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Difference revised: gender and transformation among the Amazonian Runa

ABSTRACT. In this paper I will explore how knowledge practices among the Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon are informed by the specificity of local gender constructions. I will argue that while men learn to be 'proper' persons primarily through the ingestion of substances which penetrate inside their bodies and change them from the interior, women learn to become 'proper' Runa through imitating and reproducing specific movements. This difference in learning regimes, I argue, is based upon a priori conceptualisation of men and women as distinct kinds of beings. I argue that the Runa conceptualise as gender difference the way in which exteriority and interiority are played out in male and female persons. Unlike other Amazonian cases, women are understood by the Runa as 'naturally' predisposed to exteriority. This has important repercussions in the way cultural change is through to affect women and men, especially in contrast to other Amazonian people.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Amazonia, transformation, exteriority, learning

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Introduction

On a sunny morning in Canelos, a village situated along the Bobonaza river in Amazonian Ecuador, I was sitting with my old friend Juan, a Runa man in his thirties. Under the shade of his thatched roof, we found ourselves discussing about the differences between women and men. He was concerned about the fact that Runa women today were steadily losing their knowledge. Young women, he complained, 'are no longer Runa'. I was trying to understand what he meant by this when his younger sister, Carmela, who had just returned from the *chacra* (garden), overheard our discussion and stepped in, suggesting that, today, Runa women should be considered equals to men. Juan dismissively suggested that this was impossible because women and men are completely different. I naively tried to suggest that, after all, both men and women are human beings: aren't we the same? Juan paused a little, gave me a significative look and then said: 'Well, tell me then, if you think so, if you think we are the same, why is it that if I touch women's clay my penis will no longer harden? If I were the same as a woman, surely this would not happen.' Hearing her brother's answer, Carmela became pensive while all answers died on my lips.

The Runa people of Pastaza, in the Ecuadorian Amazon - to whom Juan and Carmela belong - live in a world where reciprocity and communal work between men and women is foundational to a good marriage and to the sustenance of life beyond the human realm (see Mezzenzana 2014). In Runa villages, men's activities include hunting, fishing, building houses, clearing gardens and building houses and canoes, while for women typical occupations encompass the growing and harvesting of sweet manioc, the making of pottery and manioc beer (*asua*).ⁱ Within this complementarity, Runa people often emphatically stress the difference between women and men.

Gender difference has been the focus of interest of many early ethnographers working in Amazonia who have explored in detail the importance of sexual symbolism (C.Hugh-Jones 1979), antagonism (Gregor 1985; Siskind 1973) as well as the relationship between gender, economy and exchange (Murphy and Murphy 1985). More recently researchers have focused on the processual and 'constructional' (Santos-Granero 2012) nature of gender, demonstrating that, for Amazonian people, femininity or masculinity, along with other bodily qualities, is not 'fixed' at birth but rather grown, cultivated and shaped by a variety of agencies, including nonhuman ones (Belaunde 2001; McCallum 2001; High 2010; Overing 1989; Rival 2005; Walker 2012). Such approach moves away from the idea that 'men and women are previously 'sexed' and that 'sex' can be read as a natural aspect of individuals understood as bounded biological and psychological units' (McCallum 2001:161). As Cecilia McCallum writes in her ethnography, among the Cashinahua of Brazil 'gender difference is clearly located in ... created corporeal difference' (2001:166).

McCallum's warning against applying Western dichotomies (such as that between sex and gender) to our research subjects comes with very good reasons: Amazonian ethnographers have long strove to show how dichotomies between the body and the mind, the natural and the cultural are often inappropriate to grasp indigenous understanding of personhood and sociality (Seeger, da Matta & Viveiros de Castro 1979). In particular, ethnographic research in the region highlighted how 'mind, thought, emotion and morality and character often as seen as linked to and inseparable from bodily states' (Conklin 2001:151). Personhood is understood as subject to growth and development through substance-ingestion, rituals and other bodily practices. Similarly, becoming a 'proper' woman or man is an incremental and somatic process which takes place over time through a variety of means. Within this perspective, gender difference is understood 'as an epistemological condition for social action, one that accumulates in the flesh and bones of proper human beings as either male or female agency' (McCallum 2001:5; see also Santos-Granero 2012). As such, gender is one important way in which knowledgeable and 'real' people are made.

In contrast to this research, a number of ethnographers have suggested that gender is not a cosmologically salient category in Amazonian societies since it is often encompassed by relationships of affinity and consanguinity or by the ubiquitous dichotomy between humans and nonhumans (Descola 2001; Viveiros de Castro 2001, 2012[1998]). For instance, Aparecida Vilaça (2005: 242) suggests that among the ‘Wari of Brazil there is an emphasis at creating ‘specific human bodies’ in contrast to animal ones and that, within such process, gender is of little relevance. Humanity, rather than gender, is the idiom which defines ‘Wari sociality. Writing about the Achuar of Ecuador, Philippe Descola (2001) similarly argues that the dichotomy of affinity and consanguinity plays a pivotal role in Achuar sociality and gender differences are often subsumed within such relationships. Equally, in his now famous formulation of Amazonian perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro (1998) describes the body as the locus of an abstract ‘human’ perspective, one which is devoid of gender differentiation.

In this paper I suggest that for the Runa, as for many other Amazonian indigenous groups, there is no conception of an a-gendered personhood. Gender is described by the Runa not only as an in-progress quality but also as something which is ‘given’ at birth and which pre-exists knowledge. This Runa ‘theory’ is reminiscent of what Elvira Belaunde (2005) has described as ‘parallel reproduction’, a system underscored by the idea that ‘men and women are two different kinds of humans and have parallel lives, each reproducing himself’ (2005: 17-8, my translation). This understanding of gender implies that, while one becomes a proper Runa man or woman through an incremental somatic process, gender difference has also an immutable and a priori nature. Among the Runa the intractable nature of difference becomes perhaps the most evident in discussions about human-animal transformation, where people explicitly claim that, when transforming into an animal or a spirit during dreams or shamanic trance, a man would still maintain a *male* perspective (see also McCallum 2001:166 for the Cashinahua). The preservation of a gender-inflected perspective throughout transformation is to be explained by the specific way in which ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ seem to be constituted in one’s body. Like their close Waorani neighbours (Rival 2005), the Runa choose to emphasise this difference by highlighting an ‘asymmetry’ in the ways men and women relate to the process of making children (and things). In the Runa context, as we will see, this asymmetry is articulated through notions of interiority and exteriority as well as ideas of visibility and invisibility.

