook these steps and the words of the different *anen* used in this text are therefore without any potency. This is because one is required to be in a state of intoxication (by inhaling strong tobacco smoke) when one receives the words of the *anen*. As well, one is thereafter subject to a taboo that prohibits the receiver from talking. Because we never adhered to these practices, my close companion never saw any problem with imitating the words of her incantations to us.

We will explore later how *anen* are linked to the body of its owner. This will be done on the pages that concern more closely with the ritual planting that the Awajun gardener conducts by help of *anen* especially acquired to reach those ends. Though, I can already here say that these ritual songs are a part of the singer's own body. In fact, the word *anen* has etymological connotations to the Awajun word *anentai* (meaning: "heart"). Because of this last point one's *anen* is to be shared with the people whom its initial owner has a close relationship with. Some categories of *anen* are sung so to make the addressee aware of the fact that someone is singing about them. This is for example done when one wishes for one's husband to come

home from a long hunting expedition, or for a son that has immigrated to more urban towns. The last examples were prevalent among many of the people of Centro Tunduza whom I discussed these songs with.

I will end this discussion of *anen* by saying that the songs I received was recorded by the approval of their initial owner. Taking part in this process was also many younger children invited by the singer to listen to the words of the *anen*, as these words are normally sung in the privacy of one owns mind.

### **1.6: Language and the use of interpreter**

The reader of this theses may already know I was, for the whole length of my fieldwork, accompanied by Tania. She served as my translator and intellectual partner. Being, at the time a young student of social anthropology herself, she joined me in Lima, Peru, before we decided to make the travel to the northern parts of the Amazon together.

Our initial thought was that we would learn as much of the Awajun language as possible, but this undertaking showed itself to be futile due to our short stay among the Awajun; seven months was not enough to archive a respectable mastery of the language as well as an understanding of the object of our investigation. Because of this we decided that Tania would support me in the interactions that proved to difficult to make sense of due to my limited knowledge of Spanish. This shoved itself to be challenging as well, to some degree, since the Spanish tongue of the Awajun is heavily informed by region-specific words not known to native born urban dwellers such as Tania. In addition to this the *español de selva* spoken by the Awajun is also supplemented by their own idioms, as well as words borrowed from the Quechua language of neighbouring peoples. These factors often left me crippled, though Tania often managed to overcome these “problems”.

Because of my reliance upon Tania’s abilities to straddle this quagmire, we often kept a close distance during the fieldwork. On the occasions when this was impossible—for example when Tania spend some weeks with her family in Lima—I, and the Awajun, had to make do with interesting and often funny ways to communicate our intentions to each other. During times like this my Awajunian companions and I would often partake in more “practical” chores together. On many occasions, this amounted to hunting and fishing, though also occasional gardening. The latter exercise would be most frustrating when conducted without Tania by my side. Due to the unholy mix of my limited mastery of the language, and the fact that the garden realm was the focus of my fieldwork, my frustration would often peak during these times. When

this happened, I was forced to scribble down everything I could gather from the interaction and later join up with Tania and my informants to revisit the questions again. In addition to this I would gather the names and uses of the cultigens of the respective garden.

When conducting more “formal” interviews, Tania was always by my side. On questions concerning mythical interpretations and human/nonhuman relations (both paramount to this master thesis) we would, if allowed to by the people talking to on these matters, turn on our tape recorders for the duration of the talk. Prior to this we would write down some questions of interest. As our understanding grew, these types of interactions would take a less formal nature. And in the end our informants would seek us when they thought of or experienced something previously discussed, providing additional information to already established discourses.

The reader will through this thesis be introduced to the methodological choices made during my fieldwork. I will address them specifically when needed to, though they will also be traceable as different themes of interest are presented. My analysis of mythical discourse will stand as an example in this regard: First will I understand mythical discourse as *text* (chapter 3), before entering a practical understanding of myth as ritualized immediate experience. The latter will make up most of chapter 4.

## 2. AMELIA'S GARDEN

### Ecology and Sociality

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Peeling a manioc root (*puam mama*) [Nils Haukeland Vedal, 2018.

*“Don’t touch the stems with hard hands,  
slowly, with caution may you touch them.*

*Although we have cut them with the iron of the whites,*

*may they not take it amiss;*

*only to cut the pieces have we used the knife.*

*May it do no harm; may you grow well,*

*may you bear abundant fruit”<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Chant of the Jivaro (Shuar) women as an initiation to the gardening proses. Collected by Rafael Karsten (1935: 127)

## **2.1: Introduction**

This chapter will be an introduction to the aspects of Awajun life tangible through the ways in which they practice gardening. Amelia's garden is in many ways my "ethnographical moment", so it will serve as our first point of entry into the life of the Awajun. Being important for several reasons, the garden is the landscape for which I draw many of my conclusions from. Before we enter the more intrinsic dimension of the garden (it's myths and rituals) we will try to understand the garden as a scene of historical transition. The changing ecological circumstances that face the region also impacts the everyday life of the people living there. Amelia's garden is not unique in this regard. From the, now, vast literature paying attention to the ways in which the Awajun (and other Jivaro groups) practice gardening, we are provided with the foundation for historical comparison (Karsten: 1935; Harner: 1973; Brown: 1985; Descola: 1994). These ethnographers will thus follow us closely throughout our investigation.

As we will soon see, the Awajun are accomplished gardeners and the plants that they cultivate hold an important place in their mythology and ritualistic life. Because of this, their garden was always to be regarded as the place in which I could derive some understanding of the more fundamental aspects of their society. But it was one problem I had to overcome in some way or another: The gardens feminine nature has always been presented as a methodological obstacle of sorts for male anthropologists - this could prove difficult, even detrimental, to my study. So, no wonder, I was quite anxious about this. Making it even more precarious; failing to maneuver such a delicate social field could result in physical harm. During my visits to Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, in Lima, this was presented to me as a quite real and possibly outcome. Being told to, by seniors of this field, to approach it with a "reasonable amount of caution and respect", I poised myself, though what this amounted to in a practical sense was never actually discussed any further. But the reasons for caution were quite clear, and it was not presented by ways of a total separation of the sexes (as I initially thought), in fact, the few times men are allowed into the garden is for sexual conduct with their wives, or lovers, consequently posing the immediate question among the Awajun men of my purpose for being there alone with their wives. I would imagine that my interest in domesticated plants would not be the first to come to mind.

## **2.2: First time entering the garden**

I was pleasantly surprised, then, by the fact, that I one morning, while visiting the house of one of the families who seemingly enjoyed my company the most, were enthusiastically greeted

upon my arrival and substantively asked if I wanted to help them in the garden. Without any hesitation I agreed, and Ruth, the oldest daughter of the house, handed me my own machete and the complimentary knitted basket for harvesting crops. On that day Amelia and I, accompanied by Ruth, went to her manioc garden a good 40 minutes' walk from her house laying in the outskirts of the community. Crossing rough terrain and several small streams – one in which claimed a whole family of chickens the other day – we exited abruptly the forest claiming the path between Amelia's two houses and entered a great manioc garden. "This garden is all mine" Amelia said proudly, pointing in a sweeping motion to the far reaches of her *aja* (the Awajun term for "garden"). Taking a brief rest by the trail in the outskirts of the garden, we gathered our strength in preparation for a kind of physical labor I had never associated with harvesting garden fruits before.

We diverged from the main trail cutting through the garden and crouching down under the damp leaves of her plants Amelia and her daughter started to jolt them back and forth gripping the stem as close to the root as possible. I soon joined them by squatting down with my machete in hand with which I was instructed to soften the earth around the base of the stem. Raveling a small part of the roots we were able to jerk the rest of the structure from the grip of the soil. As is the case with most of their gardens, the main cultigens are the different kinds of sweet manioc (*mama*). Their thick and tuberous roots – often reaching several feet undergrown – requires a great amount of effort to loosen from the earth. And despite it being a murky sunless day, I was soaked in sweat and covered by orange clay well before the end of our endeavor.

Being unfamiliar with this kind of practice, I watched with great admiration how Ruth work her machete on the harvested manioc roots; she placed the tubers vertically in her hand and made crude longitudinal section with speedy strokes. She then peeled the two outer layers off, so to reveal the bright yellow edible part. This went on for some time in hasty cooperation with her mother who rapidly handed her more tubers as they emerged from the earth. In an awkward gesture I reached out my hand towards Amelia who, with a convincing smile, gave me some of their harvest. Glancing back at Ruth, I tried to imitate her agility with the machete. This did not work out as intended, and after nearly destroying parts of the harvest, including my own hands, we stopped the soon-to-be spectacle and sat down among the piled-up tubers and stem debris. "Do you have manioc in your country?" Amelia asked as she wiped the sweat of her brow. "No, we do not have any manioc where I come from" I replied. "It is too cold, so we have to import it from other places". Amelia and Ruth stared at me with empty, almost sad looks, on their faces. I suspect that this question came from them witnessing my less than novice way of peeling the roots. The fact that I was not able to handle their most basic gardening

chores, in addition to not even having any manioc in my country, seemed almost to be too much to bear for my hosts. “Do you import manioc from us?” Amelia sighed in an awestruck manner, to which I answered: “From Africa or maybe Brazil, I am not sure”. The total pity they felt for me was now evident as they looked at each other.

Their reaction can tell us a thing or two about the importance of gardening. Being closely tied up to its individual owners’ sense of self-dependence, the garden is the realization of social status of the women and subsequently the status of her husband. Not having my own garden is equal to being at the mercy of another household (as I was during my stay). It also amounts to being without a wife, since it is the mistress of the household that works the garden. Descola comments on this, for his Achuar case: “When a man no longer has any woman (mother, wife, sister, or daughter) he has no choice but to kill himself” (1994: 175). Luckily for us, both Rosa and Amelia were willing to provide us with the manioc we needed, in exchange for our help in daily tasks. The cases of male suicide, due to the lack of a woman in close relation, seems not to be something practiced today. Awajun subsistence cultivation is no longer the only way in which one can secure a living. Most men engage in cash-crop cultivation, providing them with a somewhat stable income. Though, as we will see later, this form of practice is not optimal considering the high demand of care these plants must be provided with.

When two of the three knitted baskets (*chankin*) were stacked with tubers, and ready to be taken back to the household, our attention was directed towards the smaller roots that had been left behind after the initial harvesting process. In my mind this had been the result of their puny stature compared to their bulky counterparts, thus making them unfit foodstuff. However, this was not the case. As previous done, the outer layers were torn off in quick motions but this time they were chipped by cross sections, making small cubes only a couple of inches in diameter each. Asking about the aims of this process Ruth replies that they often use the “leftovers” for making *nijamanch* (or “masato” in Spanish), a fermented drink that does just as good as a catalyzer for conversation as it serves as a way of filling an empty stomach. In fact, just before going to the garden the three of us had hastily downed a *pininkia* (traditional clay bowl for drinking) each of this creamy beverage to make up for a lack of breakfast.

A rather telling incident unfolded in one of the households sometime after the episode of my first entry to the garden. It gives merit to just how important *nijamanch* (manioc-beer) is for the social status of each household. Being introduced to a family, that was somewhat distant from our regular social circle, we were invited to their house to have a share of their manioc-beer (as was costume). Upon entering the house, we were told to wait for the mistress of the household – she was still in her garden, but she would shortly return. Some time was spent,



before I realized that the atmosphere slowly had turned somewhat tense. In front of us stood two full plastic drums. Both were filled with newly fermented beer, and the cup, used to pour the beverage into the *pinika* rested upon the seal of the drum, ready to be used. We now stared at it in silence. The men said something to each other in Awajun and looked towards the door. I now realized that the wife of our host would not return for some time. The husband sighed and stood up - he was clearly embarrassed. We exited the house and took up on the invitation to go to the closest neighbor and continue there.

This example provides us with an understanding of how crucial a social catalyzer *nijamanch* is for the Awajun – without it, the household is close to being socially dead. Some comments on relations between the genders is also a pressing matter of concern. The unity, that between husband and wife, has as its locus the household. Though the practice of hunting (the men are responsible for this) falls somewhat outside the reach of my text, I can attest to the fact that, for the Awajun, the roles of each gender culminates in the house, and if one of them is away when the time for unity is at hand (in this case the unexpected arrival of visitors), the one is to find oneself at a loss. Several of their myths holds within themselves tails of the outmost catastrophe when one of the genders ceases to act out his or hers end of the bargain<sup>13</sup>. As we experienced numerous times thought our stay with the Awajun, the men are not to serve the manic beer<sup>14</sup>. Tania experienced this firsthand; when the women realized that this was, to us, a foreign practice, they made it their prerogative to teach Tania this as fast as possible. It became a pressing matter from the day we were accepted into their community, and Tania was sure to learn this art.

Let us now return to the garden.

Amelia joyfully provided answers to my endless line of questions and never showed any signs of defeat when I came back for elaborations the next day. When she presented some of her manioc plants for closer examination, I found myself at a loss to identify the slightest of difference between them. The total number of manioc plants inhabiting the garden can amount to a several dozen subspecies. Nevertheless, Amelia insured me, while stroking the leaf of a kind<sup>15</sup> that is most sought-after, that this is no task at all. I nodded enthusiastically and continued

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<sup>13</sup> Later in this text we will draw upon some of these myths so to be able to understand the meaning of others. The myth about the moon and his wife serves as one of those that, in addition to letting us understand the myth of Nugkui, tells about the braking of the equilibrium between man and wife.

<sup>14</sup> Only when we were exceptionally drunk, during festivities, did it happen that we (me and the other men) served ourselves with beer from the plastic drum.

<sup>15</sup> Later sessions with follow-up questions assured me about the identity of many of the cultigens; the favored kind turned out to be *chujam mama* (or span. “yuca amarilla”) - a yellowish root well suited for the making of manioc-beer.

to examine the leaves for clues that, disappointingly enough, only resulted in wild guesses. Upon witnessing this Ruth exclaimed: “*Para masato!*”. For a novice like me these woody shrubs with their stare-shaped leaves seemed all too impenetrable, for this was indeed a strange place - distant and close at the same time.

If the untrained observer were to stand at the outskirts and let the gaze wander from the jungle barrier towards the other side of the garden, it would not be evident that the change in topography was due to man. For this garden was quite old (*asáuk*), Amelia assured me, although relatively massive in size, it was now under constant pressure from the surrounding environment, making the everlasting task of weeding the plot seem destitute. Tall fruit trees stood up from beneath the shrub in a scattered fashion throughout the garden matching the surrounding canopy. Except from the many small trails leading in and out from different directions, the shoulder-high vegetation stretches out akin to a carpet covering the almost the one-hectare clearing. We bent our necks and took the same trail from which we came.

