Cultural Discontinuity

The New Social Face of the Awajún

GLEND SEITZ

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CONTENTS

People of the Forest

“Since their arrival, religious missions, schools, and neighboring settlers have been promoting the abandonment of some of the ancestral views and cultural practices of the Awajún.”

People of the Forest

Indigenous peoples of the Amazon region developed a comprehensive and systematic knowledge of the biological diversity present in their surroundings, a complex body of knowledge resulting from their regular interactions with the natural environment and their cultural adaptation process. In the case of the Awajún of the Peruvian rainforest, such knowledge is particularly reflected in their classification of biological diversity (Berlin 1979) and their subsistence system (Brown 1984: 134). Their cultural practices were based on perceptions in which the natural environment was considered a symbolic space, inhabited by supernatural beings that humans could communicate with via songs, rituals, and dreams. This perception allowed them to develop a set of cultural values to interact with the natural resources in socially and environmentally sustainable ways.

The traditional practice of hunting animals as part of their subsistence process, for example, had a mythical justification, in which the sun (*Etsa*) taught the Awajún how to hunt

animals, including the use of magic songs (*anen*) associated with hunting. In this symbolic world, the animals of the forest also had a social life, which was perceived as one that mirrored human behavior (Guallart 1997). This way of understanding animals allowed indigenous hunters to become familiar with the habits of birds and mammals in the forest, in areas such as their common places of dwelling, transit patterns, favorite foods, and seasonal behaviors.

Agriculture had a mythical component as well, which was mostly associated with the symbolic world of women. The female spirit of the earth (*Nugkui*) taught the Awajún women how to grow plants and make pottery. Accordingly, their agricultural rituals often involved asking for the help of Nugkui through magic songs, the acquisition and use of magic stones (*nantag*), and the practice of certain taboos and prohibitions (Brown 1984). This cultural approach allowed the Awajún women to become familiar with over two hundred varieties of cassava (Berlin 1979), and adopt agricultural techniques such as cutting and burning when opening new agricultural plots, in a way that their continued practice did not cause environmental damage to the forest.

Hunting practices and agriculture were traditionally associated with a subsistence lifestyle based on semi-scattered settlements and periodic changes in their places of residence. This mobile situation allowed the Awajún to maintain a balanced and harmonious relationship between people and the environment, developing patterns based on a sustainable

exploitation of the natural resources, with only a minimal and temporary impact on the environment, and in a way that the ecological balance was not significantly disturbed.

The Awajún, however, have experienced profound social transformations, particularly since the 1950s, when the government sponsored a colonization process that brought large numbers of people from other parts of the country to Awajún territory. This situation intensified their interactions and communication with outsiders, characterized by a growing influence of mass media channels, greater mobility of people to and from urban centers, and a greater exchange of products. Selling agricultural and forest products to acquire manufactured goods, such as radios and cell phones, has become common. The Awajún are no strangers to new technologies, which are embedded in a system of increasing intercultural relations that have been influencing and altering their traditional lifestyle in significant ways (Heise and Landeo 1996: 63).

The replacement of their itinerant settlements by sedentary villages, the disruption of their traditional spaces of socialization, and the changes in their subsistence practices have shaped a different cultural landscape than the one they had over forty years ago, before the Peruvian government defined a standardized structure for the governance of indigenous communities to have their lands recognized.

The gradual increase in the intercultural relations between the Awajún and outsiders also

created a discontinuity in the transmission of the ancestral knowledge from the elders to the young, favored a change in the social role of Awajún women, and allowed the gradual abandonment of certain social practices, such as the selection of spouses and the patterns of residence for new couples. Together, these changes had an effect on the cultural perceptions that used to guide their social interactions and the relationship between people and their environment.

The new social setting in which the Awajún are immersed, where the younger generation has been gaining greater prominence, is also characterized by factors such as a shortage of agricultural lands near their villages, a high rate of population growth, a scarcity of animals to hunt near their settlements, a low level of knowledge about the properties of medicinal plants, an increased perception of forest resources as commodities, a growing dependence on manufactured goods, a new set of consumer habits, and an asymmetric access to the economic opportunities created by the market economy, among other factors.

This context is further complicated by the presence of external agents of cultural change. Since their arrival, religious missions, public and private schools, and neighboring settlers have been promoting the abandonment of some of the ancestral views and cultural practices of the Awajún, as well as providing alternative spaces for the transmission of knowledge, once passed from mothers to daughters and from fathers to

sons, instead being gradually replaced by school classrooms and church venues.

Such circumstances have led to a frequent situation in which young Awajún no longer practice many subsistence activities associated with the traditional use of natural resources, which affects the acquisition of symbolic knowledge, the development of practical skills, and the performance of rituals associated with these cultural traditions. As a result, their subsistence and economic practices have experienced significant variation as well.