My aim in this paper is not that of re-introducing the old dichotomy sex/gender (cf. Astuti 1998) in order to shed light on Runa construction of the person, but rather, that of paying attention

at what the Runa think of as ‘given’ without assuming that this neatly corresponds to our well known ‘givens’. I follow here the invitation made by Michael Scott (2013) for a ‘methodological non-dualism’ in the analysis of ethnographic data. In commenting about current theoretical trends which emphasise relations over entities, Scott observes that we should be careful not to impose ‘non-dualism’ over our ethnographic subjects. He suggests that whenever we deploy non-dualist theory (e.g. Heideggerian phenomenology, Deleuzian becoming etc.) to elucidate our materials, we need to acknowledge the fact that ‘our non-dualisms are not isomorphic with those of our informants’ (2013:306).

The same principle applies to the kinds of dualisms we might encounter in the field which should not be immediately identified with the ‘essentialisms’ we might know nor dismissed as distortions produced by our own theoretical assumptions. While our notion of ‘sex’ may be inappropriate for the Runa - especially as this relies upon a mind/body dualism which has proved to be insufficient for understanding indigenous conceptions of personhood - this nevertheless does not mean that they do not think that the difference between women and men is somewhat ‘given’. In other words, this analysis maintains an awareness of the *difference* between indigenous concepts and Western ones, the recognition, as Viveiros de Castro put it, that we might not be ‘talking about the same things’ (Viveiros de Castro 2008).ⁱⁱ

The reason why I insist on this ‘given’ difference between men and women is because this has important repercussions on the ways people understand and live cultural change. A central theme in Amazonian anthropology and certainly a common concern among my Runa friends, ‘cultural change’ has been recently re-articulated in the scholarly literature in terms of ‘bodily transformation’ (Santos-Granero 2009; Vilaça 2007). This refers to the somatic process by which indigenous people appropriate other people’s garments, foods and language. As Santos Granero writes: ‘what appear to be expressions of acculturative forces—the adoption of the dress, language, and names of white and mestizo peoples — is nothing more ... than the result of a long-standing native openness to the Other’ (2009: 479). This ‘native openness to the Other’ is often used in the literature to describe a process of bodily transformation which happens indiscriminately to ‘indigenous people’ without much distinction between the experiences of men and women.

Yet, we have ample ethnographic evidence that processes of cultural transformation have different trajectories and effects for men and women. For instance, Charlotte Seymour-Smith (1991) writes that among the Peruvian Shiwiar, women are attributed with the work of preserving the group’s cultural unity, while men are supposed to get involved in the political process of

representation vis-à-vis the nation state and other ‘external’ agents. This results in Jivaroan women being cast as those who should ensure the continuity of traditional culture, while men are in charge of representing it at a political level, through encounters with powerful outsiders (see also High 2010; Walker 2013).

The difference is in line with the general observation made by Amazonianist scholars that, in terms of gender roles, Amazonian women are generally those reputed to be in charge of producing ‘consanguinity’ while men are in charge of dealing with the exterior world (of animals, spirits and outsiders) (Taylor 1983; Viveiros de Castro 2001). Casey High (2010) for instance, describes that among the Waorani of Ecuador, femininity is closely associated with the making of sameness/consanguinity within the group, while men are associated with exteriority as they are the ones who after marriage, move to their wives’s house, often work in non-indigenous settings, have relationships with external people etc.

While the association women-interiority and men-exteriority is a widely accepted fact in the regional literature, the issue of ‘what it is in men that turns them into a predatory force, and what it is in women that gives them such domesticatory powers’ (Hernando 2010: 304) is ultimately left open. In this paper I will too deploy the dichotomy interior/exterior but with a different connotation. While the contrast has been used by anthropologists such as Anne-Christine Taylor (1983) and Casey High (2010) to describe a gendered group dynamics, I will show how such dichotomy operates at the level of the person. In other words, I will show how idioms of exteriority and interiority inform the way in which gendered selves are conceived by the Runa. In further contrast to other Amazonian cases, where ‘exteriority’ seems to be an exclusively ‘male’ domain, I will show that among the Runa women’s bodies are conceived as ‘naturally’ predisposed to exteriority, and this has important repercussions in the way cultural change is understood to affect women and men.ⁱⁱⁱ

The paper is organised as follows: first, I will explore how, through distinct kinds of learning techniques, Runa people become knowledgeable women and men (*yachayuj warmicuna karicuna*). In particular, I am interested in the *form* this process of learning takes. Focusing on the techniques by which Runa people are made into gendered subjects allows me to capture something fundamental about the different ‘make-up’ of men and women. I will then explore this difference by paying particular attention to ideas of exteriority and interiority as well as notions of visibility and invisibility. Finally I consider how taking such difference seriously helps us to think about gender

within Runa processes of cultural transformation as well as to draw some comparisons with other Amazonian cases.

Cultivating male strength

‘You are a man, pull hard!’ (*Cari angui, sinzhi aisangui*); shouted grandmother (*apamama*) Rosa, as she incited her grandson to pull the canoe against the currents of the river. He was struggling against the currents of water, paddling hard so that we could climb the river upwards, back home. Then Rosa turned to me and said: ‘When he was little, to make him strong I made him drink *ursa caspi* (the bark of a particular tree) so many times’. Then she added, with a reassuring tone: ‘Don’t be afraid! We will reach home!’

Like *apamama* Rosa who was proud of having raised a healthy and strong grandchild, most Runa parents give their male children all sorts of concoctions and substances to ingest or rub onto their skins to develop specific qualities such as fierceness and bravery. The concoctions do not only require an admirable effort from the parental side, but also a great amount of determination from children. In fact, the drinking of various herbal remedies is always followed by two or more weeks of fasting (*sasina*). This consistently excludes hot (*rupaj*), spicy (*jayaj*) and salty (*cachi*) food stuff to which one is even forbidden to get close. The boy needs to remain in a state of coolness (*chiri*) throughout this time. The strenuous diet is accompanied by a ritual bathing in a cold stream which takes place at sunrise. Were thunders to rumble in the middle of the night, children would be sent out to bathe in the river and encouraged to hit their bodies with stones at the terrifying crack of thunder. The diet and the bathing constitute vivid memories for my male friends, who, whenever they feel unwell, resort to these strategies to ‘revive’ and strengthen their bodies.