It could seem, from my account presented above, that gardening is reducible to simple tasks not demanding of any special kind of skill. This is misleading. If I were to make an account of every specie of cultigen found in Amelia’s garden, my list will exhaust the rest of this chapter. Being about fifty different species of cultigens<sup>16</sup>, again, divided into close to a thousand representatives (individual plants), one is quick to realize that the task of managing the total of the different cultigens is no easy task at all. Amelia must take into consideration the individual species’ period of ripen, in addition to the fact that some species does this continuously throughout the year. Gardening is thus a complex management of a conglomeration of the many crop rotations and successions (Descola 1994: 175). This intricate way of ecological management is reminiscent of the ways in which the Kayapo<sup>17</sup> of Brazil’s Amazon Basin manage theirs. In his conclusion to one of his articles, Darrel Posey states: “‘Naturalness’ of ecological communities can never be assumed without investigating the human history of the area” (1985: 156). These remarks reign true in the case of the Awajun of Centro Tunduza as well, though in contrast to the Kayapo, the case of secondary forest management poses a problem, since the cash-crops (being not native to the region) now cultivated by the Awajun suffers greatly by the fact that they are planted in the nutrient-poor soils of secondary forest.

As we shall see later in this chapter, Amelia’s garden is excluded from the sphere of economy due to its location in the interfluvial regions of the community. Her “traditional”

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Brown states that some of the gardens he surveyed had up to eighty different sub-species of manioc alone (1985: 98).

<sup>17</sup> See Turner Tarrance (1991) regarding ecological management in relation to historical change.

cultigens faces minimal threat by the ecological constraints posed by re-use of already cultivated land, but this is not the case for rice (*ajus*), maize (*shaa*) and cacao (*bekáu*). The cultivation of the latter being constantly encouraged by different non-governmental organizations in the region.

### **2.3: The social dimensions**

Each fluorescing garden is a testimony to an individual wife's determination and general knowledge about the environment at hand. Upon entering Amelia's plot, she fixed my stare, so I could marvel upon her garden's fertility. In earlier times, two or three co-wives would tend to a garden of this size, administrating their own territory within its borders. Though this is not the case anymore, the garden is still the materialization of a women's accomplishment as a wife and agronomist. The garden is no longer the subject of the critical eyes of the co-wives, though it is still a point of honor amongst sisters and different households. A woman's success in garden management has a direct correlation to her social position within the household and the community (Brown 1986: 103). From a very young age, both Amelia and her sister Rosa followed their mother on her regular trips to the garden. "What I know, my mother, Harina, gave me" Amelia would often say, attesting to the reproduction of individual knowledge as it passed down the generations. Some of the women in community told us that they sometimes bring their small boys with them to the garden. Their rationale for this is so to protect their sons from the danger of obtaining a *nákki nua* (or a "lazy women") due to miscalculated marriage later in life. A garden that succumbs to the surrounding elements does so often by mismanagement by the woman responsible for its wellbeing. This is often ascribed to her laziness or inexperience. The general anxiety towards becoming lazy is to be found amongst representatives of both genders, and preventive acts are common. The *sukuyá*<sup>18</sup>(or "nighthawk") is a bird that frequents the garden by night, and it is subject to an interesting taboo that illustrates the aversion to laziness further. Making its presence known by its melancholy song, we stumbled upon this bird late at night. "You should not touch that bird, because if you do, it will make you lazy!" Ruth told us as we made our way past its resting place. She continued to explain that this is so because this bird does not build a nest – making its's home wherever it finds shelter. The bird's properties are believed to take resident in people who comes too near. In some ways the nighthawk, often making the garden a temporary home, presents the antithesis to the qualities that a person must possess so to achieve success in the task of

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<sup>18</sup> A deeper discussion about this bird's mythological implication and temporal conceptualization will follow in the chapter about Nugkui.

gardening<sup>19</sup>. A woman's garden is closely related to her gender proves, as already stated. If a garden is not tended to, one is inclined to believe that the woman in question is unable to take care of herself and her family. This makes her a burden for the rest of her family, and then especially her mother or female sisters. At least one young woman in the community where Tania and I stayed, was shunned for this reason. During our time among the Awajun of Centro Tunduzá, this young lady would roam from household to household with her infant child. Most of the time she would be welcomed for one night or two, though the families would later express disappointment over her situation. Especially would the older women in the community communicate this by drawing on the pending gap between the older and younger generations. The laziness mentioned in the paragraphs above would emerge in the context: The older people, some of them accomplished gardeners, would complain that this is the fate of all younger generations.

As mentioned in the early paragraphs of this chapter, the garden is inherently a feminine space. Though sometimes this "ideal" is temporarily put aside. Although this may accrue from time to time, the sporadic incursions put upon the sanctity of the garden often complement its intrinsic character, thus not altering its nature: Besides looking after their cacao and rice, men sometimes seek sexual relations with their wife or lover in the sanctuary of the garden. *Bashi jinta* (or "private trails") are often subject to scrutiny by a suspicious husband or wife for this reason. It is not uncommon for one of them (wife or husband) to scout for the footprints of unwelcomed guests on the trails leading to the garden. This last point was—at least in the early stages of my fieldwork—something to consider. Some people were hesitant to welcome me to their gardens if we were to venture there alone. When Amelia and I returned for our chores some of the women we met on our way would laugh or make gestures while talking amongst themselves. Some men also commented on my interest in visiting their wife's garden, though their re-assured me that this was not in ill-faith.

#### **2.4: General ecology of the garden**

Not that many generations ago the garden surrounded the house. Usually, a new garden would follow the construction of a new house. This symbiotic relation blurred the line between the main domestic unit (the house) and the main sphere of subsistence (the garden). Now, the

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<sup>19</sup> Later in this thesis we will encounter a bird of the opposite kind. The *tatse* (species unidentified) also makes the garden its home, though is viewed as a source of inspiration by the women, who sing to this bird in their *anen* incantations.

garden often lies further away. In the case of Amelia's main household, the garden was, as we saw, to be found a whole 40 minutes' walk from it. This situation is by no means unique. Most, if not all, households in the community had their gardens made in the same general area as Amelia. Only one older woman, a widow, who chose to live a great length from the community, seemed to adhere to the "traditional" pattern of housing, so often described as *status quo* in earlier accounts (cf. Brown 1985; cf. Descola 1994). When asking the older woman about this she replied that she preferred the privacy provided by such a housing condition, and nevertheless, her many sons would often come to visit. In fact, opinions like this is to be found among many of the older people living in the community. Though not taking it quite as far as the widow, most of the older generations lived in the outskirts of the community.

The changes to house-garden relations has been gradual. One is to retract some seven decades, to the early contact with migraters from the nearby Andes region, to be able to identify the events leading up to today's situation. In the 1950s, stable relations became possible between the Awajun and the increasing number of mestizos settling in area. This influx of settlers reached its peak in the 70s when severe drought in the nearby Andes regions pushed forth an agricultural migration. Some common, yet asymmetrical, ground for interethnic relations between the mestizos and Awajun was realized through various forms of patronships. This lead some Awajun families to relocate closer to the frontier settlements. There, working for the local patrones, Awajun provided the settlers with a stable source of forest products, like timber and pelts from game animals. On the other end, the Awajun where provided with a more stable supply of shotguns, beads and other non-endemic trade-goods. Though, under these arrangements, the Awajun would often indebt themselves to the local landlord, who again forced them to work below the wage requirement enabling them to repay their dept (Brown 1985: 38). A couple of decades went by before laws, favouring the Awajun, was put into effect. Ushered forth after the military coup of 1968, by the newly instated socialist government, these laws were implemented by a set of decrees that made it possible, for the now increasingly centralized Awajun, to have their newformed villages designated as "native communities" (often just called *centro* in the singular). Next in line, and a direct following to the sanctuary of formalised communities, was the right to land titles (Ibid). This was made possible through the Ministry of Agriculture and Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social (SINAMOS), the latter being a social-action agency who implemented far-reaching agricultural-extension, educational, and land-titling programs (Adrienne 1985: 346). The native communities respective land titles were, and still are, the collective property of the peoples living there, though the designated area is again distributed to the individual families, making them akin to

their “private property”. This loosened the grip of the economic system favouring the migrant patrones. Having now the legal leverage securing their right to stable ownership of a patch of land, protecting them from further demographic pressure from migrant settlers, the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Awajun was in the end drastically restricted.

In a conversation with Rosa’s and Amelia’s father, Shamanu, the more unforeseen outcomes of these changes were presented. Having been granted the rights to one of the larger areas of land, including several cacao gardens, Shamanu now faces a pressing question: who was going to be the heir to these properties after his death? Being an old man, this question was rather pressing. The death of his two sons had left him with his daughters. Being already married and in possession of their own gardens, his only option was to let his land be passed down to his only grandchild, Alicia. This is not an ideal outcome because under the constitutive land reforms women are often excluded from inheritance since the right to land is favoured the passing from father to son. Exactly why this disfavour the female representatives of one’s family is not interlay clear, especially when one recall that many garden activities are performed by the women. One reasonable explanation could be that the land in question goes beyond merely the garden: Not only does the land owned by individual families mark the boundaries of their subsistence agriculture, it is also the families primary hunting grounds (a sphere of practice predominantly male). Though with game now scares, most hunting trips are arranged to take place far from the community. Often a day’s journey from the old hunting grounds, sometimes by hiking with car or canoe, the group of hunters would spend several nights in the jungle searching for bigger game, such as the forest pig (*paki*) and deer (*japa*)<sup>20</sup>. Another explanation, and probably more likely to be elucidative, is that the cultivated land in question does no longer only include the traditional female activity, that is subsistence gardening. As alluded to above, a greater amount of cash-crop cultivation now supplements the Awajun economy. This is, again, a domain of male activity and would thus be traceable to the ways in which land titles are favouring male representatives.

By in large, the seemingly minor change, from a life of semi-nomadism and dispersed housing to a fixed locality, has brought with it a set of realities that until some generations ago did not exist among the Awajun. No household would in the past be associated with a patch of

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<sup>20</sup> The deer was until recently excluded from eating and thus under the rubric of what is called non-edible animals (*yuchatai*). The more concrete category, that the deer in the past occupied, is called *mejeaku*, or “sickening” meat. This was so because the deer was one of the animal species believed to be the reincarnation of dead Awajun. Why this has changed yields no direct answer. Michael Brown explains this by alluding to changing ecological circumstances: “game is scares” (1985: 134), though I have myself experienced that some larger mammals, such as the great anteater, still are subject to this taboo, leaving Browns ecological explanation fruitless.

land for any length exceeding that of 15 years<sup>21</sup>, with the introduction of private property, in the temporary sense, through the implementations of the *centros* has, as we have seen, changed that. Though this has provided the Awajun with a sense of collective security whenever their lands are under threat from external forces, such as mining companies and illegal loggers, the *individual* fate of each garden, and subsequently each household, is now bound to more “inescapable” circumstances than before. Still maintaining their slash-and-burn cultivation, the Awajun are shifting the location of their garden plots every 2-4 years, depending on the soil fertility of the swidden. Seeking land with vegetation in a state as close to primary forest as possible, that is vegetation that has exceeded direct human handling for several generations, the Awajun tries to avoid the cultivation of patches that had been recently used for the same purpose, i.e. secondary forest. This presents some problems for the people who now must rely upon gardens further into the interfluvium. This just some of the consequences

Despite being unable to carry out qualitative surveys regarding the nutrient levels of the different soils in and around the community, some general statements about Amelia’s garden is still possible: The claylike red soil (*keaku nunka*), mentioned above, is characteristic of the sloping geography in which Amelia’s garden is located. Close to a ridge overlooking her families’ second house, the garden rests on a well-drained plateau securing it from heavy rainfall and flooding during the rainy season. Drawing upon Descola’s schematization (1994: 143-45) of similar habitats cultivated by the Achuar of Rio Paztasa, we find similarities between the ecological zones and their respective soil components conceptualized through the emic systems<sup>22</sup> that the two Jivaro groups have in common. In discussing the implications of the earth’s mediocre fertility (i.e.: Amelia’s interfluvial garden) by accounting for the cultigens found, we can conclude that the strong acids in *keaku nunka* presents certain restrictions on the utilization of these kinds of gardens: The low level of nutrients narrows the diversity of different cultigens effectively cultivated. Though the lateritic soil is *not* detrimental to the sweet manioc; but it presents problems for more demanding cultigens such as *mejench* (banana), *bakáu* (cacao) and *shaa* (maize). Agronomic examinations from Madagascar (Cours: 1951), paradoxically, show that the sweet manioc does in fact fare better in nutrient-poor, acidic soils, in so far that

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<sup>21</sup> The reasons for “packing up your things” and re-locating was not due to the exhaustion of garden. More was it do to the scarcity of game, from many years of hunting the same population, and the fact that the house itself would begin to fall apart.

<sup>22</sup> The complete system of emic categories is found on the pages 141-142 in *In the Society of Nature*, 1994. I will only focus on the “red earth” (*kenku nunka*) and later draw contrasts to “black earth” (*shuwin nunka*) who is also represented in the community.

the goal is to cultivate its tuberous roots and not its superstructure (the plant stem). The latter tend to grow at the expense of its roots (the actual foodstuff) in nutrient-rich, humid soils (Ibid).

When discussing this with Amelia I also asked her if she would name the plans she tended to in the garden at hand. She listed about a dozen different sup-species of manioc. Despite some other true cultigens mentioned, such as *chapi* (pineapple), *inchi* (sweet potato) and *chiki* (arrowroot), the garden was limited to the cultivation of primarily manioc and the other tuberous crops stated above. Cash crops such as *shaa* (maize) and *ajus* (rice) were not present. Amalia explained that this is because maize and rice need a higher and more stable water supply than her manioc. She also supplemented this by saying that the reasons for her, and others, garden location was due to a shortage of land suitable for cultivation. This was because of the increasing numbers of non-Awajun farmers in the area (mostly immigrants from the Andean region). These frontier settlers cultivate, for the most part, cash-crops such as the already mentioned maize, rice and cacao. Because settlers' main cultigens require more water and a higher degree of weeding, often with the help of pesticides, the more favorable riverine habitats, along the Nieva river, are taken by these farmers. Henning Siverts draws the same conclusions in his investigation of the Awajun of Marañón. Siverts conclude that historical transition, such as the arrival of non-native farmers, has caused a general shift from riverine habitat to a more interfluvial ecological zones (1972: 8-9) akin the Amelia's garden discussed here.

The next chapter in this thesis will understand the relations in the garden as more than mere ecology. Although the Awajun are quite attentive to different ecological zones and their impact on the state of the different cultigens in the garden, they also pay attention to the other beings inhabiting in. The non-humans in the garden will be attended to in the next chapter, as well as the many myths that structures the garden realm.



### 3. THE MYTH OF NUGKUI

## The Origin of Cultivated Plants

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Harvesting *chujam mama* (manioc for eating) |Nils Haukeland Vedal, 2018.

*And I and I, I and I...*

*Toward the talisman hill...*

*And I and I will stop...*

*In the river valley...*

*On the talisman path, I will stop...*

*On the talisman path, I will stop...*

*On the talisman path, I will stop...<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> Part of *anen* sung by women when setting out for gardening early in the morning.