The combined effect of these factors has been causing a progressive loss of the Awajún's traditional knowledge, putting in evidence a pattern of cultural discontinuity, with direct consequences on their perceptions of the environment and their use of natural resources. In their current socioeconomic context, characterized by the continuous expansion of the market economy and the gradual adoption of a utilitarian view of the forest and the natural resources, the fate of this part of the Amazon rainforest is closely related to the changes in the perceptions and cultural practices that characterize the new social face of the Awajún.

This book focuses on explaining the growing indications of a significant cultural discontinuity experienced by the Awajún. The analysis presented here is mostly based on data from an ethnographic study conducted in three Awajún communities (Sukutin, Nayumpim, and Shushug), but also on insights gathered in two decades of interactions with members of other

Awajún communities. The historical perspective presented in the next chapter illustrates the magnitude of the changes experienced by the Awajún in the last few decades.

A Historical Perspective

“After the roads were built, the government promoted the colonization of those areas without considering that they were already populated by the Awajún, starting with military posts that later facilitated the arrival of settlers.”

A Historical Perspective

The Awajún are part of the ethnolinguistic family Jívaro, one of the largest of the Peruvian Amazon. The Jívaro family is divided into five ethnic groups: Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, Wampís, and Awajún. The Shuar inhabit the areas of Paute, Upano, and Zamora rivers, in Ecuador. The Achuar are located on both sides of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border, in areas near the Pastaza and Morona rivers. The Shiwiar live near the Corrientes and Tigre rivers in the department of Loreto, Peru, and the Wampís are located in the provinces of Condorcanqui (Amazonas) and Alto Amazonas (Loreto), in Peruvian territory. Despite sharing the same linguistic and cultural roots, these indigenous groups have significant differences in their linguistic expressions, social relations, and cultural practices (Espinoza 1997).

The Awajún group comprises about 190 native communities scattered among the Cenepa, Nieva, Santiago, Mayo, and Marañón rivers, in the Peruvian departments of Amazonas, Cajamarca, San Martin, and Loreto.

The Awajún used to be known as "Aguaruna," but now they have reclaimed the word "Awajún" as the one to be used when referring to them as a collective group. Regarding the origin of the term Awajún, there are several possible explanations. Karsten (1935) argued that this term is equivalent to the expression "people of the forest." A second explanation proposed that the term originates from the merger of the words "water" and "people," so that the term would mean "people of the water."A third interpretation proposed that this term comes from the Quechua language used at the Pastaza River, where "awa" is "up" and "runa" is "people," which would mean "people of the heights" (Regan 1998).

The main archaeological analyses that provide information about the Jívaro are the studies conducted by Harner (1972: 13) on the Upano River in Ecuador, and the research carried out by DeBoer and Lathrap (1977) on the Huallaga River in Peru. Although none of these studies clarified the origin of the Jívaro, the available information indicates that before the Awajún settled in their present territory there was a prior occupation by a culture of greater technological complexity (Guallart 1990). The presence of the Awajún in its current territory — the provinces of Bagua and Condorcanqui— can be traced back to around 1,200 years ago (Guallart 1997).

When it comes to the socioeconomic exchanges between the Jívaro and people from the Pacific coast, scholars have identified two corridors. From linguistic evidence, it was

possible to reconstruct a first corridor that runs from Jívaro territory in the Amazon jungle to the Gulf of Guayaquil in Ecuador (Whitten 1976). Also, the comparative analysis of myths, iconography, and archaeological remains found near the Peruvian coast, together with Spanish chronicles, indicate the presence of a cultural contact between the Jívaro and the Moche, revealing a second corridor running from Jívaro territory to the coast of Lambayeque (Regan 1999).

The contact between the Jívaro living in the rainforest and representatives of the Inca culture was minimal. Attempts of the armies of the Inca Huayna Capac to dominate the Jívaro, for instance, were unsuccessful due to the rugged terrain, the presence of rivers that were difficult to cross, the heavy rains, and the warlike attitude of the Jívaro (Cieza de Leon 1551). However, the Incas managed to conquer and assimilate Jívaro-speaking populations located in the Andean region (Brown 1984).

In the Colonial period, one of the first Spanish expeditions to Jívaro territory was led by Juan Porcel de Padilla, who in 1936 founded the settlement of Jerez de la Frontera. In 1549, an expedition led by Hernando de Benavente traveled to the headwaters of the Paute and Upano rivers, where they settled in the abandoned houses of the Jívaro, who had fled to the forest to avoid being captured and enslaved (Guallart 1990).

During the Republican period, in 1832 the newly independent national government of Peru created the department of Amazonas, and in 1850 there were new attempts to break the

separation of the Andean-Amazonian space by promoting the internal migration of Andean farmers toward the jungle (Marcelo 1994).