If a person needs to be made ‘strong’, this quality goes hand in hand with the development of fierceness and bravery. The adjective to denote these states of being is *piña*. To attain this desirable state, young boys are made to swallow the pulverised tooth of a peccary, an animal which, when attacked by a predator, is notorious for the fierceness of its response. Elders along the Bobonaza like to recount that, in the past, when a jaguar was killed, the parents prepared a specific exercise for their children. The animal’s head was severed and placed onto a pole, far from the community. Then, they would order the children to go and pull out jaguar’s whiskers by using the teeth. Many children could not bring themselves to do this. The jaguar’s head, placed onto the pole, was too frightening. The ones who returned with some hair in their mouths would turn into fearless warriors

and gifted hunters. All these parental techniques are aimed at fostering one's *samai* by enhancing one's qualities of fierceness and bravery. A man who is too *manso* (docile and submissive) is criticised unrelentingly by his own family and often openly laughed at. He is thought to be unable to provide his kin with meat nor defend his people from external enemies.

This fierce ethos is indeed one of the most highly valued aspects of Runa masculinity. In the Amazon, this 'warrior' type of masculinity has been described by a number of ethnographers (High 2015; Overing 1989; Rival 2005). For the Runa, like other Amazonian people, being a warrior is synonymous with being able to protect one's family against external dangers. Such ethos, however, is not apparent in everyday life when Runa men look often rather joyful, peaceful and easy going and becomes visible only under certain circumstances.

For instance, during one of my stays in Chunda Yaku, I was sitting at dawn in my *comadre's* kitchen, waiting for my goddaughter to walk to the swidden garden. Berta, a cousin of my *comadre*, reached the house running and, after briefly greeting us, she asked: 'Did you hear the radio last night?' Her expression seemed particularly concerned. Then she continued: 'The Achuar (neighbouring people) said that they heard too many shotguns near their territory. They said that if they encounter any Runa in their territory, they will apply their own law'. She paused for a minute, giving time for my *comadre* to digest the news. We all knew too well what 'their own law' meant. The problem was that three men of our family had gone hunting to their hunting territory, on the Achuar border. The men could risk their lives if left out there unwarned of the threatening radio message. I must have looked very worried because my *comadre*, as she saw my face, said with a reassuring voice: 'Don't worry. Our men know how to fight. Nothing will happen to them'.

This brief ethnographic moment well conveys how normal, seamless routine in a Runa village can, all of a sudden, be quickly overturned and transformed into a emotionally intense, life-threatening situation. But, most importantly, this vignette seeks also to suggest that such sudden changes are relatively 'normalised' among the Runa. Outbursts of violence are, to some extent, predictable and 'normal' events, as expressed by my *comadre's* reassurance: 'They know how to fight'.

This forceful disposition is present in every Runa man, manifesting itself in different ways, on countless occasions. One day, for example, a friend who works as a leader in an indigenous organization in the provincial town of Puyo began recounting me how, a few years before, his family had been harmed by an evil shaman. His eldest son fell severely ill and no doctor could cure

him. Suspecting of a particular shaman, he decided to go to confront him. He described this moment to me as such:

You see, I work as a leader for my people. But it is not because I wear these clothes, because I wear this watch, that people can feel safe. Because under these clothes, I am still like my elders (*rucuguna*), I am still a warrior inside. If they wake me up, I have no fear to take arms and kill them. I am not afraid of killing.

Indeed, it was through the display of this potentially ravaging will, that my friend was able to save his son. As he explained, eventually the shaman got scared by his threatening stance and renounced to his murderous plans. The sudden transformation of a quiet man into a fearsome killer is indeed a common trope of Runa masculinity. If incited to take arms to defend their families, Runa men, as I witnessed on a number of times, do not hesitate to do so. Seemingly tranquil men did not take a minute to transform into belligerent, fearsome warriors. For instance, on one occasion during a rather normal communal meeting, a leader mentioned, in passing, the possible existence of *cortacabezas* (head-cutters) in the nearby forest. Within an hour from the man's statement, all male members had gone home and collected their shotguns and munitions to prepare to 'defend' their wives and children. What struck me as an overreaction to a statement pronounced somewhat casually, was seen as legitimate response - indeed as the *only* legitimate one - by my hosts.

I am now interested in drawing attention to the visual form this masculine strength assumes and to the means by which this is accrued or 'trained'. In the examples above, as in many others I gathered during fieldwork, male strength is depicted as dormant or hidden. It is not readily visible, except when it is 'awaken'. As highlighted above, this peaceful character can be quickly overturned, and the person can be overcome by sudden fierceness. The warrior-like will which is hidden, but not entirely buried under the wearing of certain clothes or a different *habitus*, is bound to explode if the circumstances dictate so.

This movement - the latent will which surfaces when needed - bears interesting resemblance to an important cultural trait ascribed to the Runa, their, so to speak, 'double face' (Taylor 2007; Whitten 1976). This designation refers to the existence of two different modalities by which the Runa have historically related with non-Runa people (and, in particular, with whites). Whitten and Whitten describe this doubleness as such:

As Christianity made tenuous inroads there developed a duality of ethnic patterning between the native person of the hamlet, of ‘civilization’, of Christianity - *Alli Runa* - and the person of the forest, of the spirit-filled sentient universe - *Sacha Runa* (2008:53).

Whitten links the emergence of the identity ‘*alli runa*’ with the advent of the missions and describes it as ‘the refuge zone providing a trade locus in an expanding purchase society’ (1976:219). In this perspective, the *alli Runa* would function as an adaptive identity which coexists alongside its forest counterpart. Whitten emphasises the consubstantiality of the two identities and, although he positions spatially the first within the realm of the Whites and the Church and the other within the space of the forest, he suggests that the dichotomy is internal rather than external, for ‘*alli Runa* and *Sacha Runa* are one and the same’ (1976:219). The *sacha runa* - always present - is often ‘eclipsed’ (cf. Kelly 2005) by the *alli runa* aspect.

The dichotomy has been analysed by other ethnographers of Western Amazonia to shed light on processes of colonization and indigenous understandings of social transformation (Gow 1991, 1993; High 2015; Taylor 1999, 2007). The *Runa* dichotomy became a useful concept to think through the ‘two-sides’ of Western Amazonian people who have established peaceful contact with colonists. For example, Anne-Christine Taylor (1999, 2007) deploys the category *alli runa* interchangeably with the term *manso* (tame) to indicate those indigenous people who, having developed a regular contact with missionaries, became cultural brokers between the world of the whites and that of the more isolated indigenous groups. Instead on focusing on the dichotomy as a means to explore *Runa* relationships to the non-*Runa* world, I wish to suggest here that the category *alli/sacha runa* might be an inherently gendered construct. Let me explain this.