### 3.1: Introduction

The previous chapter outlined my first visit to the Awajun garden. As an excerpt of everyday life and practices, it serves as an example that gives the reader--in addition to showing historical transformations--a sense of structure and direction in the mundane flow of local community life. Although subject to routine activities and often characterized by their owners as nothing more than this, i.e. mundane, the garden is a space of more than mere production *per se*. In this chapter I will explore the hidden aspects of the garden through the mythological discourse that gives form to the practical dimensions of gardening. The interpretation of myth with the help of my Awajun companions was a highly idiosyncratic ordeal. Though I will do my best to present a complete picture of the myths addressed. As we shall see mythical knowledge differs from person to person. This undertaking will be an analysis of mythical text as such., in the formal sense. A range of supplementary comments presented by the people that aided me in making sense of this rather complex task will be presented. But first let us set the stage by retracting only a few generations, to a time that still lingers in memory:

Each morning, as close to dawn as possible and always before the sun sets at its highest point, the women set out towards their gardens. If lucky Nugkui had visited them in their dreams the night before. If so, the omen is clear; a Nugkui stone (or *nantag*) could be found somewhere in the garden, placed there by Nugkui in the dream vision. These glowing stones aided the growth of the cultivated plants of its lucky keeper and was a source of great prestige amongst the women that jealously coveted them. When Tania and I asked about the contemporary standing of these magical stones, and the extent of practical use they may or may not still possess, we were presented with the following problems: the first being the subtle indication that a few still possess these magical objects, though highly unlikely, and the second; if that is the case the extreme rarity of these objects now harbors a clandestineness that seemed impossible to penetrate. I use the example of the Nugkui stones in this section of the text to demonstrate the apparent difficulties that follows the discussion of magic and myths in present-day Awajun society.

Phenomena like that of the *nantag* became in many ways a denominator for a wider range of methodological challenges throughout my fieldwork, so I will discuss it here in some length. Uncritically privileging scarce empirical material risks presenting a constructed reality that do not reflect the everyday situation of the people one is trying to understand. Additionally, one finds the problem of how to maneuver historical transitions since the use of magical objects

is generally tied to broader patterns of cultural change:<sup>24</sup> The position *nantag* once had as a major component of garden magic seems to be lost, or at least shrouded in mystery to the degree that it is natural to conclude that it now only resides in people's memory. I can of course be wrong on this note because magical objects have always been subject to secrecy for the people that do not possess them or understand them. So, I will thus use the example of the Nugkui stones to satisfy other ends, because it reminds us of the ever-looming epistemological uncertainty one enters when trying to understand the intellectual world of so called "others". The general problem that faced my investigations was two-folded: First, should I continue to presume a uniformity of "traditional" thought and practices, and second; is this even possible since the field of "mythical thought" that faced me was subject to reorganization due to cultural change that further obscures any chance for consistency. Not being a so called "closed system" anymore—if that ever was the case—let us now enter the subject at hand namely mythical discourse in general.

The collection of that which could be characterized as "creation myths" amongst the Awajun is called *duik muun augbatbau* (or "ancestor stories). Simply put, these stories serve as a generator of shared relational repertory in which one operates. Though this definition give rise to a paradox because one is naturally inclined to assume that the oral tradition of a society should enjoy an unchallenged position as a "go to source" for the people it concerns. However, most people were quick to refer us away from everyday conversations, the domain I thought was the arena of mythical discourse. When this happened were relegated to "specialists". Being persons of considerable age and high social status, these people where are called *muunta* or *yacha* ("old ones" or "great ones"). It is tempting to understand this as an erosion of mythical knowledge and as part of the greater arch of cultural change that the Awajun experiences. This could indeed be the case, but similar observations have been made in the past, during a time when the Jivaro enjoyed a greater degree of cultural autonomy. Descola states, from his study of the Achuar regarding myths: "In Achuar society [...] the population seems to take little interest in myths" (Descola 1994: 192). This resonates with my own ethnographic experience because the Awajun themselves, to this day, seem hesitant to elaborate on these topics in any lengthy stretch. Or to be more precise; they seem to not know that much about it. Taking this into consideration, some stories do stand out: being a cross-cultural point of reference, or as Descola calls it: a "Jivaro Creed" (Ibid), the myth of Nugkui has been given a central position

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that accounts of dream visions, such as of the *nantag*, are now to be found only in ethnographic literature as history. The dreams of the people of Centro Tunduza are still very much alive, however the "components of the dream" has changed.

in the works of most ethnographers interested in the intellectual world of the Jivaro people (see Karsten 1935; Harner 1972; Brown 1985; Descola 1994). The story of Nugkui still holds an important position in the lives of the Awajun, even being thought to young children in the community's pre-schools and elementary schools. This grants us with a possible entry to understanding the broader logic of not only garden magic, but the general body of myths the story of Nugkui represents, despite the seemingly discontinues relationship between everyday life and "ancestral knowledge".

### **3.2: Back at the house**

Let us take a step back and again make Amelia's garden our point of departure. Whilst peeling the tubers given to me by Ruth, our conversation slowly dwindled into a silent undertaking in which my practical clumsiness yielded an insufferable, yet humoristic, scene of underachievement. During our brake from this spectacle I said: "Nugkui lives in the earth?" while burying my fingers in the soil between us. In uttering these words, evoking Nugkui, I looked back in anticipation for Amelia's and Ruth's answer. A couple of seconds went by, then a chilling feeling crept up on me; had I now rushed the topic? Fearing that my attempt to say something substantial, to contrast my less than impressive technical skills was in part just that, a feigned. Though, I had been looking for a suitable opportunity to inquire about Nugkui for some time now, and upon entering the garden in which she is believed to exercise her powers I had possibly overreached. Finally, Amelia answered: "Yes, or in the forest.", she said while Ruth looked at her. "Maybe my mother, Harina knows, I don't know." This answer surprised me. The literature on the topic of garden practice amongst the different Jivaro groups had one thing in common: the Jivaro people's reliance upon the that which Descola calls "the tutelary spirit of the garden" (1994: 94). The garden was Nugkui's domain, but she was nowhere to be seen, apparently. My haltingly mastery of the language had now reached its limit. Amelia and her daughter had abandoned completely their *español de la selva* in favor for their regional Jivaro dialect, thus resulting in my isolation. Talking amongst themselves, I knew they were assessing the situation. I somewhat abruptly changed the topic of the conversation

Around noon we were back at Amelia's house. Our baskets, stacked with manioc tubers, where now placed in the corner of the house close to the fireplace. Ruth started to lunch while Amelia and I rested our backs against one of the long walls of her rectangular house. The braided *tanish*, connecting the vertically placed palmwood poles (*kapi*), served as a slightly elastic backdrop upon which we were now comfortable leaning. Shortly after our return other

women started to arrive at Amelia's door. The young children clutched their mothers' skirts, hiding between their legs, while Amelia greeted their mothers. They entered the house one by one. The women had all returned their respective gardens. Amelia's house is located at the outskirts of the community. The main trail (*jintas*), leading through the cluster of houses that makes up most of the residential area in Centro Tunduza, passed through Amelia's kitchen garden. This made her house an ideal stop before going in or out of the community.

Slight chatter developed as soon as the house had reached half a dozen people. Amelia started again to talk about Nugkui: "My mother told me that when you are working in the garden and suddenly hear a twig snap behind you one should not turn and look for that is Nugkui coming to visit." Amelia explained. "Why should you not look at her?" I asked. "She will feel shame, just like a person coming to *ipáamamu*<sup>25</sup> without being invited". Ruth lifted the boiling manioc from the fire now ready to serve and handed me a full plate together with two eggs. Sprinkling the tubers with some salt, I continued to look at Amelia while she continued. "Out in the forest we have seen footprints of Nugkui. Inside caves where we are looking for birds' eggs also! I think they live there". "They?" I asked. "Yes! Inside those caves or underneath the earth. Listen, I will tell you a story my mother told to us when we were small. It is about Nugkui."

Long ago before Nugkui [pointing out the size of a child]. Before that there was nothing; there was no *mama*, only *tuju*. That was everything they used to eat. When burning our *aja*, we had no seeds. They only drank *that* [fermented *tuju*<sup>26</sup>]. They used to prepare it in small *tinajas*. And they had always lived like that. But no more. Some women had been wandering off. Far away where there was a creek. There they bathed and washed. Suddenly some peel from floated down the creek with the current, and they said: 'Where does it come from?' Others replied: 'That is what they used to call *mama*, let us look for it!' The women went farther and farther up the creek. There they saw a woman washing in the river, then another and another. One of the newly arrived women asked '*Kaiju* ["sister"], where did all this *mama* come from?' 'Do not worry!' one of the women answered. 'Just take it [referring to a child], that one can call *mama*. But do not bother him, take good care of him. Build him a fence and from there he will call forth *mama*. I am going to lend him to you.' The woman agreed and took the child back to her house. And there she asked him to call forth from within his fence; 'Let there be many maduros' [esp. "ripe ones"] the child said. And quickly many bananas piled up, so did *mama* and *nijiamanch*. Remember, before there was no *masato*, nothing, only *tuju*. Then the woman's husband came home from a long day working. He was very tired, and his wife gave him a *pinig* full of *masato*. 'Where does this *masato* come from?' he asked. 'Just take it.' she replied. Then she told her husband about the manioc peel in the creek and about the child that could call forth squash, sweet potatoes and manioc. After all this the woman and her husband went together to their camp out in the forest to hunt. Nugkui stayed within his fence and while their parents were gone, the children of the house started to annoy him. Their mother had told them not to do this, but they were spoiled children, so they mistreated him. They told the child to call forth the devil. 'I can call him, but it is difficult to make him leave.' the Nugkui child said. But the children insisted. 'Call him, call him!' they said. 'So, it will be. I will call him fourth, but he is going to

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<sup>25</sup> Understood here as the native term corresponding to that of *minga* or *minka*, two Quechua words now frequently used for a "communal work party".

<sup>26</sup> Unidentified cultigen.

hit you!' Waaji iwanchi tawa [he called the iwanch<sup>27</sup>]. The devil is like this: tall and fat, bearded and black. Upon seeing him, the children felt great fear and Nugkui told them: 'This is what I told you. He is not easily returned.' In fear the children threw burning ashes in Nugkui's eyes, hoping the devil would disappear. The children's parents had now returned from their hunting trip and upon arrival saw many manioc leaves blowing in a strong wind around the house. 'Why are things like this!' the mother said and entered the house. There she saw the Nugkui child crying because of the ashes in his eyes. She turned to her children and hit them for what they did. But behind the house the boy fled and from there he called, singing. He was now gone, yet they called him. Some time passed and Nugkui left them another *uchi* [child], so to replace the one that fled. But this child only called fourth tough [not ripe] manioc and tough sweet potato that cannot be cooked. In the same way as some teachers explains well and some teachers do not. As it happened here [referring to the community<sup>28</sup>]. Then [the second] Nugkui got lost. The family fell asleep and the woman of the house dreamt. In her dream Nugkui said: 'I am going to leave manioc seeds, pumpkin, everything I will leave for you'. The woman of the house then told her husband about the dream, and she said: 'This is what he told me, and when the sun sets, I will look for the place where Nugkui left everything'. And from that place, they planted the manioc and it multiplied.

Amelia paused for some time and continued: "This is what my mother told me. There was also *piripiri* (sedge) to plant together with the manioc. When you do it like that, you get good manioc, great! *Chiki* (arrowroot) is also good for keeping the manioc healthy. "Everything Nugkui left?" I asked, referring to both the cultigens as well as these possibly magical plants. "Yes! But, brother, let us talk more about this later." I agreed and thanked both Amelia and Ruth for their time and the food received. I had almost exited Amelia's kitchen garden when Ruth cried out from the doorway: "*Kagkap!* Don't forget your *mama*. It is yours!"

### 3.3: Mythical relations

Before I derive an understanding of Amelia's story, presented above, I will place it in a grander scheme. A holistic approach is here needed, so I will, in some length, present the general characteristics that the myth of Nugkui and the Origins of the Cultivated Plants shares with greater the lexicon of Ancestral Stories (or *duik muun augbatbau*). The story of Nugkui is the account that concerns with how the Jivaro (being a universal theme) first transcended their state of total poverty and ascended into a world in which they could achieve, to some extent, a reliable state of well-being. This was made possible through the knowledge given by Nugkui. In a more general sense this logic is akin to the universal trope uniting the other transformational events in mythical time. Michael Brown gives attention to two important themes that structure

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<sup>27</sup> "Iwanch" is the term for the evil spirit of the dead and not to be confused with *ajútap* ("ancestral spirits"). Though the traditional meaning has been subject to change due to Christianisation, so an equivalence between the Devil and the *iwanch* is here possible to assert.

<sup>28</sup> Referring to an incident in the community some time ago when a teacher was expelled from his position by demand of the majority in the community.

mythical text in the world of the Awajun: the first, being the *civilizing* role that knowledge acts out in mythical accounts, and the second—and more subjectable to further exploration—is that which he calls “the disparities between the inner and outer identity of things” (Brown 1986: 48). So, what is meant by this? From the point of view of the people these accounts concern we can derive some additional substance into this discussion. Two shortened stories<sup>29</sup> will be presented below. In addition to being instrumental for our understanding of the myth of Nugkui later in this text, the first story will exemplify the relationship between the “discontinuous” relationship between interiority and exteriority of things and how they came to be, and the latter will give attention to the *civilizing* role that knowledge serves in mythical accounts. The stories also convey a certain normative landscape that one must take into consideration. This last point will be addressed more specifically later in this thesis as I try to carve out a broader understanding of the practical implications of mythical discourse.

Notions about the relationship between “interiority” and “exteriority” will bring us back to the discussion about animism and perspectivism, first outlined in the theoretical contextualization of this thesis. Though already mentioned, a further exploration is of importance since it provides us with the means to understand certain themes presented in the mythical narrations soon to come as well as in our understanding of how these very same mythical narrations allows for certain ritual practices.

Now, let us get to the stories:

On our walk home from a long night of festivities in the community, we were told the story about how the moon came to be. In ancient times the two brothers, Etsa and Moon, lived on earth. Moon (also called *Nantu*) was back then married to a woman, but the marriage was not a happy one, and this was due to the wife’s insufficient cooking-skills. The unavoidable conflict culminated when his wife started to eat the food that she originally had prepared for her husband. Because of this Moon escaped from her up to the heavens by climbing a vine linking earth to the heavenly domain. There, in the sky, Moon took the celestial form from which he is now known, and his abandoned wife, in her grief, changed into a night bird. She can, till this day, still be heard at night when she cries in sorrow for her lost husband.