In the late nineteenth century, during the boom of the rubber trade, some rubber tappers settled in Awajún territory, near the Marañón River, establishing posts in the communities of Nazareth, Tuntungos, Numpatkaim, and Wabico. They introduced significant cultural changes in the region, particularly in terms of the provision of manufactured products, and the introduction of a system of debt. However, in 1904 the Awajún got tired of the continuing abuses of the rubber tappers and organized a revolt against them (Guallart 1997). Shortly after, the end of the rubber boom seriously affected the economy of the rubber tappers, causing them to leave the area.

In the 1930s, the Peruvian government built a road that connected the Andean region to the city of Chachapoyas, located near Awajún territory, and established an air transportation service. The connection of this region with the rest of the country was reinforced by the construction of new roads. After the roads were built, the government promoted the colonization of those areas without considering that they were already populated by the Awajún, starting with military posts that later facilitated the arrival of settlers from other regions of Peru, particularly from the departments of Cajamarca, Lambayeque, Piura, and La Libertad.

The Church of the Nazarene also arrived at this area in the first half of the twentieth century, along with the Summer Institute of

Linguistics, a religious institution that sought to educate the natives and translate the Bible into the Awajún language. The Catholic Church also established missions and a boarding school for girls in the area (Guallart 1997: 139).

In 1974, the enactment of the Law of Native Communities marked the beginning of a new era for the indigenous groups of the Amazon region. This established the legal framework for the recognition and titling of indigenous territories as "native communities." Currently, most Awajún have collective titles to their lands or are in an advanced stage of their titling process. This law also mandated a new type of internal organization, based on the participation of members in community assemblies and a board with elected officials, replacing the traditional decision-making system of the Awajún.

Around the same time, the construction of a large pipeline that went through Awajún territory intensified the arrival of migrants from other parts of the country. Because of this infrastructure project, along with internal differences, lifestyle choices, accusations of witchcraft, and the kidnapping of women, many Awajún families that lived near the religious missions moved to areas located further away. In time, these families formed new indigenous communities.

In the main towns of the area, Imacita and Chiriaco, the majority of the population is nowadays made up of people who came from the Andean region. They came to Awajún territory as a result of colonization policies

promoted by the Peruvian government, particularly since the 1950s.The Awajún still refer to these people as settlers. The nearest town to the Awajún communities included in this study (Nayumpim, Shushug, and Wawas) is the town of Chiriaco, the capital of the Imaza district, in the department of Amazonas, Peru. To reach Chiriaco, there is an unpaved road from the city of Bagua, the capital of the province of the same name. From there, public transport vehicles take people to Chiriaco, on a trip that lasts about four to five hours.

The community of Nayumpim was recognized in 1976 and was assigned 3,500 hectares. Nayumpim has a settlement annex called Teesh. Its territory ranges between 500 to 1227 meters above sea level (MASL).The community of Shushug was also recognized as a native community in 1976, and was assigned a territory of 1,128 hectares, located between 350 to 700 MASL. Shushug comprises four settlements: Shushug Center, Pagki, Meente, and Boca de Lobo. The community of Wawas was recognized in 1975 and was assigned a territory of 5,803 hectares, located between 400 to 981 MASL. This community is made up of four settlements: Wawas Center, Chinin, Bethel Jayeis, and Sukutin.

In the last two decades in particular, there have been several public and private institutions working with the Awajún on different initiatives aimed at promoting the conservation and sustainable use of their natural resources, establishing programs and implementing legal actions for the protection of

the biological diversity of the area and the traditional knowledge of the Awajún, and creating development opportunities for them in a way that takes into account the significant social changes they experienced in the last few decades, which are discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Economic and Social Change

“Conflicts among the Awajún were frequent. In many cases, they were motivated by the abduction of women, the accusations of witchcraft, and the desire to gain prestige as warriors, which was usually recognized by a collection of shrunken heads.”

Economic and Social Change

The Imaza district, where a large number of Awajún communities are located, was created in1984. A large proportion of the population of this district is made up of settlers. These people originally come from the departments of Cajamarca, Lambayeque, Piura, and La Libertad, as well as other cities in the department of Amazonas. These people tend to carry out commercial activities such as trading groceries, clothing, and fuel; providing transport, restaurant and lodging services; and also conducting cattle ranching and logging activities.

The main economic activities presently conducted by the Awajún living in this area are agriculture, livestock raising, forestry, and trade. Agriculture is the basis of their livelihood because it is intended both for sustenance and for commercial reasons. However, in the last two decades, many Awajún have increasingly become salaried employees of different organizations, like municipalities, schools, nonprofit organizations, and commercial establishments, among others. Both men and

women experienced a greater diversification of their livelihoods, in overall similar proportions.

Regarding their agricultural activities, the Awajún's main crops are bananas, cassava, and rice. The first two are key ingredients in the Awajún cuisine. In general, these products (especially bananas) are marketed to meet the needs of the local towns, but in some cases they are also taken into larger cities located farther away, like on the Peruvian coast, which is more than ten hours away by car. The Imaza district has five storage centers where products such as bananas, wood, and sugarcane are stored before they are loaded into trucks. Other crops include cocoa and coffee. In the case of cocoa, these crops regularly get affected by fungal diseases such as witches' broom and frosty pod rot, which have a negative impact on the income the Awajún receive by the sale of this product. In the case of coffee, this is an agricultural crop of recent introduction and so far it has only been produced in small quantities, so it is still too early to assess its commercial potential.