In my fieldsites, the term *alli runa* was used mostly by my consultants to refer to a man who works hard, who brings home food and cares for his family’s well-being. No explicit mention was made with regards to Christianity nor, for that matter, is *alli* (literally ‘good’) meant to be coterminous with *manso*. On the contrary: as shown above, *Runa* people are openly critical towards those who are *manso*, deemed to be incapable of being true *Runa* men. Note thus that *alli runa* is a term which describes first and foremost a desirable masculine ‘role’: that of provider and carer.

On the other hand, the term *sacha runa* was hardly ever used by the *Runa* I worked with. The term could be jokingly used to describe an excellent hunter, or someone who could move rapidly in the forest. *Sacha runa* was thus used by the people I worked with as an expression to indicate the

intimate relationship between knowledge and maleness within the dangerous domain of the forest. The capacity of being a fierce hunter and a fearless warrior are indeed capacities enhanced by knowing and being in the forest (*sacha*). Could it be argued, then, that the dichotomy *alli Runa/sacha runa* is an expression of the two contrasting poles of Amazonian masculinities (Rival 2005), corresponding respectively to the affectionate, tranquil husband and father and to the fierce warrior/hunter? From an aesthetics perspective, the image of another self beneath one's good appearance, susceptible to reemergence when needed, is common to both cases. The alternation between a state of *alli runa* and *sacha runa* seems to correspond to a dynamic between two different - yet coexisting - states of 'maleness'.

Perhaps the gendered character of the dichotomy could be further enlightened with a concrete example. Due to their nature, Runa men, like their Achuar kin and neighbours (Descola 2001), are thought to be prone to outbursts of forceful will. For example, when I asked my friend why her father, being otherwise a very calm and pious man, became so violent to her mother and to other people when he got drunk, she laconically answered that he had killed an anaconda many years earlier and that, instead of cutting the head and burying it far away, he just left the dead animal there. The anaconda had resuscitated and he, in turn, had become subjected to these fits of madness. From then on every time he gets drunk he has an 'attack' which makes him lose his mind and mistreat whoever is around him. The power of the anaconda overcomes his full persona. When I questioned my friends on whether women could be similarly overwhelmed by craziness after having failed to bury an anaconda, all of them admitted that this had never happened. What my friends doubted was not a woman's capacity for killing an anaconda (there were certainly some grandmothers fierce enough to do that), but rather the reaction which a misplaced burial would ensue into a woman. Could she go crazy and violent? Most decidedly not, concluded my friends. The eruption of violence does not emerge from the anaconda's action *per se*, rather, this latter 'activates' a will which is already potentially there.^{iv}

Before proceeding any further, I wish to stress that this masculine strength should not be mistaken for an internal state of mind. The 'interior' I speak about here does not refer to the the brain nor to the soul but rather to the internal modifications brought by the ingestion of substances. Equally in no way should this 'interiority' be read as referring to some 'true' essence hidden under a façade. The reason the concept of 'interiority' is particularly relevant to men's knowledge has to do with the learning process by which they become 'proper' Runa men. As I have shown earlier, the bodily practices undertaken by men engender an 'internal' transformation. This 'inside' (*ukuy*) process involves a variety of organs including the skin, the intestines, the bile and the lungs.

Substances are understood to penetrate the body through the ears, mouth and skin, and engender internal transformations. Such transformations remain hidden from sight. A main way to assess them is to bring them out through ritual vomiting. After ingesting emetic plants, Runa men closely examine their content of their vomit and gain, on the basis of its appearance, colour and texture, a sense of the state of their life-force (*samai*). Thus I believe that the idiom of interiority used to describe male learning processes is intimately linked to matters of (in)visibility, whereby such modifications are not readily manifest. This strikingly differs from the practices through which Runa girls are thought to become ‘proper’ women which are never described as entering and affecting the body from the ‘inside’. I now explore this difference by bringing as an example the commonest practice through which women become knowledgeable and strong. This transformation takes place when they receive the *lumu paju*, the ‘power’ of manioc.

***Paju*: Holding knowledge**

On sunny morning, I went with grandmother Digna, her daughter, daughter-in-law and granddaughters to plant manioc to the swidden garden we had recently cleared. After our arrival to the garden, Digna disappeared into the bushes only to reappear shortly after, holding a drinking bowl and some annatto (*manduru*) in her hands. I then realised that she was going to plant the manioc (*lumuta tarpuna*) using her power of manioc (*lumu paju*). With tranquility, Digna proceeded to mix the annatto seeds in the bowl along with two kinds of leaves (*lumu lisan* and *lumucha ulla*) in an old ceramic drinking bowl brought for the occasion. She immersed her thumb and index finger and painted our faces with the red mixture. Then she took some papaya branches, dipped them into the liquid and began to whip the bundles of manioc. It was then that her daughter-in-law, an irreverent and playful woman I had recently become *comadre* with, shouted at me: ‘Take *paju comadre*, take *paju*! Ask grandmother for it’ (*Pajuta apingui comadre, pajuta apingui! Tapui apamamata! Ajajajajiiii!*). As she was telling me that, she opened and closed her arms like in a hug, encouraging me to imitate the gesture and to grab the grandmother’s arms from behind. But I felt too shy to grab Digna’s arms. Having noticed my reluctance, my *comadre* directly addressed her mother-in-law, telling her jokingly: ‘Give her *paju*. Don’t be stingy’ (*Pajuta ama mitsanguichu, pajuta cuai*). Then she looked at me disapprovingly and said, shaking her head: ‘You should have taken it *comadre*’.

The ‘power’ my *comadre* was urging me to take is, undoubtedly, the most important a Runa woman can hold. The most desired of all women’s *paju*, the ‘power’ of manioc gives a woman the

ability of growing healthy and large manioc. If a girl wants to acquire this power, she needs to firmly grab the arms of a woman who already 'holds' this power. The young woman has to follow the movements of the *paju* holder as she 'bathes' and whips the manioc with the red juice. A woman holds *paju* only as she has undergone this process of imitation.

The saliency of imitation for *paju* transmission is more visible in instances in which the replicated patterns involve a succession of movements. For example, during the Runa ceremonial festival, when women helpers finish to chew manioc, they ask an old grandmother to store the purée in the storage jars. When the grandmother leans forward to fill the inside of the jar with the manioc mass, a young woman grabs her two arms from behind and begs her to bestow her with *paju*. As the grandmother slowly fills the jar, the girl never loses hold of her and accompanies her movements. She squats on the floor to gather the manioc purée as the grandmother does, then stands up again, while holding her arms. She gently fills the manioc inside the jar until this is full. Once the process is over, the *paju* is transmitted: just like old grandmothers know how make fine manioc beer in large quantities, so will the girls who have 'learnt' their movements.