The second story of importance here, was given to us by Rosas husband, Felizardo, just before we were going to bed. It tells about how the Awajun obtained fire: One day some people

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<sup>29</sup> The first story is a crude summary of the myth concerning how the moon came to be. This is done so to illustrate the general theme of interest. Known, though in different detail, by all groups of the Jivaro one should see Descola (1994: 69) for a more detailed version. The story about the child obtaining fire is to my knowledge not to be found in any other study of the Jivaro.

stumbled upon fire in the forest. They brought it home to their house. During that time, they were warring with their neighbors, and the fire they obtained proved to be an effective weapon in their struggle. The family was now very powerful because they kept the source of their destructive means a secret. But one day, their fire was gone. A hefty price (a deer) was to be granted to the person who could retrieve the fire. A small boy wanted to join the others in their search, but his legs was crippled so he was commanded to stay home with his mother. While the others were out and about in the forest, the young boy used two metal parts to create fire for his mother, who was cooking for the people out searching in the woods. When the rest of the household returned home, they saw that the boy had obtained the means to create fire. They gave him the well-deserved deer, as was promised. From that day, the rest of the Awajun would come to see the small boy so to learn how fire could be made.

The last story is not in need of much further elaboration. It tells about how the Awajun people obtained the needs (or technology) to create fire at will. The small child, being to one must unlikely to possess this art, becomes in the end the one every other person seeks for guidance, so to share in the wonder.

The first story, however, has a subtler theme that needs some additional exploration. As stated above, it concerns with the relationship between internal and external qualities of mythological protagonists, and how these qualities now contrast each other. The myth about the moon concludes with a transformation of the body, exemplified by two such cases: from that of the human to celestial object and from human to that of a bird. It tells, thus, about an event resulting in corporal differentiation leading to a state of affairs which is contrasting the initial mythical context defined by nondifferentiation, a context which Viveiros de Castro characterizes as the “*presubjective* and *preobjective* milieu” (2004: 17). This be said, however, there still exists traces of this primordial state of being to be witnessed in the present: the moon shines down on the Awajun as they reminisce the time when he walked the earth. His former wife, the night-bird, reminds them of her loss of a husband when they hear her cries during a moonlight night. It still lingers traces of the original state of nondifferentiation in their contemporary representatives, that continue to tell the tale. What one can conclude from these ends is the well-known separation of “Culture” and “Nature”, a theme which Claude Lévi-Strauss deems to be an Amazonian universal (1964: 71). However, there is one crucial difference between the Amerindian and Western understanding of the processes of differentiation:



in the case of Amazonian peoples (the Awajun included<sup>30</sup>) the original condition (shared by humans and nonhumans) was not that of Nature, but of Culture – the smallest common denominator was not that of *animality* but, rather: *humanity* (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 465). The myth about the moon and his wife thus narrates, not only the separation from each other, but how they lost the qualities retained by humans - they are now ex-humans (Ibid). As is the case in the context of Western discourse about the innate state of the world, we consider our formal animality. Amerindians, on the other hand, must consider, to some degree and dependent on context, the prior state of nonhumans (i.e. their humanity). The notion that the order of the world was founded on the principle of a sheared culture (a shared humanity), so to be differentiated by ways of the many transformations narrated in myth, has important consequences for how one should maneuver present-day landscapes. An interesting case from Michael Brown's literature clarifies this point further. It tells about how the Awajun first come to realized that the manioc cultivated in the garden has a soul (or *wekán*).

In the past, when the men cleared the gardens for their wives, they did it in a fashion that was slow and time consuming. Because of this some parts of the garden had already produced fully grown manioc (the garden was constructed in stages). The men thus tried to avoid the trees they cut down from falling on top of the harvest, as this would destroy it. When they tried to do this, the manioc (the ones already in the garden) started to sing: "We will help cut the trees, so they don't fall in our direction". When the plants uttered these words, the men fell asleep. While the men slept, the manioc people took their axes and machetes and started to clear the garden in a fashion that would not hurt them. As they did this, they continued to sing: "Sons, pull hard so the three won't crush our children". The man who had called the work party could, in his sleep, hear the song of the manioc people, and that is why they know that the manioc are people (see: Michael Brown 1986: 105 for the complete story).

During my stay among the Awajun, I was presented with a similar story. It tells about a time when the men could sleep and drink in the garden while their machetes worked by themselves. Their machetes and axes were handled by "invisible" people. One day, a woman came upon this strange sight and started laughing out loud, pointing at the flying gardening tools. When this happened, the machetes fell dead on the ground, and from that day, the men had to do all the work by themselves. Akin to the story presented above, the latter version shows the garden in ways as being inhabited by "invisible people". In addition to this, it also tells

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<sup>30</sup> This is of course highly dependent on the individual in question. Many Awajun people have abandoned these notions about the world. Though my companions, still living, at least partly, a "traditional" life do adhere to these principles in various forms.

about how these beings, or spirits (being invisible), should be accounted for – or rather, how they should *not* be approached. The workings of the garden are compromised in ways that ceases them to exist; confronted by the mocking laughter of the woman, the nonhuman agents (or plants) breaks out of the already sensitive (being only comprehensible for the men in their sleeping state) relation that they have with the men.

The capacity to observe, that of being able to *see* or *hear* (the latter being the case in this story) how nonhumans comprehend themselves (as humans: having language and so forth) in dreams and visions, is a theme that is to be found in many stories of this kind. As will be later explained, it demands somewhat unusual circumstances for this to happen. Because it is important to note that humans do not automatically see nonhumans in the same way as they see themselves, as humans.

Our last point draws consideration to Descola's resurrection of the notion of "animism" (1992; 1996; 2005), presented in the early pages of this thesis. Being in many respects reminiscing of the ways in which Viverios de Castro essentializes Amerindian cosmologies, as the opposition to Western conceptions about the separation of "Nature" and "Culture", animism argues that the relation between humans and nonhumans has a social character, and that the space between nature and society is itself social. Hence, as is the case with Viverios de Castro's line of thinking, presented above, animism conveys that of having "society", or "culture", at its base. Animism is, thus also, a reversal of the oppositions constituting our Western notions about the innate state of the world. Descola calls this Western paradigm "naturalism" and explains it as being the mode of identifying the world as having nature as the constitutive medium between the "natural" and the "social". Though one important difference does exist between Descola's "animism" and that which Viverios de Castro calls "perspectivism", and that is the ways in which the two makes use of stability (or lack of) in identifying the features of the practical landscape that mediate "Nature" and "Culture". Because, why does *not* the Awajun see the plants in the garden as people all the time, if they truly are people? If animism has at its core the unity of humans and nonhumans by ways of a shared culture (founded upon a shared capacity for subjectivity, language, etc.), what are really the differences between humans and nonhumans? This distinction needs to be taken into consideration because my ethnographic data does not support the, seemingly, stable unity between humans and nonhumans that Descola postulates. Viverios de Castro, on the other hand, makes use of this instability (the instability in defining the components of the world, as humans or as natural objects). He does this by ways of drawing attention to the fact that humans and nonhumans do differ – they differ by ways of their corporal attributes. This gives rise to the fact that the world is inhabited by many points of

view (or perspectives), since the fundamental way of grasping the world is through one's corporal form. As was the case in the story about the moon and his wife, their corporal transformation differentiated them away from the world of the humans. However, we also witnessed, from the two cases about the "invisible" people in the garden, that some situations do intrinsically depend on the fact that the inner essence of things still tells of their prior human state and must somehow be accounted for. This leads Viverios de Castro to conclude that: ... "[the] bodily form of each species is an envelope (a "clothing")" (2004: 465), and it is exactly these differences - in external qualities - that makes a difference in how nonhumans and humans relate to each other: plants see themselves as humans, in the same way as humans see themselves, as humans. But how humans and nonhumans see each other is inherently confined to certain principles of conduct that will be discussed later. One of these being the realization of the potentiality of the women in the garden, by ways of formalized ritual acts, to conceive their plants by ways of consanguinity (relatives by blood, or more precise, children). The process of subjectivation is always a potentiality to be exhausted in times of need, by making possible the bypassing of the external, corporal, clothing, or envelope.

Now, with all this in mind, let us conclude adherent to these participles, and think of ancestral stories (or *duik muun augbatbau*) as the formal collections of the accounts that in their entirety gives narration to the Awajun people's *exodus* from the mythical past through various events of corporal differentiations and knowledge granting revelations.

Before we are finally able to return to our discussion of the myth of Nugkui, some points must be made regarding the notion of the soul (*wekán*) among the people of Centro Tunduzá. In discussing the properties of the souls (or, human essence) with our companions, the conceptions were as numerous as the people we consulted. Christian ideas have shaped the intellectual discourse to such a degree that some of the people we consulted hold the opinion that only humans possess a soul. Establishing a shared definition of the qualities of the soul thus proved itself to be difficult. The explanations given even turned somewhat contradictory when two of the people seemingly convinced that a *wakán* is an exclusively human attribute one night asked us to protect a newborn baby from the dangers posed by malevolent animal spirits inhabiting the forest trail upon which we were walking. The highly idiosyncratic nature of the explanations given regarding the nature of the *wakán* will be discussed later in the text when the themes presented above again is put into motion by ways of analyzing ritual implications of myth.

### **3.4: Nugkui and the origin of cultivated plants**

In the end it was Amelia who told us the story of Nugkui presented here, but the investigation consisted of many fragmented conversations. The story was by no means unknown for the contemporary Awajun, though some people were very hesitant when asked about it. Even the fact that the story narrates the origin of the cultivated plants and thus being, in most cases, attributed the realm of feminine, did not exclude the men from taking part in discussions about its inherent meaning. One of them, an older man who had great knowledge of myths in general, insisted on the notion that Nugkui compose an ensemble of people characterized by magical powers. Others concluded that *uchi*, the boy-child, turned into Nugkui when he escaped: “There was no grown Nugkui” they said. This equivalence, that of Nugkui and the child, seems to be an assertion that does not run counter to either of the explanations given. Since the logic of the latter assert the transformation from child into Nugkui when he descended into the earth, whilst the former *a priori* asserts the collective nature of the Nugkui people. In this text I will limit myself to talk about Nugkui as a single being. Not only for simplicity sake but, because the Awajun seem to hold this notion when they talk about her continuation through her presence in the garden. The same type of reduction also applies to her gender. This is done so to epitomize the underlying theme, that is the feminine qualities she embodies in relation her fertile powers.

Nugkui still resides in the present; in the forest and in caves sometimes frequented in search of birds’ eggs. But most importantly she is associated with the fertile topsoil in the garden. The term *nunka* (meaning “earth”) bears direct connotations to Nugkui and it is from this under-earthly domain that she continuous to exercises her powers over the cultigens she ones gave to the Awajun. “It is true you know, when I go to my garden late in the day, it is empty. Only small tubers are left.” Rosa said during a late supper. “She has taken all the manioc away because I was late.” On the question of where the flight of the Nugkui child finely ended, Amelia answered that she escaped beneath the earth. But exactly how this took place is subject to continuous discussion, especially when initiated by curious questions from strange anthropologists. This point is more openly explored in the versions of the myth held by Achuar. Collected by Descola, the excerpt goes like this: “the furious baby fled to the roof of the house ... then Uyush baby entered the ground where she now dwells under the name of Nunkui” (Descola 1994: 194). Though explicit in the Achuar versions, a couple of subsidiary comments were made by Rosa and Don Lucho about the exact course of these events. Residing outside the mythical text presented here, it still serves us with crucial information. “The child fled up [up onto the roof?] and into a palm tree (*kenku*), but just before that he called out to someone”. Rosa explained while her uncle nodded. “What where the words used?” I replied. Don Lucho started singing: “*kenku, kenku*, come and get me, let us eat some ground nuts.’ This is what the

child said.” The song that the Nugkui child sings upon escaping from his tormentors is common to all versions of the myth. This is true both within the Awajun complex and across the four Jivaro groups. In the case of the Shuar, Michael Harner writes “Come mother, let us start eating some peanuts” (Harner 1972: 74). Here, the identity of the “someone” is clearly laid out. Amongst the people we consulted, this uniformity of opinion is not shared. When asked about who the child called out to, Don Lucho hesitated and said “To whom did he sing, to God? But how could this be? God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, the one from the Bible, does not talk about this. Nugkui was raised first. When we suffered a lot.”

Before continuing with this excavation some notes on Christianity and its influence on Awajun thought is needed. As Michael Brown states, and this seem to be the case for the contemporary Awajun of Centro Tunduza as well, most people still believe in the power of *ajútap* (“ancestral spirits”). Traditionally these spirits are believed to reside in a great house in the heavens, from which they act out their influential powers over the lives of the living (Brown 1985: 54). Their meddling in human affairs, and this is crucial to the point I am making, is often accompanied by powerful winds (remember the storm the flight of the Nugkui-child). Now, the notion of *ajútap* is in some cases subject an interesting merging with the Christian God. This syncretism has given rise to the singular being Apajuí (meaning “our father”). Several crucial aspects of *ajútap* has been absorbed by Apajuí, including their heavenly residential which he shares with the spirits of the dead who he now rules over. This merging seems unproblematic due to the already established and overlapping qualities that the two categories, i.e.: God and *ajútap*, originally hold. Don Lucho, being a Christian man, seem to convey this transformation when he broods over the identity of addressee to which Nugkui sings. The focus here must be on the ability possessed by Nugkui to conjure up great winds, as an indication of divine presence. The phenomena of storms as indication of divine presence is a general theme in Awajun myth: the winds that blew up the manioc leaves that engulfed the house of the family in the myth of Nugkui is just another example of that. It seems thus that this theme has been transmitted to Apajuí/God by virtue of absorbing the grater corpus of capacities formerly held by *ajútap*. This line of reasoning seems hold some additionally bearings when Rosa, being Don Lucho’s niece on the maternal side, presents an explanation for Nugkui’s origin: “Maybe Nugkui was sent by God to teach us how to work our gardens, because God saw us suffering?” Now that we have asserted a possible explanation for the elusive entity to whom Nugkui sings, namely God, we can continue with our exploration.

The story of Nugkui presented here lack in its content any further explanation for the origin of the second Nugkui child, other than the fact that an additional child did at some point

appear. Two additional versions of the myth grant us with supplementary substance in this case. A short version given to us by a man called Gerónimo tells that when the Nugkui child escaped into the stem of the palm (*kenku*) it was pursued by the masters of the household. They desperately managed to cut open the trunk of the palm, but when they uncovered the child it had turned into a toad (*poách*) that let out foul gases. They asked it to call forth the cultigens again, but when the toad did the cultigens were inedible. The second version stems from the Awajun of Alto Mayo (collected by Michael Brown) and recounts the same relations, though the toad is here absent. In this myth the child is untangled from the stem of the *kenku* palm by the angry parents of Nugkui's tormentors, but when the child is revealed it has seemingly been replaced by an infant that can only call forth "malformed and defective cultigens" (Brown 1985: 51). Upon realizing this the master and mistress of the house now, even more furious, further abuses the child until it "climbed into the woman's anus" giving explanation to why human beings are plagued by intestinal gas (Ibid).

