

# **BUILDING BODIES, BALANCING POWERS**

**- OF INSIDES, OUTSIDES AND CHANGING NOTIONS OF  
MALE AND FEMALE PERSONHOOD AMONG THE  
MATSES OF THE WESTERN AMAZON**

# Abstract

**Building bodies, balancing powers – of insides, outsides and changing notions of male and female personhood among the Matses of the western Amazon.** By Anna Kovasna. Masters Thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, Lund University.

This Masters thesis in Social Anthropology is based on fieldwork carried out among the Matses in the Peruvian Amazon. The study examines local notions of male and female personhood, illness and medicine as well as how these are changing in the current context characterized by an increasing integration of Matses and national society. By combining theories on social reproduction and the person as an agent-in-society it aims to show that personhood is practiced on a field where social structure and cultural specificities interact to enable different actors to act in different ways. Changes in the social field will thus lead to changing possibilities to act as a proper human person as well as to changing definitions of what a human person is.

This general understanding of personhood and social change is combined with current anthropological theory on personhood and society in the Amazon, where the corporeal shaping of individuals and the relational nature of human personhood are emphasized. It is argued that Matses individuals are dependent on the actions of several human and nonhuman people to grow into proper gendered human persons. Matses personhood is shown to be articulated in relations with both the human and the nonhuman, where sociable intrahuman relations mainly contribute to the buildup of personhood while relations with the nonhuman are characterized by a precarious balance of power and primarily threaten to break it down. It is argued that a Matses person therefore is dependent on maintaining strong and caring relations with other humans to be sufficiently strong to deal with the sphere outside of human society and the dangerous interactions taking place there. Looking at how notions of personhood are changing, it is argued that national society to a varying degree has come to replace both inside and outside relations and that both kinds today are characterized by a perceived lack of power that can be explained both by a redefinition of the Matses person and changes in social reproduction that has placed the control of necessary resources and relations outside of Matses hands.

**Key words:** Matses, personhood, social reproduction, gender, illness, Amazon, Peru

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## ***The embarrassed jaguar***

*'Do you know', my interpreter said as I climbed down the steps to leave the house, 'that he used to turn into a jaguar every night? His wife would hear the growling sounds of jaguars in his chest as they were falling asleep, and in the morning, although no one had seen him leave, he would wake up with fur stuck between his teeth. For a long time he was like that, each night he would become a jaguar and go hunt'. 'No, I did not know', I answered, slightly taken aback that the man I had just talked to, who spoke Spanish better than most others, who repeatedly had invited me over to his house to eat and talk and who from the look of things had more than average success in his dealings with national society for years apparently had had the problem of shifting species each night. 'I figured he wouldn't tell you', my interpreter continued, 'Everybody knows about it but I think he is a bit embarrassed by the whole thing'. Embarrassed, I thought, - maybe worried would be a more appropriate feeling? I was going to have to look into this.*



# 1 Making introductions

## 1.1 Aims and research questions

This study is based on fieldwork carried out among the Matses, a small Amerindian group living on both sides of the Peru-Brazil border in the western reaches of the Amazon jungle<sup>1</sup>. The study has many aims, one of them being to understand what a human person is if such a person can turn into a jaguar at night; another to understand in what kind of world such an occurrence would be more embarrassing than anything else. In more theoretical terms, the primary aim in this thesis is to investigate Matses notions of personhood, particularly the constitution of the human male and female person. I also want to examine how the Matses understand illness and medicine and how these understandings are related to notions of personhood. In addition, I want to grasp how increasing contacts with national society and changing patterns of social reproduction fit together with changing conceptions of the human person and how these two aspects of change intertwine and affect each other. My main research questions are thus:

- What are the distinguishing features of Matses notions of human male and female personhood?
- How does an individual become a proper gendered Matses person and through which processes can that personhood be lost?
- How do the Matses conceptualize illness and medicine and what do these conceptions say about Matses notions of personhood?
- How are Matses notions of human male and female personhood affected by the ongoing integration with national society, and how can those changes be explained?
- In which ways are changes in notions of Matses personhood themselves an integral part of the ongoing integration with national society?