All *paju* point to the saliency of movements for becoming a proper Runa woman. A Runa woman is thus someone who constantly makes such movements visible. Female learning practices do not aim to engender an internal transformation but rather shape the way one moves her own body. Significantly, no idiom of interiority is used to describe such learning. *Paju* does not affect the 'inside' of the body, but the way one moves. A Runa woman is recognised by her capacity of enacting these specific movements beautifully. The transformation engendered by *paju* is a visible one in so far as it takes place between many people and always involves the imitation of another's movements. It is only when her movements are seen, that a woman become a Runa, a 'true' person. The importance of visibility expressed by *paju* learning is also evident in many other female knowledge practices. Take, for example, the case of pottery making.

Pottery making is a female-only activity among the Runa. In villages, women devote large part of their time to the making and painting of hand-coiled pots. Noticing, at the time of his first fieldwork, that every shaman's sister or wife was a knowledgeable potter, Norman Whitten (1976) has drawn a connection between shamanic and pottery knowledge. He suggested that women's designs closely parallel the 'hybrid' visions of the shaman (*yachaj*). Indeed the Runa often compare the visual patterns produced by ayahuasca ingestion to the multicoloured designs of Runa potters. Most importantly, women potters are said to dream designs. The appellative *sinzhi muscuj huarmi* (strong visionary woman) used to describe master potters, speaks about their capacity of seeing

designs in dreams and then, of reproducing them on the surface of pots. Dreams, as hallucinogenic visions, grant an access to what the Runa consider as the true, hidden reality. In both instances, the flow of 'images' is controlled and managed respectively by the potter and the shaman.

Despite the remarkable similarities, I think there is a subtle, yet important difference between the two activities, one which concerns the visibility of designs/visions. Unlike *ayahuasca* patterns which can be seen only with the aid of the potent hallucinogen and, most importantly, from the solitary perspective of the *yachaj*, the designs women make are visible to everyone. More importantly, *they are there only for the purpose of being seen*. Like the *yachaj*, the potter may 'see' designs; however this is not enough. After seeing them, either in dream or in her head, she needs to take a step further, she needs to make them visible *for others*. The *yachaj* sees the true forms of the world through *ayahuasca*-induced visions but can not render them manifest for everyone. Indeed, the role of a shaman can be just the opposite, being cryptic and esoteric knowledge the realm of his expertise. The job of these master potters, on the contrary, is to bring to light, to make forms visible.

The painting of designs, like the practice of *lumu paju* described above, are all instances in which we can witness a stress upon women's ability at reproducing visible patterns. Female knowledge takes the form of visible forms - be these designs, movements or gestures. Take, for instance, one last but cogent ethnographic fact: the existence, amongst the Runa living along the Bobonaza river, of a specific 'female' laughter. This is not unconsciously reproduced but rather actively taught to women. 'Teach *comadre* how to laugh' (*asinata yachachingui comadreta*), my *compadre* instructed his wife one afternoon: to become a Runa woman, I needed to be able to reproduce the typical 'female' laughter (*ajajaiiiiiii*). Such laughter distinguishes the women from this particular area of the Bobonaza from others. The existence of such a 'congealed' laugh is striking if compared with the absence of any such thing for men. It is as if women need to be heard and seen to be recognised as a Runa, a 'real person'.^v

My discussion on exteriority/interiority does not wish to state that Runa men's 'nature' is exclusively internal and hidden while Runa women's nature is external and visible. As a reviewer for this paper noticed, men's rage could be understood as an embodiment, a movement 'outwards' just like women's designs or *paju* movements. Equally, a killed tapir or a dugout canoe could be well considered as the visible materialisation of men's knowledge and skill. On the other hand, a knowledgeable woman elder does not need to show her knowledge to be considered a *yachaj* or 'someone who knows'. While there are certainly ways in which the two kinds of knowledge take similar forms or even overlap, two elements remain starkly different. First, the kind of training

women and men undertake reveals a different emphasis on the issue of visibility and exteriority, whereby men's learning process is conceptualised as an internal transformation while women's as a reproduction of visible forms. Secondly, there are different social expectations on matters of visibility and knowledge which have tangible consequences on the ways women's and men's processes of transformation are locally understood. In other words, I suggest that the relation between the internal and the external is different from men and women. I believe this asymmetry needs to be understood with reference to the emphasis Runa people place upon women's relationship to the babies (and things) they grow. To this I turn now.

Reproducing difference

When talking about gender in every day life, Runa people often refer to it as if it were something 'essential'. This characteristic had already been noticed by earlier ethnographers working in the region. Take for instance, blood. Among the Runa, as elsewhere in Amazonia, blood is considered 'as a fluid embodying and gendering personal spirits, thought and strength' (Belaunde 2006:130). Ethnographer María Guzmán-Gallegos relates that her Canelos Runa informants were adamant in stating that men and women possess different kinds of blood (1997:57). She recounts the case of a man in the village of Canelos who, after receiving a blood transfusion, had asked whether he had received female or male blood as he thought this could affect his personality.^{vi} Similarly, my Runa research participants were often horrified at the idea that, through blood transfusion, male and female blood could get mixed and often worried about the consequences of such abnormal blending.

Blood is not the only substance which differs for women and men. *Samai*, a term often invoked to describe the vital breath of a person, is also thought to be different for the two sexes.^{vii} For example, Whitten (1976) writes in the 1970s that, according to the Puyo Runa, a male child inherits his male 'soul substance' or *samai* from his father, while a Runa girl receives hers from the mother. Guzmán-Gallegos (1997) makes a similar remark for Canelos where people think that, at the moment of conception, men 'make' male children, while women 'make' female ones. While my own research assistants never speculated on the technicalities of procreation, they were unanimous in stating that the *samai* of men and women is different: indeed, when I told some of my friends about Whitten's reports of conception beliefs, they thought they found it logical that a girl should be made by her mother, given that both possess 'female' blood and strength. According to Elvira Belaunde, this concept of parallel reproduction, which is found among many Amazonian societies,

emphasises that ‘men and women are two different kinds of humans and have parallel lives, each reproducing himself’ (2005: 17-8, my translation).