The meaning of the toad is here of importance. Though not to be found in any other known version of the myth, the implications of the toad in mythical discourse will be given some attention here: Let us now, for a moment, return to the time before Etsa and Moon ascended and took their celestial forms through which they are now known. Here focusing on the sun (Etsa) who, akin to his brother (Moon), was subject to an unhappy marriage<sup>31</sup>. Having taken several wives in toad form, one of them proved herself to be such an "inept cook" that Etsa, like his brother, fled her greed and took residence in the heavenly volts from which he is now known as the sun (Lévi-Strauss 1985: 40). When discussing the toad as lacking the sets of desirable qualities making a "good wife", some of the participants stated that "all lazy wives stem from the toad." Having established the toad in Jivaro discourse as the antithesis to the "good wife" so to speak, we can proceed. By contrasting Nugkui and the toad as polar oppositions by way of the two sets of qualities (granter and taker) they embody, we can begin to understand some of the morals the myth conveys.

We can of course establish the position of Nugkui in mythical discourse without our detour by the toad. But by contrasting the two of them, based on their abilities, or lack thereof, we add a second dimension to the story; not only is Nugkui the source of knowledge through her magical words, but there exist in the world a direct antithesis to her way of being. A negation

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<sup>31</sup> It could seem that the "good-for-nothing" toad wife at one point in mythical time was married to both Moon and Etsa and thus responsible for both fleeing to the heavens. Lévi-Strauss continues to ascribe the negative attributes of the toad wife to encompass a whole range of Amerindian myths (Lévi-Strauss 1968: 290-91).

of the “prosperous life” that gives continual rise to the unwanted dimensions of womanhood. The relationship between the affluent and the destitute is the fundamental theme bridging the different version of the myth together. For the Awajun this is given through the disparity between the creative powers of the first Nugkui child on one hand, and the defectiveness of the toad (or the second child) on the other. Though their brethren to the north-east, seem to explore this through the highest degree possible.

Putting the toad aside, the *curse* of Nugkui enjoys a position in the mythical discourse of the Shuar, Achuar and the Wampis. To my knowledge not found in any version held by the Awajun, a brief examination is needed. Retracting the incident of the *kenku* song, when the first child fled the household, Descola writes: “[...] when she [the first child] was nearly under the ground ... [t]hey bagged her to call up manioc beer, but the baby refused; instead she spoke a curse on each of the cultivated plants, and these began to shrivel, until they were tiny.” (Descola 1994: 194). Here the shrinking of the cultivated plants granted by the Nugkui child substituted for the “malformed and defective” cultigens called forth by the second child in the Awajun version presented above. The explanation may be presented through different course of events though both give narration to the subtraction of the state of plenty briefly enjoyed by the Jivaros. Their transgression towards Nugkui sealed their fate and they were once more in a state of suffering. My reasons for giving awareness to the curse of Nugkui by means of additional text may seem out of place since the Awajun perfectly well give explanation for how they lost the favor of Nugkui. But by doing this I give attention to the fact that the Jivaro to this day find themselves under the threat of the possible recurrence of the curse. Though not conceptualized as a “curse” in the case of the Awajun, they still convey the possible danger of Nugkui taking back her cultigens. “Nungkui has the power to give and take.” Rosa said in relation to her garden being empty after midday.

The Achuar myth ends with the curse and Nungkuis flight under earth, leaving no explanation for how the Jivaro recovered the cultivated plants. Additional Achuar commentaries, Descola states, only allude to the “[...] compassion shown by Nugkui, who changed her mind.” (195). The Awajun further explores this theme in a concrete way. Their myth continues with a dream vision. In the dream Nugkui takes pity on the Awajun who again has been reduced to their original poverty. The mistress of the house is in the dream granted with the seeds and stems of the different cultigens that was up to recently of abundance. She then tells her husband about the place Nugkui left the cultigens and that they from there should start to cultivate their own gardens, so the manioc will multiply once more.

Along these lines a “new balance” is established. Nugkui is now no longer the source for the unlimited abundance briefly enjoyed through her magical words. A middle ground has instead emerged, and it is to be maintained by hard labor in the garden. The plants formerly belonging to Nugkui is now fundamentally depended on human toil to prosper and multiply. We are now able to grasp the subtler themes of the story of Nugkui namely “motherhood”. Through the shift from Nugkui as the “creator and mother of all cultivated”, towards the woman (the dreamer) as an adoptee of the reasonability that is the care the plants are dependent on to survive. This conclusion is by no means original. It is to be found in most of the literature that concerns with what they call the “symbolic nature” of the garden (see especially; Descola 1994 and Brown 1986). A couple of my informants also concretized the notion of Nugkui as a mother of plants by calling her *mama dukují* (“manioc mother”) and *mama muunji* (“manioc master”).

The shift from Nugkui as the sole caretaker responsible for the well-being of the cultigens, to the Awajun woman being the adoptive mothers of the plants, does not isolate Nugkui from the everyday reality of gardening. As stated before, she continues to enforce her maternal influence on her “children”. Because of this she is continuously consulted and viewed as a role model for the women that now cares for her offspring. Being both the “master” and “mother” of the plants in the garden, the capacities desired in fulfilling the obligation of caretaking is just that; a firm yet compassionate hand that guides the plants through the perils of life.

### **3.5: Concluding remarks on the myth of Nugkui**

Let us now conclude this excavation of the mythical discourse presented above with some closing remarks on the most important aspects laid out: I started this chapter by presenting a set of methodological problems that is often characteristic for these kinds of analysis. Those being: the constant changing nature of mythical discourse (previously described as more uniform and rigorous), if it at all should be attempted to build up a uniform system of thought in this (as so often tried before), and lastly, how one should maneuver the uneven distribution of “mythical knowledge” between people. In analyzing the Story of Nugkui and the Origin of cultivated plants, we have seen how the story gives shape to Awajun understandings about the garden as a moral landscape in which one is to adhere to the principles of womanhood and maternity. Furthermore, the analysis show how certain myths closes the gap between esoteric and everyday knowledge. Even though the particularities of the ancestral stories, that is the details of these accounts, may vary and exist as fragments not easily collected, they find their way into the light through the idiosyncrasy of mythical “sense-making”. The last point is shown to be a



fundamental undertaking when a concrete myth is under collective investigation. The story of Nantu (the moon) and Etsa (the sun), as well as the meaning of the toad, seem to be out of reach of everyday life, but when called upon, they represent the logic of bodily morphology, as well as the transformational power of knowledge. The two driving themes that ancestral stories are concerning, for example the heavenly bodies, are continuously shown to be instrumental when one tries to understand seemingly non-related stories like the myth of Nugkui. Through the conceptual merging of the traditional category “*ajútap*” with that of the “Christian God”, giving rise to the notion of Apajuí, one realizes that the general changes in Awajun society is not contained outside of mythical understanding. This example uncovers the experimental facet of mythical “sense-making”; there is no absolute certainty about the established meaning of particularities, neither does the Awajun claim that it is. But the potential for understanding are narrowed down when placed in the relational logic of the myth. For the Awajun the toad is often just a toad outside the context of myth, albeit its symbolic meaning (*greed* and *laziness*), derived from the story of Moon and Etsa, is concretized and given a heuristic value when the toad again is subject to interpretation and portrayed as the antithesis to the fertility Nugkui embodies.

The next chapter will explore the innate relationship between mythical text and ritual practices. Taking us back to one of Amelia’s newly planted gardens, we will again visit the myth of Nugkui, though not in “textual” form as presented her.

## 4. MYTH IN ACTION: Ritual Planting

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Amelia planting *kunkuin mama* (manioc for making beer) |Nils Haukeland Vedal, 2018.

*For being the Nugkui woman...  
Because I'm not easily abhorred...  
I just walk and walk...  
And my brother-in-law weed ...  
What will he tell me?  
I'm not beaten by the weed ...  
Because I'm Nugkui woman...<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>32</sup> Part of *anen* dedicated to Nugkui

#### 4.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter we treated myth in a textual and discursive form. In focusing on merging the different elements of the myth of Nugkui with the broader logic of ancestral stories, we made probable derivations between their respective components resulting in an understanding allowing us to conclude the rather formalistic study of the Origin of cultivated plants. This chapter will continue to explore how these aspects shape Awajun life, though now, in their performative structure. This will prove itself to be a rather complex undertaking because the range of ways in which people derive meaning from mythical accounts will again be subject to differentiation. To some degree, we must revisit the conclusions made in the previous chapter. Because of this the reader may find some aspects, further explored in the frame of practice, contradictory to the formal nature of our textual analysis of the Nugkui story. Though I will argue that this demonstrates a rather vibrant continuation of the relationship between myth as text and myth as practice when the former is ritualized, linking the materiality of mythical text with the materiality of the gardening.

As was mentioned in the theoretical contextualization of this thesis, the theme of a shared “interiority” is a core notion to be found in both Descolas animism and Viveiros de Castros relational ontology (or perspectivism). This shared “interiority” is often conceptualized as a “soul”, or more generally as the *capacity for subjectivity* or *intentionality*. As previously mentioned, earlier literature discussing Awajun notions of “souls”, or that which they call “*wekan*”, describes the *wekan* as the locus for “human-like” capacities/qualities that bypasses the different corporal forms of the respective non-humans possessing a soul. The definition presented is not much different to that of animism and perspectivism: In the words of Micheal Brown the shared capacity for social interactions is expressed as the “the disparities between the inner and outer identity of things” (Brown 1986: 48).

This being said, my own attempt to conceptualize a stable definition of the *wekan* as it relates to non-humans, in the context of *contemporary* Awajun life, proved difficult. Christian notions of the soul as only a human--true human, or that which the Awajun call “*penke aents*”—capacity is prevalent among the people of Centro Tunduza. Though many allude to the potential for other beings (humans and God/Apajui) to take on the “corporal form” of animals. This is done so to realize certain ends which would prove difficult to achieve if bound to the position of their “original” bodily form. This brings us, again, to the core of Viveiro de Castro and the relational ontology called “perspectivism”. As mentioned, the animism presented by Descola,

postulates a shared capacity for sociality, morality and intentionality by virtue of how Amerindians sees non-humans as humans, despite their corporal differentiation (Descola 2005: 139). This contrasts a relational ontology such as perspectivism because how one sees “others” (non-humans) is bound to the initial position of the one who perceives: non-humans may see themselves as humans, but real humans (*penke aents*, in Awajun) sees them (animal or plant) as non-humans. Only under special circumstances does the potential humanity of the “other” show itself as “the real deal”. In this chapter will I argue that the humanity/subjectivity of non-humans are only a potential to be realized by use of *ritual positioning*. By singing their *anen* the Awajun horticulturalist can position herself in such a way, by ritual transformation, that allows for a social continuity between herself and the “other-than-human selves” that inhabits the garden.

In realizing this end, I will discuss a mode of relation that often is associated with both animism and perspectivism, namely *predation*. In the context of the Awajun garden we will see that predation first and foremost is the predation of the “point of view” of the “other”. To realize the desirable outcome of ones gardening the Awajun must engage in a “thug of war of perspective”; the horticulturalist must overcome the initial perspective of the “other” so to *win the “other” over to her side*. As said, this is realized using *anen*. The respective incantations analyzed in this chapter will present kinship terms of an affinal nature. The binding of the other-than-human perspective will thus be achieved by the incorporation of the non-human by the use of affinal kinship terms. One must, essentially, humanize the non-human other, if one wishes to engage with that “non-human”. This adds the “additional perspectivist clause” which Descola deems not essential/universal to “standard” animism (2005: 140).

In addition to this, will the moral ethos derived from the myth of Nugkui, explored in the previous chapter, reach full potential in its ritual contextualization: The gardener must obtain a harmonious and constant commerce with Nugkui if she is to succeed as a gardener. In addition to her agronomic knowledge, presented in the early chapters of this thesis, the Awajun must position herself *as* Nugkui so to be able to communicate directly with the manioc plants. This positioning transforms the singer of the respective *anen* into Nugkui, thus revealing the non-human plants, found in the garden, as “leafy children”. The last relation is realized by the fact that Nugkui is conceptualized as *mama dukují* (meaning “manioc mother”); if the singer turns into Nugkui when submerged in the narrative of the *anen*. She is thus emerged in the very relations that Nugkui fundamentally possess vis-à-vis her plant children, though only for the short time it takes to sing the *anen*

Before we delve into the concrete nature of the ritual positioning allowed for by the use of *anen*, let me comment briefly on the notion of “mythical time” and contrast it to our western notion of “history”.

#### 4.2: Mythical time

Some informants seem to believe that Nugkui not only granted them her cultigens, she additionally “left them the story” itself. How does this affect our potential for understanding the materiality of the garden? If I was to discuss the way ontological properties of mythical accounts relate to the Awajun peoples’ broader conceptions of time and moving beyond the potential meanings to be derived from the stories, I would not only exhaust this text, but most certainly also my mental capacities. But let me briefly allude to what is at stake if one were to understand the proposal that the Myth of Nugkui is not to be looked at as an account of the historical becoming of the first cultigens, reenacted in the present but rather what is ought to be lived; that the “story given” is the pamphlet one should act out or put *into* life as a normative script. This would still maintain the two themes of importance that Michael Brown presents (see chapter 3 in this thesis) as fundamental in the ancestral stories, though *not the historical trajectory alluded to*. Understood rather as “a reality ought to be lived” and not “a reality lived” based on a historical event, allows us to focus, not on the retrospective nature of practice as a way of reliving a profound incident in time, but on the notion of what of necessity should happen when one is entering the garden.

If the accounts narrated in the myth really is “just” the narrative yet to be exhausted in the practical landscape of the garden and not a concrete moment in early Awajun history one is to relive in the drama of everyday life, the conception of time that the Myth of Nugkui presents would itself be a way of understanding the materiality of the garden as it relates to myth. This notion contrasts our western perception of Time as the “accumulation of events” that drives forth the “arrow of time” towards an indeterminate future giving rise to the phenomena of History as the way these events can be understood in retrospect<sup>33</sup>. Because it is nothing uncertain about the Awajun garden *per se*; it is bound to the events narrated in myth. And if we are to understand mythical time as “that which becomes into being when one steps into the practical landscape of the garden” we bypass the question “did it happen”. This renders it

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<sup>33</sup> Malinowski also challenges the understanding of myth as “chronological accounts” because in viewing it as such (as history) one then westernises the phenomena of myth through a naturalistic frame. He states: “to take all mythology as mere chronicle is as incorrect as to regard it as the primitive naturalist's musings.” (Malinowski 1926: 80)

plausible to discard the notion of “mythical time” and instead understanding the phenomena as a way of “stepping in and out of a mythical *milieu*” when one is presented with a quest that allows the landscape to be perceived as such. A mythological landscape (instead of mythical time) is ever existing in that it is a potential to be visited again and again through the nature of the practices it renders possible. This logic is somewhat akin to that of the prophecy: if you do such and such, good things will come your way. And encapsulates in this sense the closing event of the myth of Nugkui, that is the dream vision in which the woman is told to go out to the place where she will find the means to the prosperous life, namely the garden.