The social organization of the Awajún, which is a core element of their collective behavior, is reflected in areas such as their traditional leadership, their kinship relations, their interactions with people outside their family groups, their recognition as territorially bounded native communities, their reproduction of cooperative work traditions, and their participation in indigenous organizations that conduct advocacy actions.

Before their recognition as native communities, there was no centralized hierarchical authority to exercise control over the Awajún. When they had to select leaders, these were not appointed as rulers but only as temporary coordinators of specific campaigns. Such leadership roles were assigned to individuals on the basis of their bravery, eloquence, and persuasion abilities, and were particularly common in situations that involved some level of friction and conflict (Brown 1984: 27; Larson 1977: 48). In times of conflict, the figure of the military leader (*wajiu*) emerged, whose role was to gather relatives from various local groups, dissipate the tensions within these groups, and build a unified front to face a common enemy. In everyday life, however, the heads of each family directed their activities as they saw fit, without the influence of the appointed leader.

Conflicts among the Awajún were frequent. In many cases, they were motivated by the abduction of women by men from other settlements (later turned into wives without asking for their consent), accusations of witchcraft, and the desire to gain prestige as a warrior, which was usually recognized by the collection of shrunken heads such individuals possessed. Among Awajún warriors, it was customary to decapitate their defeated enemies, shrink the heads by removing their skulls and making their skins contract using tanning techniques, and then hang them in front of their houses as a warning.

There were also conflict resolution mechanisms, structured to soothe tensions and generate an appropriate space for peaceful coexistence, at least temporarily, through the establishment of different types of partnerships and agreements. These included marriages between members of opposing families, covenants on the access and use of natural resources, agreements for trading relationships, and the establishment of new settlements, among other areas where agreements could be reached by peaceful negotiation.

The Awajún displayed strong collaborative social behavior on a regular basis. The most representative shared practice was the *Ipaamamu*, a collective work session performed on a reciprocal basis. For individual families who needed the help of others, the man who hosted the event invited his relatives and neighbors to participate in a given project, such as building a new house or opening an agricultural garden, while his wife prepared food and drinks for the volunteer workers. Such events were more than simple calls for help, since they usually turned into festive social events. The leaders of a group also organized work sessions on projects that benefited the community as a whole. Such events included projects like cleaning roads and trails, maintaining common areas and recreational spaces, conducting hunting trips for village festivities, the repair of bridges, etc.

Given the need to defend their lands against the increasing presence of colonizers in

their territory, since the 1970s the Awajún have been members of several indigenous organizations, which place their ethnic claims at the center of their campaigns to advocate for their shared goals. Such goals include defending their collective lands, reducing the risk of losing their ancestral culture, promoting bilingual and bicultural education, advocating for culturally appropriate health care, and gaining representation in political bodies at different levels, among other activities. Since then, indigenous federations representing the Awajún have achieved a significant level of social recognition, technical capacity, and political influence.

Cultural Discontinuity

“The fathers and older brothers of young women still exert an important influence in their lives, but this pressure has been decreasing. However, Awajún men are nowadays more careful when placing women in roles that could make them feel trapped, hopeless, and/or depressed, since that could lead them to hurt themselves.”

Cultural Discontinuity

In the last three decades in particular, the marked generational gap and changes in social roles experienced by the Awajún have been defining a pattern of cultural discontinuity, a break in the transmission of ancestral knowledge between the young and the elders, and the cultural practices associated with them that used to guide their subsistence activities, social interactions, and use of the natural resources.

As a result of the Awajún's increased level of intercultural relations, one of the major areas in which this change has occurred is in their affinity kinship system, particularly when it comes to the traditional pattern of post-matrimonial residence. In traditional Awajún culture, the marriage process had two important steps: (i) the prospective husband had to move to the house of the father of the bride for a period of about two years, during which he had to work hard to impress his father-in-law, and demonstrate that his working skills were enough to maintain a household; and (ii) after this period of work service ended, if the father of the bride

was satisfied, then the new couple was authorized to move to a new house, usually in the settlement where the family of the husband lived.

Nowadays, that situation has changed. Most young Awajún men consider this two-year work period unfair. Accordingly, after living in the house of the father of the bride for a few months, new couples usually decide to build a separate home, forming a new nuclear family and becoming independent. While the appearance of remaining near the house of the father-in-law is oftentimes kept, the economic relations have changed, since the new couples now seek their sustenance in a more independent way.