These bodily differences are continuously reasserted through sex-specific prohibitions. A myriad restrictions prohibit men from engaging in women’s activities, lest they lose their strength and vitality. One such restriction seeks to avoid the undesirable condition of *ucatza*. During intercourse, vaginal mucus is said to accumulate inside the man’s body, thus rendering him prone to a condition called *ucatza*. *Ucazta* is a word used to refer to a man who cannot hunt or fish. Often *ucatza* is linked to excessive or unregulated sexual relationships, but it can also be associated with any polluting fluid (bloodbirth and menstruation). For example, if a man has sexual intercourse with a woman who is menstruating (*huarmi ungushca*), the smell of menstruation is said to attach itself permanently to the man’s body. Whenever he goes to the forest, animals smell him from a distance and run away.

Ucatza accumulates inside men’s stomachs in the form of a foamy froth. *Ucatza* needs to be expelled from the body by ingesting great quantities of emetic infusions (e.g. the *huayusa* plant). *Ucatza* does not occur only with sexual penetration. When my *comadre*’s son Flavio, usually an excellent fisherman, began to return home empty handed and with a desolate expression on his face, his mother immediately linked this fact with Flavio’s new ‘secret’ girlfriend. Scolding him lightly, she commented: ‘A hand which touches a woman’s vagina does not work’.

Whenever I enquired my friends on the difference between men and women, they would promptly point to another fundamental, distinguishing factor: the different reproductive capabilities of the two and, in particular, their role in procreation. In Quichua, the common expression for making babies is ‘placing the baby’ (*huahuata churana*). The expression refers to the male action of placing the ‘seed’ in a woman’s womb. Despite the linguistic expressions stressing paternal conception, however, this is the only instance in which emphasis is placed upon a paternal creative act. In fact, Runa people emphatically claim that it is the woman, successively, who makes the baby in the womb, gives him birth and thus ‘owns’ him.

Women’s exclusive capacity for giving birth (and the consequences this entails) are the subject of both intellectual and emotional engagement for Runa men. Consider the following example. One day, during a walk to the village centre, my host Diego and I came across a couple who was fighting loudly in the middle of the track. It had been well known for a while that the couple was about to separate: the fight we witnessed represented one of their last outbursts of rage. Their children and with whom they should live after the separation were the issue at stake in the

discussion. The man insisted that, in case of separation, his newborn son should stay with him, rather than with the boy's mother. The woman, outraged, answered him fiercely: 'From me [my body] the baby came. I am the mother [so] he will stay with me.'

The man lowered his head with shame and went away silently. As we proceeded walking, my host, usually an irreverent and loquacious man, kept quiet for an unexpectedly long period of time. After a while, he sighed and commented to me:

This is what scares us [men] about women. She said she is the mother, the baby came from her, so she will keep it. It is hers. What can we do? We might feel sad, but we have to keep quiet.

In this example, the issue of creation as a distinguishing factor between men and women comes forcefully.^{viii} Men do not create as women do and, for this reason, as my friend affirmed, 'we have to keep quiet'. I want for now consider the ways in which the episode of the fight described above made my friend pensive about his own relationship to his children. He emphasised the qualitative difference of 'ownership' for women-as-mothers versus men-as-fathers.^{ix} In particular, he stressed that maternal ownership can not be disputed as the child comes from the woman's body. This example reveals the peculiar status of Runa women as privileged owners vis-à-vis men.

In her work in Canelos, Guzmán-Gallegos cogently observes that Runa women, unlike men, 'own' virtually all foods (be it manioc beer or meat) which enter the household (1997:126). Wives are entitled to all the meat (amongst other things) obtained by their husbands. As soon as a man returns from a hunting trip, he promptly hands all the meat over to his wife, saying: 'take your meat' (*canba aichata apingui*). Were he wanting to give any meat to his female relatives, he should suggest this to the wife who would be ultimately in charge of taking the decision and giving it away. In my fieldsites, men often emphasised their wives' status of owners by calling them explicitly *dueñas* in presence of visitors. Indeed, I was always referred to the *dueña*, whenever I wanted to borrow something from the house or talk about household matters. Being in control of the flow of goods which enters and exits the house, Runa wives have also a key role in producing sociality with outsiders through the drinking of manioc beer and the cooking of meat. Guzmán-Gallegos finds in this special status of wives-as-owners the reason for the widespread criticism to which newly wedded women are subjected by their in-laws.

Accusations from parents-in-law to daughters-in-law of being *quilla* (lazy) and *mitsa* (stingy) are by far the most common complaints by in laws in both urban and rural communities. I always found these complaints particularly striking given that the majority of young women who were

being criticised seemed to me indefatigable and generous towards their husband's kin. Both epithets, *quilla* (lazy) and *mitsa* (stingy), refer to key concepts in the making and the circulation of substances. The first, *quilla* denotes the absence of work and it is, by far, the worst insult any Runa, male or female, could receive. *Mitsa*, on the other hand, indicates an unwillingness to distributing substances and things generously. While such accusations can be directed towards son-in-laws, throughout my fieldwork, whenever I heard such remarks, they always targeted women. In Guzmán-Gallegos's analysis, it is because women occupy a special place within the flow of things that they are more liable to be targeted with accusations of stopping or impeding the flow.

This sociological fact is based upon *a priori* conceptualisation of women and men as different kinds of makers. This difference also entails an asymmetry within the apparent complementarity of Runa marriages. This imbalance is forcefully brought to light by posing a question: given that women are the legitimate owners of anything which enters the household (and especially of meat), could we advance the argument that men too 'own' their wives' manioc beer? I believe the idea would be totally unconceivable to most of my Runa friends. A woman is the *amu* or *dueña* of the meat she receives from her husband but she is even more so of her manioc beer and pottery. This is true notwithstanding that manioc beer is said to be made for male desire - and Runa women are unequivocal about that. Men can never 'give' away manioc beer as a gift like women do with meat when they decide to give it to other kin or neighbors.^x Manioc beer always belongs ultimately to its 'mother' (*mama*) who is the one who transforms cooked manioc with her saliva. While meat is 'taken' by men from somewhere else, the forest (*sacha*), manioc beer, just like pottery, is created by women from their own bodies.^{xi} This is further evidenced by usage of a maternal idiom to refer to both manioc and pottery (cf. Uzendoski 2004), which is unparalleled in men's realm.