In Viveiros de Castro’s discussion on perspectivist ontology, the mythical principle is the continuation of corporal differentiation. “[...] a milieu whose end is precisely what the mythology sets out to sell” (1998: 483-4). What I derive from this notion as it relates to the Awajun, goes beyond the logic of bodily metamorphosis<sup>34</sup>; in the general sense the myth presents a *tool* to be instrumentalized in contexts – in this case the garden. In addition to this Viveiros de Castros definition of “mythical time” convolutes any notion of the simulacrum of “mythical time” as historical consciousness. So, when the Awajun says “Nugkui left us the story”, we can understand it as the granting of the principles of gardening praxis derived from the relations acted out by the agents of the mythical account. The garden becomes a *mythical landscape* in this regard because it potentially is already myth in that it shows itself to be so when certain stages of the gardening process is reliant on mythical knowledge. Descola states in relation to conceptions of time: “[...] my companions [the Achuar] are totally unconcerned with time and how it is computed.” (1997: 225) Making itself evident when one realizes that myth, generally, is presented in the imperfect tense rather than the definite.

Descola continues to say that myth does not contain any practical inclinations and are to be taken highly metaphorical (Ibid). This is a questionable assertion, not because he defines myth as figurative but because it is exactly from these metaphors one is to articulate the practical axioms giving direction to how one ought to grasp the task of gardening. The Awajun seem quite attentive to what is to be perceived as intrinsic in the myth and from there they formulate a normative way of being in the garden that is inherently articulated based on the mythical narrative. This articulation is in the nature of the rituals. It provides them with a shared presentational field in which they operate, making the myth not only an explanatory account for a state of being, but also practical in the sense that instrumentalizes certain fields of conduct in a distinct way. The relations that, for example, the Myth of Nugkui gives narrate also give

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<sup>34</sup> As we will see in the pages to come, the understanding de Castro presents seem to reduce the many meanings myths hold in addition to their logic corporal transformation.

rise to the ritualistic acts in which women instrumentalizes when maneuvering the “mythical landscape” that is the garden. Later in this chapter we will explore how the women in the garden “cloth” themselves in Nugkui’s initial precepts.

### 4.3: Planting a new garden

Towards the end of the fieldwork, at the concluding days of the rain season, a new garden had been prepared close to Amalia’s initial plot. In contrast to her old one, this garden was a multi-crop swidden consisting of cash-crop *shaa* (maize), *ajus* (rice) in addition to the staple tubers such as *mama* (manioc), *chiki* (arrowroot) and *kamút* (sweet potato). A small stream marked the perimeter towards the dense jungle. We made camp on its banks early in the morning. Several people of Amalia’s closest family had joined in on the project bringing with them food and two full plastic barrels of *nijamánch* (manioc beer) prepared some days in advance. Her husband, father and maternal uncle had been burning the two acres land some weeks before after they had cleaned the undergrowth and left it to dry in the sun. Already had the layer of ash been penetrated by the most persistent representatives of early secondary forest. The men started right away to prepare the sections of the garden that was meant for the cash-crops. Marking out the boundary between the spheres of economy and subsistence was once a towering tree now laying broken flat on the earth. Each of the women had brought with them a selected stock of cuttings from their personal gardens. Some of them were highly sought-after species of manioc, like *chujam mama*, valued for the richly flowered manioc beer it produces, and *kunkuín mama* a most appreciated edible. The social status of the women is reflected in the state of their gardens, and Amalia’s social capital was now to be manifested in her new plot. These ways of trading different cultigens make out the moral economy that retains the reciprocity between the close kinswoman. Having previously enjoined the cultigens of another household one is expected to repay the favor when the “tables are turned”, resulting in a stable circulation of the variants most socially valued. The boundary between the different kinds of cultigens, those being cash-crops and tubers (for domestic use), does also stratify the gendered differentiation of labor that this multi-crop garden adheres to. Often will a garden either consist of “traditional” crops or those of economic value – the men solemnly take care of the latter. Rosa told us that Nugkui has nothing to do with the crops that grows above the ground. Nunkui, being a maximization of feminine qualities, is only to be of interest when the cultigens at hand are dispositioned to be handled through her.

In times past “the tobacco feast of the women” enjoyed an important role in any young woman’s *rite de passage* (see Karsten 1935: 126-137). Consisting of several rituals spending a period of three days, the inauguration of a young woman’s first garden concluded her new position among her fellow horticulturist. In planting one’s own garden under the guidance of more experienced gardeners one made the passage into adult life. When concluded the young woman was able to provide not only for oneself, but also for the family soon to be (Ibid). To this day the identity of the woman is clearly to reach its full potential only through the manifestation of her own garden. From there she will be able to exhaust that which is viewed as essential to “womanhood”. The tobacco feast of the women reached its finale when the garden was planted with cultigens. Though several formal steps remained to be taken before the actual planting of the manioc stems took place. In performing a joined combination of chants and dances under the intoxication of tobacco water, the women sang to Nugkui and directly to the manioc plants. In doing this the women collectively established the necessary circumstances that encourage the of growth of the manioc. Being performed publicly, this stands in stark contrast to the individual nature of the rituals now directed towards the same goal.

Amelia and her kinswoman prepared the section of the garden dedicated to manioc. We joined in and grabbed our digging sticks used to puncture the ground. We made clusters consisting of three holes approximately one foot apart from each other. Amelia followed us while we did so, pointing out where to dig next. She carried her knitted basket in one hand and planted the stems in the ground with the other. While doing this she uttered: “Nugkui is planting you!” (in Awajun: “*Nugkui ajapawe*”). She said the incantation to each of the stems individually before inserting them in the holes in the ground. “Nugkui told us to do this. First you blow a whistling sound to the manioc and then you place them in the earth.” The term *umpuartin*, literary meaning “to blow”, also corresponds to that of “teaching someone”. More generally, having the possibility to directly impact the issue one wishes to resolve, the phenomenon of “blowing” is found to be fundamental to shamanistic healing practices and bewitching<sup>35</sup>. Rituals of teaching magical songs (*anen*) by “blowing” into the mouth of the apprentice proves the point further. In telling her soon-to-be planted manioc that it is Nugkui who plants them, she brings to the stage the fundamental relations put forward in myth of Nugkui. The knowledge of Nugkui, that is her words bequeath to the Awajun, is spoken through Amelia. Nugkui being the original master of the plants in the garden, Amelia thus strive to instrumentalize this relation so to ease the stress of the young plants. This humble act shows us

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<sup>35</sup> The shaman will upon bewitching a person “blow” invisible darts into his victim, causing sickness and possible death.



that there is not the course of events in mythical “time” that is formally reenacted, but the logic of their relations that is of interest. They are found in this way as subtle instructions to be adhered to. Used as the tool in a context allowing it to be used, the relations extend their practical potential in small rituals of this nature.

The concrete planting of the manioc stem and the corresponding three to five months after is viewed as the most critical for the outcome of the garden. Considered to be at their most vulnerable when they are “underdeveloped”, several growth-enhancing cultigens are planted by their side. This is especially done so to ensure that the young plants have a constant access to water. Amelia’s garden, being planted at the finale days of the rain season, will most certainly experience some degree of drought through the period of five months. Though enjoying a greater degree of stability than her interfluvial garden (her old garden) due to the proximity of the stream running close by, the arrowroot (*chiki*) and sedge (*piripiri*) is planted in intervals between the other cultigens. This is done to secure their well-being. As Amelia told us, these plants were instructed to be planted in this manner by Nugkui herself – being left to the Awajun in the mythological dream vision concluding the story. Michael Brown writes that the Awajun of Alto Mayo consider especially the arrowroot to be an important addition to a young garden because, in being “people”, they bring water to the thirsty manioc plants in the garden (1986: 123). The notion of plants being “people” will be discussed later in this chapter but I can attest to the fact that the contemporary Awajun, regardless of calling their plants people or not, still holds firm the belief, as demonstrated through their practice, that the arrowroot and sedge has the properties in and by themselves to alter the fate of the manioc plants in the positive. Another interesting act further illustrates this point; *mama nantuji* (“old seed”), the rather bulky and rough part of the manioc stem, is also planted amongst the young manioc. Being told to do so by Nugkui, Amelia said that in doing this, the older seed “will teach the younger ones to grow big and strong.” The old root has exhausted its initial purpose - that is to grow and prosper so to grant the gardener with edibles. It now stands as an ideal to its freshly planted kind. Knowing how to “behave” and grow in a desired fashion, the old seed guides the young ones through their adolescence. Being a representants of the fruitful garden now abandoned, the old stems is a testimony to Amelia’s prowess as a gardener, being a direct manifestation of Amelia’s teachings who again is derived from Nugkuis initial knowledge granting. Through this chain, the old root is connected to Nugkui as well, in the sense that it has been raised by the words of Nugkui’s teachings through being instrumentalized in Amelia’s actions. The full potential of these old roots (also called “first seed”) was illustrated to us when they were proven to serve as a mediator between her old and new garden. Some additional context is here needed: When the

manioc stems brought by Amelia's kinswomen had all been planted, we were instructed to fetch additional ones. Walking the few minutes separating her new garden from her old one, we entered the latter. When there, we used our machetes to harvest the few manioc tubers still in the ground. Placing the roots in the baskets, we intended to prepare them for lunch later in the day. We collected the new stems belonging to the harvested manioc. They proved hard to separate from each other, often resulting in me doing more damage than good, since my machete now was dull from months of use. After being cut into sections of 10 – 15 centimeters, we brought back them and filled up the remaining part of the garden made for edibles. While this were being concluded, Amelia and her mother threw some of the newly brought stems into the bush vegetation in the outskirts of her new garden – both uttering a whistling sound accommodating the act. This procedure had been alluded to before, though its meaning had not been clarified. Often done in the context of entering the garden early in the morning to harvest, Harina told us that this was to be done because, again “Nugkui told us to do so.” Michael Brown witnessed similar practices amongst the Awajun he was living with<sup>36</sup>. He presents a possible way of understanding to the “tossing of the old stem” by way of analyzing an *anen* sung in the same context. In the song the performer calls the cast-off stems “my children”, asking them to call for the younger manioc to join them in the new garden (Brown 1986: 11). Having the authority to rule the will of the adolescent plants, the old stems echoes Amelia's initial requests. Through the various practices and ways of knowing that define Amelia's process of gardening, she can be defined as a “model gardener”. Evoking the mythological instruments of Nugkui in the context of her own life she models herself and her actions after the various relations in the myth. We can understand her old plants in the same way; being grown manioc, *mama nantuji* is in many ways the model cultigens from which the younger plants are to be molded after. Nugkui's teachings is manifested in them by the very fact that they have reached their full potential. Having served their initial purpose (to grow and bear fruit), the old stems are now able to teach the younger ones towards achieving the same goal.

Both examples presented above conveys the same theme; that is the “capacity of older plants to teach the younger ones”. Having been fostered through a multitude of ritual acts they are directed towards their destination. In being constantly molded in this way - through the ever near narration of their masters – their place in the grander scheme of the garden is realized. This ethos of constant socialization is found to beset the general ways in which the Awajun relates to their human children as well. Being fundamental to how they understand themselves as

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<sup>36</sup> Brown does not describe the practice of planting the old stem in the sense that it is a “accumulation of knowledge” to be distributed by example to the manioc youngster.

humans, they strive to make their children “strong and their though correct” (Ibid.: 19). In those ways, they prepare their children for a life that is supposed to be lived in a certain way. Understanding the garden like this, as intertwined in the fabric of the broader social logic, it is tempting to conceptualize the logic of the garden in mere utilitarian ways, as a mirroring of human society, thus presenting the Awajun with the instruments of socialization that they already possess, though this presents us with a problem. As alluded to above, the garden is something more than the place one addresses nonchalantly to harvest the food one needs. Neither is it a place that is subject to any grave ecological uncertainty<sup>37</sup>. For Malinowski, magic has functionalistic properties in the sense that it helps the people depending on it to overcome the uncertainties of natural phenomenon (Malinowski 1935). So how can one justify, from an anthropological point of view, the reasons for this conduct when the garden is likely to yield fruits regardless of the many practices explained above? It could seem that the Awajun, from the point of view of a biocultural functionalist, conjures up a problem for themselves that they subsequently need to resolve<sup>38</sup>. To understand this further we must, once again, enter the ways in which the Awajun identify their general natural environment.

#### **4.4: The problem of a stable animism?**

It may now be obvious to the reader that the plants inhabiting Amelia’s garden is something more than mere plants – something more than our naturalistic understanding of the world allows them to be. Before we were able to fully grasp the myth of Nugkui, I needed to draw up a general point of reference so to be able to understand the different components presented in the story. In addition to the transformational properties that knowledge possesses in mythical discourse, the general theme of animism and perspectivism assisted me in doing so. In the ancestral stories, the moon and Etsa (the sun) served as representatives embodying that which is called “discontinuous relation between interiority and exteriority”. Being formerly “people” in the sense that they once had the corporal and emotional capacities equal to that of the Awajun living today, they changed into the heavenly objects that they are now known as. In doing this the two (moon and Etsa) left the human realm and its affairs behind. Now, the Awajun does not seem to pay much attention to them. As stated above, Michael Brown, in a most general sense, seem to conceptualize “mythical time” as a concrete stage in Awajun history (meaning that

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<sup>37</sup> As we saw, in the chapter concerning the ways in which the Awajun manage the strictly ecology needs of their plants, the manioc is well suited to handle the nutrient-poor soil types of interfluvial gardens.

<sup>38</sup> Being one of the main go-too ethnographic descriptions of the fundamental functions of magical use, Malinowski’s ethnographic work, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935) argue that magic serve to meet mere physiological needs, those being: food, reproduction, shelter.

the Awajun themselves define this “stage” in history as a concrete period in a *concreate* time). By ways of countering this, I presented a different understanding of mythical time; rather than being concrete moments in history, mythical accounts rather presents a way of “being” in a context that accepts the relations in myth to be instrumentalized. Through these instrumentalizations (relational) one is able deal with the concrete issue at hand. Amelia’s garden illustrates this. Being what I called a “mythical milieu”, the practical landscape of the garden is dependent on the logic--the logic of the relations--presented in the myth of Nugkui to be maneuvered. But how does this explain the seemingly human qualities of the plants? Nothing in the myth of the Origin of Cultivated Plants explain this aspect of garden practice. If I was to understand the nature of the plants cultivated in the garden only from how they are presented in the myth of Nugkui, the maternal qualities that Nugkui directs towards her plant children, could be nothing more than mere metaphors, serving to drive forth the theme of creation of the first plants.