The fathers and older brothers of young women still exert an important influence in their lives, but this pressure has been decreasing. Given the high rate of suicides among young Awajún women in recent decades, largely as a reaction to decisions that they strongly opposed but were unable to influence, Awajún men are nowadays more careful when it comes to placing young women in roles that could make them feel trapped, hopeless, and/or depressed, since that could lead them to hurt themselves.

There have also been important changes in the selection of spouses. Traditionally, there were certain kinds of relatives that the Awajún were expected to marry (cross cousins), and some types of relationships that were prohibited (parallel cousins). That division, common among ethnic groups with Dravidian kinship

systems, is no longer used as an enforceable criterion for the selection of marriage partners.

Polygynous marriages are also a thing of the past. Formerly, the marriage of a man with more than one woman was common, particularly if the women were sisters. If a man was an efficient hunter and warrior, his father-in-law oftentimes offered him a younger daughter as a second wife. In those cases, they all lived under the same roof. If the wives were not sisters, however, such men usually built two adjacent houses, one for each wife. Today, being a provider for two wives poses significant economic challenges that make this tradition unpractical, besides being a practice that has been widely criticized, particularly by the local settlers.

What has increasingly become more common is intercultural marriage. This situation has been happening mostly between Awajún men and Spanish-speaking women, who are usually the descendants of settlers from other parts of the country that grew up or migrated to the area some time ago. Awajún women, on the other hand, are usually wary of relationships with Spanish-speaking men, who are perceived as unreliable, particularly because it was common for such men to impregnate Awajún women and later abandon them.

The frequency of hunting activities among the Awajún has decreased significantly as well. In the past, hunting was a key part of their sustenance. However, like in the case of the Wachiperi (Tello 2014), the scarcity of wildlife near their villages and the emergence of new

economic alternatives have driven people away from hunting as a means of subsistence, creating a situation in which young men nowadays prefer to become wage laborers or conduct commercial agriculture activities, among other market-oriented activities. Sustenance does not have to come from the forest, so their current efforts are focused on earning money to buy their food.

The production of ceramics and baskets for everyday use has declined significantly as well. This happened in part because of the increased difficulty of obtaining the necessary materials to make pottery items, which stands in stark contrast with the greater availability of manufactured products such as plastic bowls, synthetic plates, fabric bags, and metal pots, among others. This process was also affected by a disruption in the traditional system of knowledge transfer that enabled the Awajún to learn to produce handmade items.

Likewise, the presence of evangelical churches had a significant impact in reducing the consumption of *masato*, a traditional alcoholic drink made by Awajún women out of cassava. Having this drink available allowed families to develop and maintain their social networks, and enroll the work of others when hosting collective work sessions in tasks such as building a new house or opening a new agricultural plot. Without masato, a key component in the festive atmosphere that characterized such collective works, the incentive to participate in these events was

reduced, so it affected the reproduction of this collaborative practice in general.

Also important is the growing demand for pharmaceutical products by the Awajún, since their rapid action and high level of effectiveness have relegated their traditional ethnomedical system to the background, leaving little incentive to learn the medicinal properties of the plants and animals of the forest beyond the basics, which also led them to forego their ancestral knowledge of the symbolic dimension of animals and plants.

There is a significant generational divide as well. Tensions between the elder and younger generations are latent, and as a result, parents no longer transmit their traditional knowledge to their children. In turn, young people do not show any significant interest in learning the ways of their ancestors, their myths, their craftsmanship skills, their knowledge of the forest, or their interactions with people outside their family groups. Schools and churches have become the new source of knowledge about life, society, and the environment.

The rupture of the Awajún's traditional system of knowledge transfer has also turned the attention of the youth to other areas, diversifying their options and expectations in areas that are significantly different from what used to be expected in their traditional culture. Instead of becoming skilled hunters, potters, warriors, gardeners, or traditional healers, young people nowadays seek opportunities related to higher education, with many of them

dreaming of becoming bilingual teachers, agricultural extensionists, forestry technicians, nurses, tour guides, traders, and others forms of salaried employment available for people who complete their secondary education. The combined and cumulative effect of such changes has created a significant cultural discontinuity.

These changes have also brought some benefits for the Awajún, particularly for the women, who have gradually gained more freedom, a greater ability to make decisions over their own lives, and higher participation in public spaces. Examples include the access of women to higher education, their participation as officers of local governments, their election as municipal councilors, their presence in the regional government, their election as leaders of Awajún communities, as well as their appointment as officers of regional indigenous organizations. Together, these changes provide a favorable outlook regarding the participation of women in society, as part of their continuous efforts to achieve equal opportunities.

Development projects and conservation initiatives carried out with the Awajún have only glimpsed the deep cultural changes among them, and their potential role as local partners. The perception of homogenous indigenous villages maintaining their traditional ways is no longer valid; the Awajún communities are now composed of heterogeneous groups internally differentiated by age, gender, religion, level of education, perceptions of the environment, and expectations for the future, among other factors.