In addition, I hope that my results rather than being another depressing illustration of unavoidable assimilation can provide an understanding of how Matses society could change in a more sustainable way.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for map of the region detailing the location of Matses settlements

## 1.2 Some notes on approaches and terminology

In answering these questions I have drawn on theories of social reproduction and social change as explained by Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman, who define social reproduction as a concept that “traces the cycles leading from production to consumption to new production, in whatever social form” (Ekholm & Friedman 1985: 105). In accordance with this, I have largely focused on processes of production, exchange relations and consumption in my search for why and how notions of personhood are changing.

The way I use personhood is much inspired by Harris (1989) and Pollock (1996), who both conceive of the person as an agent-in-society, by which they mean a carrier out of culturally meaningful action on a particular social arena. With the help of Friedman and Ekholm-Friedman I attempt to show how that social arena is created in an articulation of social structure and cultural specificities, where personhood and the strategies of practice that stem from local understandings of the person play a central part. In more general terms, personhood can to me be defined as a concept that refers to the collections of traits, qualities, capacities and relationships that are seen to constitute a person (male, female, human, nonhuman or other) in a given sociocultural context.

To look at changes in notions of human personhood, I needed to construct a baseline against which that change could be measured. While that baseline is artificial in the sense that it is an arbitrary freeze frame of a continuous process where I on top of that have excluded much dissonance to create a clear picture, I think it is absolutely necessary for the discussion. In constructing this image of how things used to be, I have relied much on information provided by elderly Matses and on stories of how things used to be some decades ago. I have also found great help in a dissertation written by Steven Romanoff (1984), who did fieldwork among the Matses during the mid-seventies, when the Matses only recently had established the peaceful and permanent contact with national society that remains to this day.

While my interest in illness and medicine to some extent goes beyond what they may say about the constitution of the human person it has also been one of the main ways I have accessed such notions, especially while in the field where questions about illness and medicine provided a great avenue for inquiries into more profound issues. As Rosengren (2005) points out, within medical anthropology it is common to distinguish between ‘illness’ and ‘disease’, where disease is used for biomedically defined pathological states whereas illness denotes a person’s culturally based perception and experience of such a state. I do not use the word disease, partly because I agree with Rosengren that the distinction is ethnocentric, partly because I have no interest in any understanding of illness other than that which people themselves act on in their daily lives. A substantial part of my material on illness, furthermore, concerns what I have chosen to call spirit retaliation. For this, the Matses use the word *quid*, which Fleck (2006: 10) translates as ‘retaliate’ or ‘reciprocate’. Of these two, I have chosen retaliate since all actions called *quid* that I knowingly came across quite easily can be classified as aggression, whereby ‘retaliate’ in this case feels closer to the actual

use of the word. In the analysis of illness and personhood as the Matses see them, the anthropological literature on the matter has been of great help.

Another note on terminology that may need clarification is that I have chosen to refer to non-Matses society as national society. I do this even though the economic flows in which the Matses are becoming more and more enmeshed not at all are limited to Peruvian or Brazilian society, partly because most of those flows filter through national society and partly because it is a convenient term that describes what to me is an interaction between two still clearly separated social worlds. Talking about national society I call its inhabitants nationals. I also make use of the word *mestizo*, which is a Spanish word used to refer to nationals of mixed ethnic origin, European and indigenous, although many *mestizos* simply are assimilated Amerindians living in national society. The word is what the Matses themselves use when they speak of nationals in Spanish. To refer to the Matses and other Amazonian peoples, I use those two terms or Amerindian, which is used in much of the anthropological literature on the region. A few times I also use Indian, but only when I speak of the uneven relationship between nationals and Matses, when the slightly derogatory ring of the word to me illustrates the attitudes of national society towards Amazonian peoples.