During my fieldwork, I was not able to collect any myth that gives rationale for why the plants in the garden is viewed as having qualities akin to that of their human counterparts. Though some plants where described as “once being people”. One story was given to us by a teacher in the community. It tells a sad story of two most unfortunate sisters: Ipac and Shua, who’s overexaggerated sexual appetite and general lack of modesty in search of a suitable husband concluded their contemporary plant-state through a metamorphosis that they themselves desperately initiated. Now, they are visited by the Awajun as the source of the black (*genipa*) and red (*achiote*) dye used to paint their faces, making them forever unable to escape the suitors that they once rejected. On par with the story of the sun and the moon, the myth of Ipac and Shua holds true to the theme of transformation from humans to nonhumans, but again it concludes with a *withdrawal* from human life, resulting in the Awajun not needing to account for their prior human state. These two examples thus illustrate that some of the previous human agents of myth are now at such distance from ordinary human life that they are regarded as nothing more than a source for practical needs<sup>39</sup>. Understood like this, we are again trapped in understanding “mythical time” as the formal accounting of the casual events that established the order of the contemporary world. Though there are ways around this problem; as stated before, myth is to be operationalized in the concrete context that the myth inherently addresses.

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<sup>39</sup> It could be the chase that the total withdrawal from human life is the very core of the myth. Bound to be haunted in silence by the men they once turned down, Ipac and Shua will forever be past in silence by the Awajun that once coveted them.

Levi-Strauss presents an understanding of myth as the narrations that inverts<sup>40</sup> some aspects of social reality illustrating how life ought not to be lived (1967: 29). Thus one should then focus on the morals to be derived from mythical discourse and, again, not the historical trajectories, because if the faults of the protagonists in “mythical time” should be found acted out by a contemporary person, he would most certainly not be viewed as a time traveler by his contemporaries – at best he would be thought of as quite incompetent at whatever he failed to do (that be marriage, hunting or gardening). It would thus seem that myth, most generally, addresses the ever-present existential problems of their narrators - transcending then both time and space. Myths then, must rests upon something *prior* to itself, and that must be a more fundamental understanding of the world. By its very nature, myth then tells about the “normative ways of existence”; a discourse about how one should answer the problems that the world presents. Myth seems then, often, to pose the question about *how* one should act, and not *why* some people do as they do. E. E. Evans-Pritchard thought us long ago, in his study of the Azande peoples’ use of magic and oracles (1937), that the very questions people asks themselves are ontologically different from our own because they are posed within the context of a grander scheme of *their* society<sup>41</sup>. Myth thus, is generally a “how” to something concrete.

Many times, throughout my fieldwork I asked the women willing to let me partake in their gardening chores about the nature of their plants. This was done in the context of their practices, for example, when addressing the manioc stems directly as a subject (“Nugkui is planting you”). Despite the seemingly opportune moment, no clear answer to my questions was presented. Rosa hesitantly looked at me, and said: No, I don’t think the plants have a soul (*wekan*). “But Nugkui is the mother of your plants, right?” I countered. “Yes, it depends, she created them. Being *mama dukují*, she is their mother, yes.” Pausing for some time in our conversation, we continued the weeding around the plants. “So, the plants are alive?” I then asked. “Yes, if you say so. They do bleed and die if you cut them<sup>42</sup>, just like we do.” With these words taken into consideration, the animism so often described as fundamental to the way in which the Jivaro relates to their surrounding environment suddenly seem to be at some distance, or at least not that easily defined. Though myth, especially that of Nugkui, and the practices

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<sup>40</sup> Though this conception of myth has been firmly criticised for being inconsistent, the main objections being Levi-Strauss misinterpretations of secondary ethnographic sources, it seems that this logic could be ascribed to the stories presented here. See: Thomas, Kronenfeld, and Kronenfeld (1976)

<sup>41</sup> For the Azande, the fundamental understanding of the world contains in part the fact that people can bewitch their enemies.

<sup>42</sup> In his comments on the “Tobacco Feast of the Woman” Rafael Karsten (1935) gives attention to the cutting of the manioc stem. The chant that the Shuar Jivaro preforms in this context, prepares the manioc plants for what is about to happen.

(the rituals) that follow, presents a more clear-cut version of a discourse largely depended on an animistic world view, though the concrete questions asked about some of the subtler themes presented in that myth, such as the plants actually being people, yielded no definitive answer. This presents us with an interesting problem: it seems that the Awajun at times, or all the time, engage in modifications to their relations with nonhumans – i.e. modifications of their ontological properties, exemplified through their handling of their plants. But this mode of conduct seems at best to be inconsistent, and, not least, highly contradictory. Despite of this, similar observations have been made on the seemingly non-problematic role of contradictions in “native” thought.<sup>43</sup>:

By designating it ‘prelogical’ I merely wish to state that it does not bind itself down, as our thought does, to avoiding contradiction. It obeys the law of participation first and foremost. thus oriented, it does not expressly delight in what is contradictory (which would make it merely absurd in our eyes), but neither does it take pains to avoid it. It is often wholly indifferent to it, and that makes it so hard to follow ... [T]hey take but little account of the logical law of contradiction. (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 78, in Vilaça 2015)

So, this problem (that of contradiction) seems thus to be an anthropological one, and consequently a problem for the “western mind”, since anthropology is by large a western invention. Roy Wagner exemplifies this further. In studying forms of aversion to contradiction among representatives of the societies he calls “conventionalizing” (those being primarily Euro-American societies), he brings attention to how people create rules corresponding to their notion about the innate properties of their world (Wagner 1976). Understood like this then, that most people, through their very modes of being, do uphold the conventions of their society--in the Euro-American context, one of those conventions are their *aversion to contradictions*--it seems not that problematic that the Awajun are capable, without much hesitation, of bypassing contradictions, or more fittingly; *of passing right through them*, if the problem of contradiction never was a something to be avoided in the first place (not a part of their convention). If we were to understand “myth” as a form of convention, à la Wagner’s understanding of the notion, thus being a formalized normative narrative, more or less shared by the rest of the Awajun community, we would not diverge notably from our previous understanding, that “myth” as a normative landscape made up of what I previously defined as “what one ought to do”

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<sup>43</sup> Aparecida Vilaça, explores the shifting nature of animistic worldviews in relation to Wari conversion to Christianity. And it is from her discussing on the Wari notion of a person that I borrow her use of Levy-Bruhl.

practicalities. Then we can continue to define certain kinds of practice, or rather the possibility for alternative ways of handling the things directly addressed in myth, as forms of invention, as it diverges from the normativity formally presented (in myth). What Rosa then brings to the table in her non-cohesive way of relating mythical practices to “everyday talk” is to present a dialectical relation between mythical text (convention) and “everyday”, or “on the spot” sensemaking (invention). Like that, we are introduced to Rosas plants as possessing of a double character, simultaneously human (in mythical text and corresponding ritualistic practices) and mere plant (in whatever context that is not dependent on mythical understandings). The manioc in the garden then possesses two potentialities to be actualized in specific relational contexts, making them reminiscent of what Bruno Latour calls hybrids or “quasi-objects” or “quasi-subjects” (1994: 120). So how is this possible? This question brings us back to Viveiros de Castro’s notion of “mythical time” as a “pre-subjective and pre-objective milieu<sup>44</sup>”. The tendency of the Awajun to unproblematically pass through contradictions is rendered possible by the fact that their myths presents the possibility of bypassing the restrictiveness of the two seemingly mutually exclusive modes of identifying the components of the world, i.e. as “objects” or as “subjects”. The animistic world view of the Awajun thus seem to be highly flexible one in that it can be just as quickly actualized as it can be tossed aside, depending on context. This is what I previously defined as “the problem of animism” in relation to my ethnographical context. How can we account for an understanding of *how* and *when* the Awajun engage in social relations with non-humans, when these non-humans are for the most part not treated as such, as humans?

Viveiro de Castros perspectivism may present a solution to this problem: “By definition, in the perspectivist world there can be no all-encompassing perspective.” (Vilaca 2016: 34). In Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism, the shaman is given the privilege of being the one of the main mediators between the many perspectives inhabiting the world. Though Rosa is no shaman. It is about time to bring their magical song (*anen*) into our discussion.

#### **4.5: Magical songs**

As we have seen that words play an important role in gardening practise among the Awajun people<sup>45</sup>. Being able to alter the state of the world through phrases such as “*Nungkui ajapawe*”

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<sup>44</sup> We extended the definition, in relation to the myth of Nugkui, to encompass in addition to corporal flux, normative ways of being in relation to certain contexts.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Brown and Margaret Van Boldt explores the general use of *anen* in an article titled: *Aguaruna Jivaro gardening Magic in the alto Rio Mayo* (Brown and Van Volt 1980)

(“Nugkui is planting you”) the women frames the agency of the plants to adhere to their requests. These words are uttered publicly between the women while they plant their manioc stems. Though some words are subject of great secrecy and power. *Anen* (or magical songs) are uttered in the privacy of one owns mind so not to be stolen by potential listeners. Being the most powerful tolls in planting and harvesting rituals they are handed down by Nugkui to the Awajun woman thus being the greatest prestige amongst them, since it bears testament to the union between the individual woman and Nugkui. Not everyone possesses such songs and the distribution are in general decline. Before we return to the garden, I will address some of the general features of these songs.

The genre of *anen* encompasses several, if not all, aspects of Awajun life, being used in hunting, gardening and courtship (Brown 1985: 70). Differing from their social songs, called *nampét* which are often improvised on the spot during social events and festivities, *anen* are highly formalized utterings that follows strict forms of rhythm and lyrics<sup>46</sup>. Not the subject of any kind if improvisation, they handed down between close kin. And, if not, as in our case, they are bought or change for clothing. It was no easy task and most people would not partake in this transaction. Because being considered a part of the person possessing them--the word *anentái* meaning “heart” has close connotations to the word *anen*--only our closest friends would share them with us. I will always be grateful for this show of trust.

Another aspect of these song is that several ritualistic steps must be taken so to fully realise their potential. Having not taken these steps might have eased our companions into letting us record their songs, because it is not viewed as adequate just to possess the words of *anen*<sup>47</sup>. One must take the *anen* into oneself through the intoxicating state of tobacco. This is done in a secluded place, often close to a waterfall. There, the apprentice and the person called “the head” of *anen* (often an older person in possession of its powers) makes the granting by ways of transmitting the *anen* by inserting the tip of the cigar into the mouth of the apprentice. He or she then blows the intoxicating smoke into the lungs of the learner. When the tobacco has taken effect, the words of the *anen* are rehearsed until the learner remember them correctly - the seance will be repeated as such until this is realized. The importance of the state of intoxication was presented in such a way that makes the *anen* worthless if transmitted without it. After the apprentice have learned the words in the correct manner, he or she must undergo a

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<sup>46</sup> See Bloch (1974) for a discussion on the relationship between ritual and formulized language.

<sup>47</sup> In addition to this, some *anen* are used to manipulate social relations between true humans (*penke anent*), thus making them somewhat dangerous “in the wrong hands”. We did record one of these *anen*. Having the power to bring back loved ones, you could sing it if you found yourself to be separated from your husband or wife. Believing me and Tania to be husband wife, the one who gave us the song felt great pity for us.



period of silence. This is done so that the *anen* does not escape from the person's body. The longer this period is, the stronger will the power of the *anen* grow. An interesting insight into the nature of these songs was made clear to us when we first started to ask people if they knew *anen*. The ones that did not know, said so, but some of them continued to sing the words out loud. We asked about this seemingly strange contradiction though it was made clear to us then that the words are not the source of its powers. Michal Brown did also become aware about this, leading him to rather ask informants if they could "imitate" (*dakumát*) the words (1985: 74). The ones who did this for us said that they had not undertaken the ritual of tobacco intoxication described above.

Many things about these songs is unknown to me, so I am at a loss in explaining many things. Though for the Awajun the workings of these songs are clear. In the case of gardening songs (the ones of interest in our case) they are the words of Nugkui. These songs range supreme among the many ways in which they cultivate their plants. Many Awajun hold firm the idea that they are addressing Nugkui when singing thus being able to mediate the relations in the garden. The women that does not possess these songs told us that their garden will always yield less than the ones who are planted and harvested by those who possess them. This uneven distribution often turns competitive and gardening songs (viewed as one of the most powerful categories of *anen*) are often kept a secret even between close kin. I will present one of these songs. It will help us to understand how Rose is able to go between seemingly two mutually exclusive ways of identifying her plants. Because it is clear from our conversation above that she does not spontaneously see her plants as persons (subjects). It seems then, that for the Awajun it is important to know *how* to personify nonhumans and the *anen* they use provides us with a window into this process. The *anen* will be dissected in ways that will not allow it to be presented in its totality.

*Song for keeping the garden safe from weeds (dupa):*

Due to being the tatse woman [a kind of bird]

Because I'm not easily to be loathed [or abhorred]

I just go and go (walk and walk)

In the first part of the song, Rose identifies herself with a bird. Enabling her to thread the garden in ways that will not compromise her. The analogy between the, bird and the

woman singing, is to be found in many *anen* throughout the literature (see for example: Descola 1994: 207 and Brown 1986: 110<sup>48</sup>).

And my brother-in-law weed and weed  
What will he say to me?  
I'm not beaten by the weed either  
Just in my place [garden] of sweeping

She then continues to address the weeds (*dupa*) in the garden as her “brother-in-law”. In addition to this, she identifies the weed as a potential threat to the well-being of her garden (and subsequently a threat to herself). This is because they - Rosa and the weeds - are both competing over the garden. This is so because one of the greatest threats to a manioc's well-being is posed by the “leaching” from other plants that compete for the nutrients in the soil – possibly leading to the death of the cultigens. As de Castro says: “Enemies are conceptualised as “ideal” brothers-in-law” (2004: 479). And through this exchange (of perspective), the enemy (the weeds) sees Rosa as the same – as an enemy. This leads to the subjectification of *both* – neither is an object in the relation, they are brothers and sisters-in-law and thus enemies. Then enmity between them is a sort of “reciprocal subjectification”, making it an exchange of point of view (Ibid) Now, the role of the bird (*tatse*) also falls into place. As a bird, Rosa can pluck the weeds just as one sweeps one's house (“my sweeping place”<sup>49</sup>). The garden is the equivalent of the Awajun house from the point of view of the bird, making Rosa the master of the garden in the same way as she is the master of her house. In Michael Brown's study--of gardening among the Awajun of Alto Mayo (1986)--the nighthawk (*sukuyá*) is the manifestation of Nugkui, serving as her messenger. Though not talked about in this concrete way, the Awajun of Centro Tunduzá, still regards this bird to be closely related to the manioc garden adhering to the general theme of the garden being equivalent of the Awajun house for these creatures.

The *anen* continues:

Because I'm a Nugkui woman  
My sweeping space [garden] sweeping  
I just go and go (walk and walk)

Here, Rosa identifies with Nugkui, again, making the garden her house, since the garden is the final residence of Nugkui (as we have seen in the myth of Nugkui). And again, Rosa can

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<sup>48</sup> In the latter example one can see that the garden is equal to the house of the bird in question.