Each of these groups has their own needs, goals, knowledge, and potential of contribution as agents of change, within and outside their communities. Cultural discontinuity, multiculturalism, gender, and internal heterogeneity are key features of the new social face of the Awajún, which should be taken into account in order to understand their culture and society.

This concludes the main body of the book. If you found this information valuable, I encourage you to please consider leaving a review. I would highly appreciate your feedback, even if it is just a few words. Your ideas and opinions may also help other people benefit from the content provided in these pages.

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About the Author

Glend Seitz is an anthropologist with extensive experience with indigenous peoples. He holds a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and a master's degree in Amazonian studies from the University of San Marcos, Peru. He started studying the way of life of the Awajún two decades ago, when he was an undergraduate student who became fascinated by both their ancestral traditions and their rapid cultural change. He currently lives in the city of Chachapoyas, Peru, working for a nonprofit organization as regional coordinator of environmental conservation initiatives and sustainable development projects, with the Awajún and other local communities.

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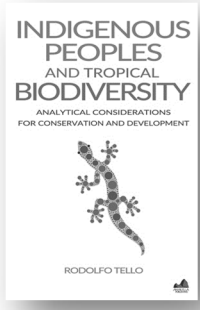

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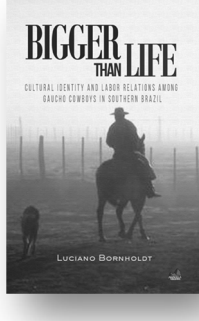

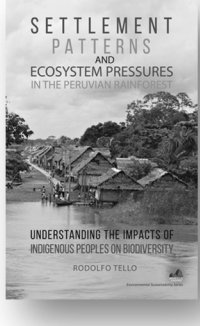

Settlement Patterns and Ecosystem Pressures in the Peruvian Rainforest: Understanding the Impacts of Indigenous Peoples on Biodiversity

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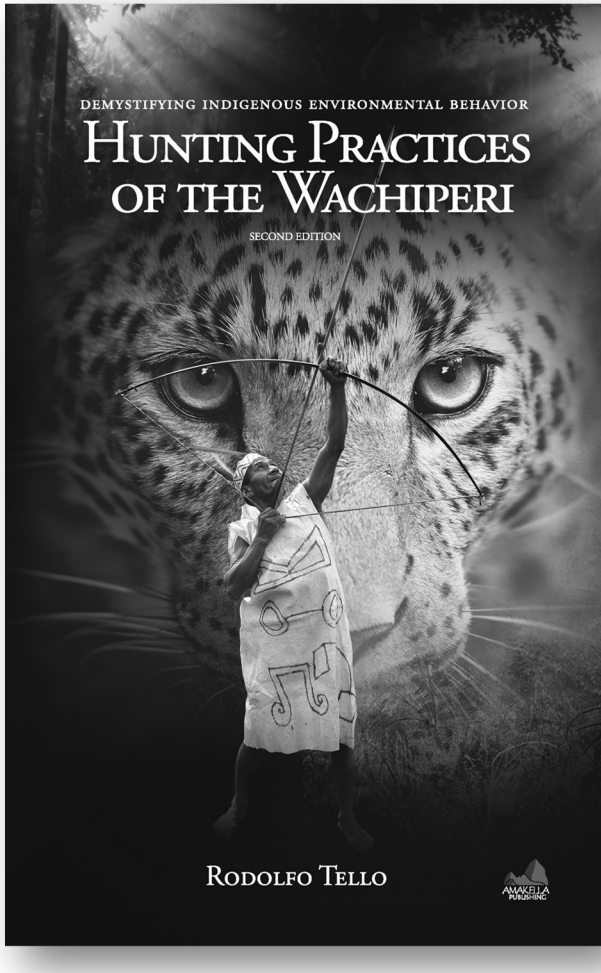

A sample chapter is included next.

Bonus Content

Sample chapter from *"Hunting Practices of the Wachiperi: Demystifying Indigenous Environmental Behavior," by Rodolfo Tello.*

Introduction

Becoming the first indigenous community entrusted by the Peruvian government with the responsibility of managing a protected natural area was not something that happened by accident. It was the result of a long and evolving process, where the courage of the Wachiperi of Queros to undertake and succeed in this novel initiative took many people by surprise. The experience of the Wachiperi is one of survival, innovation and hope. It is also an example that targeting both environmental conservation and socioeconomic development simultaneously is not only desirable but also achievable, if we first take the time to understand what drives indigenous environmental behavior.

In 2008, the leader of the community of Queros signed a contract with the Peruvian government to manage a conservation concession for a renewable period of forty years. This event was the result of a partnership between an indigenous community and an environmental organization. It provided people

from Queros with the required technical and financial support to embark on this environmental initiative. The adoption of this strategy by the Wachiperi was a clear indication of their active engagement in natural resource conservation.