### **1.3 Material and delimitations**

The material presented in this thesis was collected during two months of fieldwork in a Matses village in Peru, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter. Regarding written material, I have been somewhat limited since some potentially important works have been difficult to access. This is true for many doctoral dissertations and especially lamentable with regards to Matlock's (2002) monograph on the Matses, which I have only had access to in an uncompleted form, and Erikson's (1999) work on the Matis, which I have only had the opportunity to leaf through and read sections of at I time when I sadly did not take very proper notes. Many articles published in Spanish and Portuguese are also difficult to find in Sweden. In both cases, I am grateful to David Fleck who supplied me with a lot of material I would otherwise have not have found.

The Matses are not a very well known group, so sources that deal directly with them are not so plentiful. A brief review of ethnographic literature on the Matses can be found in appendix 1. Many of these sources provide details on exchange networks and relations to national society, which has been of great use to me. Material concerning personhood and cosmology is, however, rather scarce. For the greatest part, I have thus relied on material from other Amazonian groups for clues how to best approach and analyze notions of personhood, humanity and humanity's place in the world.

Many of my delimitations have come as a natural consequence of my choice of theories, such as my focus on social reproduction rather than, for example, warfare or myth. As with much writing, however, it has still been difficult to choose which parts not to include. Myths and stories are one such thing I have not included; another is looking closer at the aging person. The anthropological material Amazonian personhood, furthermore, emphasizes the importance of agency, relationships and a conscious shaping of the body and its capacities and has served to direct my attention in such a

direction. Because of limitations of time and space I have chosen to not go deep into historical sources or seek out standards works such as those by Tessmann (1938) or Steward (1948), but have instead placed priority on current theory, my own material and the rich sources of information provided by Romanoff (1984), Matlock (2002) and Fleck (e.g. 2003, 2001). The material I do present on historical aspects of Matses society is adapted from secondary sources, primarily from Romanoff (1984) and focuses on Matses adaptations to the social environment, which both Romanoff (1984: ) and Matlock (2002: 3) identify as the most critical aspect of explaining both former and ongoing economical, social and cultural change. In my characterization of Matses social structure, I have as already pointed out chosen to focus on production, exchange relations and consumption rather than for example kinship, since this is congruent with my overall theoretical approach. For more in-depth analyses of Matses history and place in the regional context I recommend Matlock (2002), Fleck (2003) and Erikson (1994).

## **1.4 Disposition of the text**

The text is structured so as to mirror itself in several ways. The first half takes the reader through general discussion of personhood, social reproduction and social change as well as a more specific discussion of anthropological theories on the person and society in Amazonia. The first half of the analysis then takes the reader through the somewhat idealized image of buildup and growth of the Matses male and female person from conception to adulthood. The second half instead treats central changes in the relations that constitute the Matses person and ends with a discussion where the main theoretical discussion concerns personhood, social reproduction and social change.

In terms of chapters, this introductory chapter is followed by chapter 2, which contains a methodological discussion and a report on my doings in the field. Chapter 3 then describes the Matses and their society and is meant to also provide an overview of the local historical context. Chapter 3 deals with theoretical issues of personhood, social reproduction, culture and social change and is followed by another largely theoretical chapter, number 5, focusing on present day theory of personhood and society in Amazonia. This is followed by two chapters detailing a more traditional view of the buildup of the Matses person from infancy to adulthood. These chapters, 6 and 7, are interspersed with interlude 1, which provides a deeper insight into ideas and practices of the buildup of human persons through the transfer of energy and skill. Interlude 1 is mirrored by interlude 2, which instead details ideas of illness and the breaking down of human personhood. Interlude 2 is placed before chapter 8, which in turn contains a summary synthesis of the material presented so far. After this, the discussion instead focuses on changes of earlier conceptions of personhood as well as concomitant social and cosmological dittoes. These are presented in three chapters where chapter 9 is about the switch from *sinan* to money, chapter 10 details changes in the conceptualization of illness and death and chapter 11, lastly, concerns Matses self-identification. Chapter 12, finally, contains a second synthesis and my final conclusions and observations.

## 2 Being there

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. ... Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. ... This exactly describes my first initiation into field work on the south coast of New Guinea (Malinowski 1922: 4).