<sup>49</sup> The sweeping of the floor of the house is the task of the woman.

sweep the weeds from her garden with ease. As Nugkui, Rosa can walk in the garden while uncompromised, just as the bird: “I just go and go”. In identifying with both the bird and Nugkui, Rosa has the means to overcome the threat of her enemy (her “brother-in-law weed”).

Let us continue:

The Sekemju fruit is (the one) that

Is usually placed laterally

The ojé root is (the one) that

Is usually placed laterally

The Awajun view the *sekemju* and the *ojé* as possessing of the qualities favoured for their manioc tubers<sup>50</sup>. Being “thick” and “bulky”, these fruits share many likings to that of the manioc. As Descola (1994: 201) and Brown (1985: 175) notes, *anen* does not refer directly to the manioc (*mama*). Only through the uses of analogy (comparing her manioc-roots to that of other cultigens), does the singer bring into the conversation her subtle desire to achieve bountifulness. This show of caution is a general theme throughout this *anen* (and others). Starting the song, by identifying as a bird so that she will not be loathed/hated, Rosa is somewhat safer in that she is not easily overwhelmed by those who seek to pray on the garden (the weed).

Tatse tsete tseet going

Not easily beaten by the weed

Because I’m Nugkui woman

Do not treat her badly

Because Nugkui to the manioc the manioc

(may she) doesn’t hide it

The uttering: “Don’t treat her badly” has direct connotations to the myth of Nugkui, where everything was lost when the Nugkui-child was abused by the members of the Awajun family. An interesting split, by way of referencing the agents of the garden, occurs in this part of the *anen*; by stepping *out* of the role of “being a Nugkui woman”, so to address the potentiality of a new disappearance of the cultigens, the singer states that Nugkui should not be

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<sup>50</sup> The women that did not know *anen* themselves, still used analogies akin to those presented here, when they “imitated” (*dakumát*) the songs for us.

treated badly: [so] she does not hide it [the manioc]”. This flexibility of point of views by way of the instable, or elusive, relation between the referent and the reference (Rosa = Nugkui and Rosa ≠ Nugkui), brings us back to Wagner and what he calls “differentiating societies” (1976:88). In contrast to ours (or, western societies) they (the Awajun) do not discriminate against what we would call “inconsistencies” in perspectives. Because, *again*, in the perspectivist world there can be *no all-encompassing perspective*. The transformational properties of *anen* is an intensified inventive process (when ritualized) in which the singer (Rosa) creates alternatives to convention. The process of *differentiation* is taken to be part of the innate world (presented in myth), allowing the coexistence of diverse alternatives, or points of view.

When Rosa is singing, she is conducting a ritual transformation of the *self*, so to be able to see the (*potential*) subjects in the garden through herself, as they see her - as an enemy subject (affine or more precise: brother-in-law). The potentiality, that of subjectivation of otherwise objects (being the plants in the garden), is not realised through the relationship established between Rosa and me. So, in *that* context, the answer to my question “are your plants human or not?” is evident and will already have been answered by the mere nature of our relationship that the question is posed in – i.e. they will remain mere plants. The potentiality (that of subjectivation) is only realised by use of *anen*, that is a process of transformation, or “activation”, of the nonevidential subjectivity of plants – a process that excludes my participation from the relations briefly established.

#### **4.6: Concluding remarks on the process of subjectivation**

As I briefly mentioned, some of the people in Centro Tunduza deny nonhumans (be it plant or animal) any spiritual capacity. Saying that the attribution of a soul is only to be found in humans alone. Viveiros de Castro gives attention to this as well, when he points to Amazonian cosmologies that does not attribute human qualities to “post-mythical” nonhuman species (2014: 407). The reasons for denying this may be quite different from cosmology to cosmology (and from individual to individual), in my ethnographic case, this is most possibly so because of Christian believes have shaped new soul-concepts. This being said, Viveiros de Castro brings into consideration what he calls “spirit masters” (Ibid). Descola do in fact adhere to this notion when he considers Nugkui to be, what he calls “the tutelary spirit of the gardens” (1994: 192). Although being, in most cases, invisible to humans, the Awajun do not think of Nugkui as a spirit. But they do think of her as the “master of cultivated plants” (literary: “*mama muunji*”).

Doubt concerning the human capacities of individual plants may be somewhat widespread, depending on the person asked; at least some of the ethnographical examples presented above problematise any *stable* definition of plants as being “people” (*aents*). What the ethnographical examples does not dispute is the existence of Nugkui: “Every woman in Centro Tunduza knows about Nugkui”, echoing Rosa. Considering, then, the many cases where humanity is *not* an attribution of any individual plant, Nugkui (understood as a “spirit master”) serves the role of *hypostases*, or lowest command dominator, between the women gardening and the plants cultivated, resulting in an *intersubjective substratum*, or field, in that the woman (not having any immediate or direct contact with the plants in the garden) still rely upon Nugkui motherly precepts, thus creating a human/nonhuman relation *through* Nugkui. For the woman cultivating the garden, the plants may well not be *her* children, but for Nugkui (being the *master* and *mother* of cultivated plants) the cultigens are in fact just that, her children. That what is nature to the Awajun in question may well be culture for Nugkui, making her an *animating* being. This theme is also somewhat prevalent in that it is to be found throughout the *anen* we analysed above. Even for Rosa, who does not doubt the agency of the plants, at least not the potential for agency under the right circumstances, constantly call upon Nugkui for help in her struggle. Though Rosa’s *anen* does enable a directly transforming of herself into Nugkui, she nevertheless addresses Nugkui by ways of unshackling herself from her point of view.

As we discussed, animism and perspectivism differ on some key points: Descola argues that “in an animist society” humans see non-humans as animals, because they simply know that this is the way non-humans see themselves (Descola 2005: 140). The case in an “perspectivist society” is quite different in this respect: Viveiros de Castro argues that non-humans see themselves as human, but they see humans--*penke aents* (“true humans”)—as either predator, pray or spirit (1998). As we saw in our ethnographic case concerning Rosa’s *anen*, she was unwilling, almost unable, to deem her plants as subjects in their own right. The human-like qualities of the plants in the garden were first realized when she addressed them in her *anen*. As we saw, this had to be done by taking the *position* of Nugkui (though also the bird *tatse*). By positioning herself like this—by taking on the perspectives of the non-humans in her garden—Rosa managed to overcome the threat posed by the wild weeds (*dupa*). When Rosa became the “Nugkui woman” she was able to address the weeds in her garden by ways of *affinal kinship terms* (brother-in-law). By doing this, Rosa underwent a *ritual transformation of herself* because a kinship term is always vis-à-vis oneself and another i.e. a double definition.

As Descola, and others, have pointed out, affinity is often associated with rivalry, negotiations and real or potential hostility (2005: 252-253). Viveiros de Castro heads to this as

well when he says (as we have already seen) that: “enemies are conceptualised as ideal brothers-in-law” (2004: 479). Because an affine is positioned outside the category of consanguine relations, and obligations, by definition, they are open for another type of exchange: By not being “contaminated” by the exchange of one’s sister, something that would make them “less-than-ideal-bothers-in-law”, one is able to exchange perspectives. The association between predation (as war) and reciprocity (as transaction) is to be found in the works of Levi-Strauss, when he says that the latter (transaction) is a “peacefully resolved war” (1969: 67). The process of subjectivation, that we witnessed in Rosa’s *anen*, is akin to a *thought of war* over the perspective of “other”: Rosa tries to “trap” the weed in the garden by addressing it as an affine, forcing out its *hidden humanity* by making it see herself as she sees it, as an enemy.

A most interesting dimension regarding our case, presented above, is the question posed by some anthropologist concerning *gender* and perspectivism (Costa and Fasto 2010): Since predation, being an innate part of the perspectivist idiom, often is the object of study in male dominated practises like hunting and shamanism, some have been led to think that predation, and thus perspectivism, is only to be found in the male dominated facets of society. My ethnographic case has clearly something to say about this: The predation witnessed in the Awajun garden is first and foremost *the predation of the point of view of the “other”* initiated by the *woman* gardener. It seems thus, that the predatory dimension of perspectivism transcends gender relations; it does so at least for the Awajun of Centro Tunduzá. Though not a direct object of my study, some *anen* used for hunting was acquired during my stay in the Amazon. The use of affinal kinship terms—like the already mentioned brother-in-law—is presented in more than one of these *anen*. One example is an incantation uttered if the hunter—accompanied by his dog(s)—runs into a jaguar. In the *anen* the singer addresses the jaguar as an affine as they battle over the identity of the dog standing between them. For the hunter the goal is to convince the jaguar that the dog is not his (the jaguar’s) prey – i.e. the *human* hunter strives to make the *non-human* hunter (the jaguar) see the dog in the same way as he (the human) does.

Let me now conclude this study of Awajun gardening and the relations it deems possible.

## 5. CONCLUSION: Summary and Final Thoughts

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This thesis has strived to explain how the Awajun people of Centro Tunduza practise subsistent gardening. As the reader have seen, this was done by exploring the many facets that connected to the garden realm. By joining the people, with whom I lived and worked, on their regular trips to the garden, I was able to gather a respectable understanding of their conceptual systems and practises that in the end allowed me to realize the thesis presenter her. The first ethnographical chapter of this thesis concerned with the every-day harvesting of the different foodstuff cultivated in the garden. In addition to that, the chapter also gave the reader an introduction to the Awajun garden not so different to my own: The garden's mythical dimensions, like the story of Nugkui and other mythological narratives, was not until further in to my ethnographic fieldwork, sometime after my first visit to Amelia's garden, revealed to me in full. The weeks leading up to this was spent conducting basic shores like harvesting, peeling and washing manioc. The Awajun men felt sometimes pity for me, so they would, often to my delight, invite me on their regular hunting expeditions. This relieved me from the somewhat mundane gardening. But most of the time I was bound to my host families garden, taking notes on everything said (regardless of my ability to make sense out of the conversations). Many things from these situations are not to be found in this thesis: the enormous collection of almost every cultigen found in my host families' four gardens is only one example. Other examples are the many moments shared with the Awajun that did not relate in any direct way to the object of this thesis: the times we played football on the muddy field at the outskirts of the community, the many conversations had, and quiet moments shared, with my hunting companions, and the hours spent listening to stories about everything from a distant family member living in Lima, to the one time one of my closest friends in the community was trapped in a tree by a jaguar.

As we have seen, general historical changes to Awajun society has altered many things: disperse housing patterns are now only to be found among a few elders. As a result of their centralized lives the garden has been located further and further from the respective family's household. A centralized housing pattern is not the only reason for this. Mestizo farmers and other frontier settlers puts an additional strain on the ecology of the area, in addition

to the fact that number of Awajun people are encasing. The access to stable health facilities has for many decades decreased child mortality in the region.

Changes to the “conceptual systems” of the Awajun are also evident, but harder to characterize. Christian notions had altered notions of the *wekan* (“soul”) to such a degree that many contemporary Awajun people argue that the soul now only belong to humans. Earlier literature on this matter conveys, uniformly, that all representatives of the Jivaro cultural complex describes the *wekan* as being fundamental to all living things (Karsten: 1935; Harner; 1972; Brown 1986; Descola 1994). This being said, we have seen throughout this thesis that a uniform notion of a shared soul (shared by both humans and non-humans) is not required for a social bond to be established between the Awajun and non-humans: The myth of Nugkui was our first hint of this. The story of Nugkui and the first cultivated plants are still known by most, if not all, adult people in Centro Tunduzá. As we have seen, it is almost required to know, not only of Nugkui, you should know her personally. The intimacy established between Nugkui and the Awajun gardener is most important for the outcome of gardening. This is the main point to be derived from the myth of Nugkui; if she is absent in your life/garden, or if you mistreat her or her manioc-children, then your crops will fail. After careful examination of the myth of Nugkui, as it was presented to me by Amelia, I was able to draw some conclusions about the nature of “mythological time”. I argued that the myth of Nugkui, belonging to a class of stories called “stories from the ancestors”, not presented a concrete time in Awajun history, or to that which Lévi-Strauss calls “the passage from nature to culture” (Lévi-Strauss and Éribon 1990: 186–87). Rather, myth, or at least the myths of the Awajun, are told and remembered because it addresses every-day situations that are close in both *time* and *space*. As we saw, this allowed me to argue that the myth of Nugkui grants the relations to be maneuvered (practical and conceptual) in that which I call “a mythical landscape”. Another way of putting it is like this: The narrative in the myth (as text) is the same narrative adhered to in the garden (as practice or ritual): *the relations of myth is the relations of the garden*.

With this in mind, we were able to understand some deeper aspects of the rituals used by the Awajun in the garden. A stable intimate commerce with Nugkui is only achievable using *anen*. When this relation, or positioning, is achieved, the garden emerges as being inhabited by “other-than-human subjects”. Due to Nugkui’s role as *hypostasis*, the garden is first and foremost realized as a “mythical landscape” when one is in the position of Nugkui. As we saw, by being in the position/perspective of *mama dukují* (“manioc mother”), the plants in the garden emerges as subjects, or more precisely, as the *children* of the singer of the *anen*. This transformation is a type of mutual “other-becoming” This is because the nature of relationship



is bound to the position of those who make up the relation: the singer *becomes* Nugkui and the plants in the garden thus *becomes* her children. The relational model called “protection” is often not representative for societies in Amazonia, perspectivist or animist. The *predatory* idiom is often constitutive for human/non-human relations presented in the literature on Amazonia, see: Fausto (2002, 2007a); Vilaça (2002, 2005); Århem (1993); Lima (1999a). The mode of protection is hierarchical in nature: one is depended upon by another (Descola 2005). In my ethnographic case the one who is protected is the manioc-children, and the one who protects in the gardener/Nugkui. Protection is thus, in addition to predation, an innate part of the social relation that constitutes the garden realm, although more subtle than the predation discussed in some length. As we saw, the manioc(-children) in the garden is threatened by the weed (*dupa*). The woman/Nugkui overcomes this threat by overwhelming the weeds with their perspective, making it possible to overcome or get rid of it. This example, protection as part of predation, adds an interesting dimension to the literature concerning human/non-human relations.

The conclusions made in this thesis was made possible by applying a perspectivist theory to my ethnographic context. As we saw I paid some homage to Philippe Descola and his animism, but due to the nature of the human/non-human relations in the Awajun garden--its unstable and “contradictory” identification of non-humans as subjects capable of social interaction with humans—I saw it more fitting to make sense of “it all” by applying the “no all-encompassing perspective” of perspectivism. The fact that “special” ritual steps must be taken before one is capable of seeing non-humans as humans adheres to the ethos of perspectivist cosmologies: humans see themselves as humans, but they see non-humans for the most part as predator or pray, regardless of the respective non-human’s perspective on itself. You must *predate* the perspective of the “other” to be able to perceive the “other” as he/she perceives herself/himself, or as you perceive yourself (because predation is a *dyadic relation*, or a mutual “other-becoming”). This logic runs counter to the “stable animism of Descola, where humans “simply” perceive non-humans as humans because they share an identical *interiority* (Descola 2005: 140).

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