The woman maker (*asua mama*) is in an intimate relationship with the drink for multiple reasons. First, it comes from the plant she has herself grown. Then it becomes beer through the incorporation of her own bodily substance, saliva, to the mass of manioc. Beer thus comes to bear something unique of the woman's body: two different beers, made by two women, will never be mixed together: were this to occur, the resulting mixture will go bad (Guzmán-Gallegos 1997). While being such an intimate substance, beer is made to be distributed and shared among kin and non kin. Like elsewhere in Amazonia (Gow 1991; Grotti 2009; Overing 1999), the circulation of manioc beer strengthens and creates social relationships. By ensuring the flow of manioc beer, foodstuff and babies, women represent, in the words of a Runa friend, 'our real treasure to survive as Runa'. Within the flow of life, women occupy an exceptional status as makers of beer, pottery and children.

It is important to notice, at this point, that the activities described so far have been usually reported by other ethnographers as being central to the making of kinship and thus enlisted in the realm of consanguinity. While the activities in which Runa women engage are in many ways the same as in other parts of the Amazon (gardening, beer-making, pottery etc.), what is stressed here is the capacity of such activities to bridge channels with the external world. In other words, while Runa women participate in activities commonly identified in the literature as the work of consanguinity, what gets emphasised both in cosmological discourse as well as in the practice of everyday life is the potential of this work to transcend the domestic unit. Just to give an example: the Runa often describe the ‘power’ of manioc beer as its capacity to flow outside of the house where it is produced and seduce outsiders (both Runa and non) to join in. Unlike other Amazonian cases where indigenous people emphasise the ‘making of kin out of others’ through substances like manioc beer, the Runa speak relatively little about this transformation^{xii}: what is greatly emphasised is the capacity of this female work to cross the boundaries between the inside and the outside. The difference is subtle yet important: while Runa women engage in the same activities of many of their Amazonian counterparts, people interpret such practices as movements towards the exterior.

Finally, an ulterior hint that the difference between men and women may be directly linked to women’s capacity for engendering novelty out of their bodies was given to me in the field by some elderly grandmothers from Canelos. They claimed that fully grown up women possess ten souls while men only have one or few more.^{xiii} When I asked for the reasons behind this difference, none of the women showed any hesitation: women are born with many souls because they will give birth to children.^{xiv} The surplus souls are explicitly linked to women’s capacity for parturition. This is why, according to my older informants (some of which were men), women have always been discouraged from becoming shamans: their many souls represented a tremendous, yet dangerous advantage in shamanic warfare. With an excess of souls, women could have been much stronger than men in their visions and powers.^{xv}

The possibility of engendering novel things - the issue of creation - seems to be conceptualised by the Runa as an intrinsic, a ‘given’ characteristic of women. The movement towards the exterior - the giving birth - is simultaneously a process of bringing forth, and thus of making things *visible*. I think women are involved in a similar process with regards to knowledge. As learning practices emphasise, knowledge, for women, happens on the ‘surface’ and it is only recognised insofar as it is visible to others. Rather than simple physiological difference or ‘sex’, it is this visible movement outwards - on the body and from it - which distinguishes women from men. Be these movements pots, children or designs, women’s role seems to make them visible for others to see.

The gender of transformation

In this paper I have argued that learning techniques foster in Runa women a capacity to make things visible, while for men, these techniques aim to act upon an ‘interior’ disposition. I linked the different practices to local gender constructions and in particular to Runa understandings of women as more predisposed toward the exterior. Far from being trivial, this gendered asymmetry has important consequences on the ways the Runa think about processes of transformation and relationships with non Runa people.

The first consequence regards the way in which men and women are respectively thought to undergo cultural change. Generally, the Runa speak about ‘cultural change’ in a way which resembles classical accounts of transformation described by anthropologists all over indigenous Amazonia. As mentioned earlier, change has been re-conceptualised by ethnographers as ‘bodily transformation’ (Santos-Granero 2009; Vilaça 2007). This is in line with indigenous understandings of the body which is made ‘similar’ or ‘different’ through local proximity, sharing of foods and drinks (Fausto 2007; Gow 1991). Such practices serve to create a community of kin and to differentiate one’s self from potentially dangerous others. Within such landscape ‘cultural change’ can be understood as a somatic process which takes place as one adopts the language, clothing and foods of other people. Such change is not irreversible: since it is primarily about bodily habits - and not about an irreducible core - one can become and un-become a Runa by adopting other ways of eating, dressing etc.

Following these premises, I had expected that people who had not partaken to the sharing of substances for a very long time - people, for instance, who no longer lived in the village - would be thought of as having transformed into ‘others’. However, for the Runa with whom I worked, going to live far away and abandoning Runa practices did not initiate, at least amongst Runa men, a radical transformation. Strikingly, the opposite was true for women: those women who, having spent years living away from home, return to their communities are often openly criticised for their incapacity at doing female tasks. Despised for their lack of skills, these women need to work hard to make their knowledge visible to everyone. It should also be noticed that Runa men, much more than Runa women take up jobs which lead them to live far away from their communities of origin and

thus have every day experiences of change. And yet, when Runa people discuss ‘change’ in the village houses, in the plaza and in the bars of Puyo, it is women who are thought, far more conspicuously than men, to be vulnerable to processes of transformation and, as a consequence, closely monitored so that they can follow a ‘traditional’ route.

It is as if, since women are so predisposed to the exterior - and their knowledge itself is conceived as existing on a surface - the dangers of becoming ‘other’ are for them more real than for men. On the other hand, because of this very predisposition Runa women are the quintessential cultural brokers. This contrasts with other Amazonian examples in Western Amazonia, where men are the ones in charge of the relationships with non-indigenous people (High 2010; Seymour-Smith 1991; Walker 2013) and women instead are seen as those who should ‘preserve’ culture. Harry Walker (2013), for instance, writes that Urarina women in the Peruvian Amazon are encouraged to wear traditional clothing as well as to speak their native language while their male counterparts seek to obtain a ‘modern’ identity through the possession and display of ‘foreign’ trade goods. Similarly, High argues that contemporary Waorani indigenous politics needs to be understood as an extension of the local notions of gender whereby masculine agency is manifested through the capacity of entertaining relationships with and obtaining goods from powerful outsiders.