The Wachiperi, however, did not always display an environmentally friendly attitude. In the last few decades, there were also times when their harvesting activities led directly to the degradation of the local natural resources. As such, the experience of the Wachiperi also provides a great example of the variation through time of indigenous environmental behavior.

The impact of indigenous peoples on tropical biodiversity through animal hunting has been a key area of discussion. The analysis of the hunting practices of the Wachiperi provides insights into the larger debate about the relationship between indigenous peoples and biodiversity in tropical forests. Key questions explored in this book are: What explains the variation in the levels of hunting intensity among the Wachiperi? To what extent do regional historical processes help explain the current intensity of hunting? How has the social division of labor shaped their hunting practices? How important are cross-cultural factors in the establishment of their present levels of hunting? What are the most significant factors influencing their current levels of hunting? And what are the implications of changes in the intensity of hunting for both biodiversity and the living conditions of the Wachiperi?

In a context where indigenous ways of life are greatly influenced by environmental policies and practices guided by preconceived notions which assume intrinsic behavioral patterns, this book fills a crucial gap in practical knowledge about the environmental behavior of indigenous peoples. It also provides methodological guidance to elucidate this process, based on ethnographic research conducted among the Wachiperi of Queros, an indigenous community located in the Peruvian rainforest.

The community of Queros is situated within the Kosñipata District of the Cusco Region in Peru, in the Amazonian multiple-use zone of Manu National Park, a place with one of the highest concentrations of biodiversity on Earth. The weather in the area near Queros is warm and humid, with abundant rain throughout the year, particularly between November and March.

The Wachiperi have lived in the Kosñipata Valley for about a thousand years (Llosa and Nieto 2003). They alternated between periods of conflict and peace with other indigenous groups in that region. They also traded coca leaves and ornamental feathers with the Incas. Beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, the Spaniards started establishing agricultural plantations in the area, occasionally exchanging products with the Wachiperi (Califano 1985).

Despite these exchanges, the Wachiperi did not establish permanent relationships with

members of Western society until the middle of the twentieth century, when their interactions with outsiders brought about the transmission of external diseases, particularly smallpox, which killed approximately 65 percent of the Wachiperi population (Pinasco 2002: 13). These massive population losses had dramatic affects on the Wachiperi. One notable change was the forced resettlement into a Baptist mission that had recently been established in the area. The missionaries invited the surviving Wachiperi to live in the mission, offering them various kinds of support and medical attention. This relocation was a major event for the Wachiperi, who in the span of a few years saw their lives deeply transformed.

The fact that the Wachiperi maintained a relatively independent way of life until the 1950s, however, placed them in a different position from most groups in the Amazon region. For the most part, these groups had been severely disrupted by colonization since the earlier stages of Spanish occupation in the sixteenth century (Lathrap 1973).

The establishment of closer relationships between the Wachiperi and members of Western society created significant changes in their livelihoods. Shortly after moving into the Baptist mission, the Wachiperi adopted market-oriented activities in addition to their customary practices of subsistence. Their interactions with missionaries, along with the increasing number of settlers coming to the Kosñipata Valley in the following decades, created significant changes

in the Wachiperi lifestyle. This posed a significant challenge to find ways to combine their expectations for socioeconomic development with the conservation of the natural resources. Conserving the local forests was important for their subsistence, as was their growing need for market products, which were gradually introduced into their way of life.

As a result of these changes, some activities like hunting experienced a significant reduction during the last five decades. Other activities experienced intensification, such as agriculture. Currently, a large portion of the community's agricultural production is intended for sale in Pillcopata, a nearby town and the political capital of the Kosñipata district. Pillcopata is mostly inhabited by former settlers who came to the area about three decades ago.

The current population of Queros is approximately sixty people, which represents a tiny fraction of the Wachiperi population before the middle of the twentieth century. People from Queros frequently visit Pillcopata, where they have relatives and friends. Some members of Queros even live in Pillcopata on a full-time basis. Accordingly, the community of Queros should be understood not as a territorially bounded village, but mainly as a network of people whose activities transcend a single physical space.

Pillcopata is located about seven miles away from Queros, and is connected by a single dirt road. Queros residents make frequent trips to Pillcopata, which takes about two hours on

foot. Buses run three times a week from Pillcopata to Cusco, the closest city in the region, on a trip that takes almost nine hours. Although Queros is the community where most Wachiperi are currently concentrated, some Wachiperi families live in other indigenous communities, adding another thirty individuals. However, for practical reasons, mention of the Wachiperi in this book is limited only to people belonging to this indigenous group who are members of the Queros community.

Changes in the hunting practices of the Wachiperi are significant because hunting used to be critical to their subsistence in the ancestral way of life. Today, the intensity of hunting in Queros is significantly lower than the hunting levels they had around the middle of the twentieth century. Their current harvest of meat is for subsistence, to celebrate festivities in the community, for recreational purposes, and to prepare meals for their guests. The main animals hunted are small- and medium-sized terrestrial mammals like armadillos, peccaries, tapirs, paces, deer, and capybaras. Birds are also hunted on a regular basis, including six's guan, white-throated dynamo, and **common piping guan.** In addition to hunting, other contemporary activities include agriculture, logging, gathering, fishing, raising chicken, tourism, conservation, and working as salaried employees.