At a first glance, Runa women Runa women seem to be caught in a parallel process. The ‘cultural’ stuff Runa women are supposed to preserve include speaking one’s language, wearing traditional garments, painting facial designs with genipapo juice, making pottery and manioc beer. Women who do not ‘show’ such characteristics are often criticised for being lazy or not being ‘proper’ Runa women. However, in stark contrast to Urarina women, Runa women and, in particular potters, often become influential figures within their communities, with a status paralleled only to indigenous leaders or shamans. They share with the former categories a high mobility, *compadrazgo* relationships with foreigners and the ability to speak a third language in addition to Spanish and Kichwa. Importantly, through their work many potters are also financially independent from men. While this particular condition of Runa women has been certainly favoured by the growing demand for Runa pottery and the increase of tourism in the region, it seems that Runa potters have enjoyed such a status since a long time. People in the village of Montalvo, for instance, recall women travelling as far as Peru to exchange pottery and learn new designs from other non-Runa women. Equally, Whitten and Whitten (1987) point out how Runa potters, like shamans, have been traditionally regarded as being particularly skilled at communicating with the non Runa world as well as ‘teaching’ others about their world.

Thus, while on the one hand Runa women enjoy high mobility and independence, on the other they are under pressure to bear the tangible signs of their ‘culture’ - lest they are deemed no longer

Runa. Although this might look like a paradox - independence on the one hand and cultural conservatorism on the other - I think that these are the two sides of the same coin. For all the 'cultural' activities in which Runa women engage - facial painting, dancing, pottery-making - are processes of 'exteriorizing' knowledge or, to use a more appropriate phrase, of making knowledge visible. It is the special place Runa women occupy in relation to knowledge, exteriority and visibility which makes them the most apt to 'represent' Runa culture and simultaneously the most susceptible to change. Their complex position as well as its anomaly with respect to other Amazonian examples need to be located in a gender cosmology which emphasises women's relationship to exteriority and visibility. Within such understanding, cultural change is always gender-inflected not only because women and men end up doing different things but also because, for the Runa, being a female or a male poses certain constraints on the experience of transformation. Not all persons change in the same way: female and male persons, due to their different 'make-up', are thought to be in a different relationship to change. It might be argued thus that, for the Runa, not only there is no conception of an a-gendered personhood, but also that bodily transformation is always gender-inflected.

Notes

ⁱ In rural communities, participation in the market economy - for example in trade and wage work - is limited but open to both men and women.

ⁱⁱ Indeed I believe that the conversation with which I opened this paper is a typical example of 'equivocation', in the sense Viveiros de Castro (2004) originally put it. Despite both addressing a 'common' subject - gender difference - Juan and I were not talking about the same thing: whereas my own personal starting assumption was a common humanity whereby men and women, while different, share the same evolutionary trajectory and the same (ideally) juridical status, for Juan, difference between men and women was more

radical and grounded in exclusive bodily substances and dispositions. Equally, Carmela might have talked about an entirely different matter than what I or her brother were talking about.

ⁱⁱⁱ This paper is based upon ethnographic materials gathered during fieldwork with people from rural communities in Pastaza. Unlike their urban counterparts living in the capital city and surroundings, Runa people from this area live mostly on subsistence agriculture, fishing and hunting. Notions of gender are thus deeply informed by people's relationship to their surrounding forest ecology. Practices such as fasting, hunting charms and agricultural magic are still very widespread among young generation and thus strongly permeate the domain of gender. I do not wish to suggest that the gender concepts I describe here are unanimously shared by all Runa people today nor, on the other hand, that they are unchanging. For instance, many Runa youth born and raised in the city have no direct experience of forest environments. It is likely for these younger generations to think about unlikely gender in ways which contrast or differ from what I describe here (see High 20120 for an analysis of generational shifts in Waorani masculinities).

^{iv} What I have outlined here might, at a first look, resemble Rival's (2005) description of the predatory life force *pui*, among the Waorani. She describes *pui* as an attack of furious madness, to which Waorani men can sometimes succumb. The states I am describing here are not 'institutionalised' to the extent of being classified as a condition, like *pui* in the Waorani case. This male strength - which lacks any specific designation - can only be glimpsed by witnessing the informal yet usual instances in which it outbursts or, as in the case of my friend above, when it is willingly put into display.

^v With this observation, I do not wish to imply that Runa men are never involved in the reproduction of visible knowledge but rather that the process of reproducing visible forms is far more conspicuous in women's realm. For example, although men do have some *paju*

involving a similar technique, these latter are not described as foundational for the constitution of one's knowledge and, certainly, not in the way *pajus* are for Runa women.

^{vi} Commenting on this specific episode, Luisa Elvira Belaunde, who has written extensively about Amazonian hematology, suggests that this shows that 'what differentiates a man's blood from a woman's blood is not an immutable gender essence, but rather men and women's personal life experiences' (2006:135). However, from my own ethnography, it seemed that people were far more concerned about the mixing of female and male blood and the consequences this would entail on their being a woman/man, rather than acquiring the other person's specific abilities. At any rate, it was the acquiring of *another gender's* ability what troubled my Runa informants.

^{vii} Conceived as a substance, a vital breath or as a life-force, *samai* it is often used interchangeably with 'knowledge' (*yachai*). I came to understand *samai* as a life strength which can be strengthened throughout life but which is also somewhat 'fixed', having been given at birth.

^{viii} Here, like among the Waorani described by Laura Rival, 'biology is culturally interpreted so as to emphasise the fact that men do not relate to their offspring in exactly the same way as women do' (2005:302).

^{ix} Ownership is expressed by the Runa using the possessive adjective, *ñuca* before the object owned, or by using the Spanish-derived name for 'owner', *amu*.

^x Even in the case of working parties (*minga*), where men often serve their wives' manioc beer to the female and male visitors, the beer ultimately belongs to the woman maker.

^{xi} Indeed, Guzmán-Gallegos herself points to this difference when she writes that the act of hunting is fundamentally different from that of planting of manioc. See the following paragraph: 'Like the relationship between manioc and its female grower, the relationship between the hunter and its prey is important, but different. Hunting is conceived as an act through which a man takes a forest animal to kill it without this entailing a process of

creation of the prey. Men, unlike women, do not contribute to the growing of animals’ (1997: 75, my translation)

^{xii} See, however, Uzendoski (2004) for another perspective on manioc beer among the neighbouring Napo Runa.

^{xiii} Powerful shamans similarly possess a multiplicity of souls which they acquire throughout their lives.

^{xiv} Some women claimed that these multiple souls are then passed on to the children.

^{xv} Interestingly this resonates with the widespread idea in the region that female shamans are much more dangerous than male ones (cf. Guzmán-Gallegos 1997; see also Perruchon 2003 for the Shuar). Stephen Hugh-Jones has suggested that, among the Barasana, women could not be shamans because they are already so ‘by means of this contact with the exterior provided by gestation’ (Hugh-Jones in Vilaça 2002: 360).

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