The community of Queros provides unique insights into the modern-day behavior of indigenous groups, such as their involvement in

processes different from the ancestral practices of subsistence commonly associated with indigenous communities. These new processes include the management of a conservation concession, the establishment of a partnership with a regional environmental organization, their engagement in community-based tourism activities, and commercially oriented agriculture, among others. The existence of members with college education working on these projects is another factor that illustrates the extent that higher education can make a difference in the activities undertaken by indigenous communities.

Unlike positions that perceive indigenous peoples as natural conservationists (Clay 1988: 4; Posey 1998: 115; Warren 2001: 453; Meggers 1971: 2) or as threats to tropical biodiversity (Terborgh 2000: 1359; Redford and Sanderson 2000: 1362; Robinson et al. 1999: 595; Oates 2000: B6), the analytical approach adopted in this book recognizes indigenous peoples as adaptive agents whose environmental behavior varies according to their specific conditions (Balée and Erickson 2006: 12; Chicchon 1993: 15; Berkes and Folke 1998: 10). To analyze the factors that encourage indigenous communities either to pursue sustainable livelihoods or to adopt practices leading to environmental degradation, relevant publications identified different factors affecting indigenous environmental behavior in tropical forests. I grouped these contributions into biological

models, socioeconomic approaches, and cultural explanations, along with the historical processes associated with particular settings.

The way I address this general body of literature is to acknowledge that all the factors identified as influential to indigenous environmental behavior may be important in some cases but not in others. However, since the relevance of each potentially influential factor varies from one setting to another, and such variation has not been adequately accounted for, this situation required adopting an approach based on a more flexible understanding of the issues surrounding the variation in environmental behavior. Thus, I searched for an analytical framework capable of (i) exploring the potential of multiple factors identified as influential in different geographical and cultural contexts, (ii) allowing for the identification of the most relevant factors influencing environmental behavior and the way they interact in each particular research setting, and (iii) articulating different levels of analysis to understand the interplay between multiple influential factors within a historical perspective. I found that such an approach is provided by the ethnographic application of the root-cause analysis methodology (Steadman-Edwards 1998; Wood et al. 2000). This methodology offers the means to identify and differentiate between the root causes and the proximate causes of variation in environmental outcomes and processes. Root-cause analysis

also provides a high level of flexibility when identifying the most influential aspects of environmental behavior, according to the particular conditions of each research setting. Based on this approach, I examined the different factors that the literature identified as potentially influential and evaluated their local relevance among the Wachiperi, within the context of the historical processes and events associated with this group.

While conducting this study, I focused on the variation of the intensity of the hunting practices of the Wachiperi since the middle of the twentieth century. Hunting intensity is understood here as an operational term that indicates the level of pressure on forest animals, defined by the frequency of hunting and the number of animals hunted. The lack of baseline information did not allow for direct comparisons, so I relied on reconstructions based on the recollections of the Wachiperi about the intensity of their hunting practices in different historical moments, and the identification of patterns in their hunting behavior.

At a more general level, this book provides analytical insights into the socioeconomic and environmental processes underlying the relationship between indigenous peoples and tropical biodiversity, addressing crucial issues for members, friends, and allies of indigenous communities, environmental anthropologists, conservation scientists, interdisciplinary practitioners, academics,

students, and people interested in socially sustainable environmental conservation in general, particularly those involved in the design and implementation of conservation policies and programs.

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END OF SAMPLE CHAPTER

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Over time, indigenous groups in the Amazon region have developed subsistence strategies and cultural practices associated with the use of natural resources, reflecting a process of cultural adaptation to their ecological environment. However, the intensification of their intercultural relations during the last few decades has been in many cases creating a series of ruptures in their social fabric—disruptions that have significant implications for their traditional knowledge, subsistence practices, and social interactions. Among the Awajún, this is particularly apparent in areas such as the perception and use of their natural environment, the relationships between women and men, the interactions between people from different age groups, their patterns of residential mobility, the establishment of working relationships, the diversification of their livelihoods, and the definition of their life goals in general. This book explores the effects of such cultural discontinuity among the Awajún of the Peruvian rainforest, revealing the patterns of their new social face.

Glend Seitz is an anthropologist with extensive experience with indigenous peoples. He holds a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology and a master's degree in Amazonian studies from the University of San Marcos, Peru. He started studying the way of life of the Awajún two decades ago, when he was an undergraduate student who became fascinated by both their ancestral traditions and their rapid cultural change. He currently lives in the city of Chachapoyas, Peru, working for a nonprofit organization as regional coordinator of environmental conservation initiatives and sustainable development projects, with the Awajún and other local communities.

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