Thus writes Malinowski, and although I rather than finding myself on a tropical beach stepped ashore on a muddy riverbank in the Amazon nearly 100 years later, his words are a fair description of how I felt when I did so. Doing fieldwork with an Amerindian community deep within the Amazon has this undeniable effect of placing the anthropologist face to face with the history of her discipline, including the post modern critique against it with its questions of authority, representation, power, voice, exoticism, relativity and more (e.g. Clifford 1983, Marcus 1995, Geertz 1988).

In dealing with some of these problems as well as relating to ethnographic research before such things were discussed, I find that being aware of how my relations to others influence the end result is fruitful. Looking at how those relations are shaped by both personalities and the wider context of history and power to me makes it easier to understand both the ethnographic research process and its end product. Self reflection is also the ethnographer's friend because there is much to learn from one's own reactions and the twists and turns, or abrupt halts, of interactions in the field. This does not mean that I find it is necessary to include myself in the text at all times, but it does mean that a portion of the discussion in this chapter is about such interactions. It also contains a discussion of power and context since I find those parameters fundamental for understanding anything in this world.

Matters of representation I find more difficult. As for example Overing and Passes point out, Europe has a long history of creating imaginary Amazonian worlds, filled with cannibals, warriors, shamans and monsters of every imaginable kind; and, naturally, with alternately noble and beastly savages (2000b: 11). I cannot deny that these myths hold some sway over me. I have tried to avoid this form of exoticism by providing what I hope is enough contextual information to show that the Matses are ordinary people simply living their lives under circumstances shaped by both historical and global contexts.

Another important matter of representation as well as voice and authority is raised by Clifford (1983: 120), who wonders "[h]ow, precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined, cross cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more-or-less discrete "other world", composed by an individual author?". Cultural clashes and power relations I have already dealt with. When it comes to the composition and the final image, the representation of this more-or-less discrete "other world", I think that it unavoidably is

my creation. It is I who through my interactions with others and my way of interpreting these have constructed the material on which this thesis builds. Additionally, to imagine that it is possible to understand the world without relating it to oneself or present something without also presenting oneself is to me a great fallacy.

Still, the creation is not only mine, because interactions are like tango, they take two, at least, and I consciously engaged my informants in conversations about my results, thoughts, ideas and behavior and thus continuously tried to seek out misunderstandings, clashes, dissonance and what Agar would call breakdowns (Agar 1986: 21). Although the end product is mine, it has thus come about in dialogue with others. Little of this dialogue is apparent to the reader of my text, although I have tried to give voice to different people by including quotes and transcripts from many of my interviews. The way I see it, while doing ethnography definitely amounts to creating an image of an “other”, it is also about becoming a bit more like that other and the other becoming a bit more like you. That ethnography builds on dialogue is to me therefore unavoidable, although the ethnographer tends to get the last word, which I incidentally find completely in order as long as everybody knows what is happening and the context in which that dialogue takes place is well understood. Speaking of my own authority, I can definitely note that having been where not so many go goes a long way since there is hardly anyone else who contradict what I say on the same grounds. In my case, being an eye-witness thus goes a long way towards becoming an I-witness (Geertz 1988).

## **2.1 Where, when and under what circumstances**

During April and May 2007 I spent a total of 7 seven weeks in Matses territory on the Peruvian side of the Peru – Brazil border, more exactly in the north-east of the country, in the southern part of the Loreto region, in sub-region Yaquerana. Most of my time was spent in the village of Estiron on Choba creek, or Chobayacu, a tributary to the Yavari river. One week was spent in a hunting camp on Añushiyacu, another creek about five hours walk away. In both locations I lodged and ate together with different families.

Most of my work required the assistance of an interpreter since few Matses know or are comfortable enough to express themselves in Spanish. The younger generations have all learnt Spanish in school, but since chances for real interactions are few and far between it is usually only those, mostly men between 35 and 50, who have been in prolonged contact with the Spanish speaking, non-Matses, population for reasons such as work, religious education or a career in politics that actually speak it voluntarily. My main contact and supposed host was a man in his upper thirties who was also going to be my interpreter. Sadly, after helping me with preparations he had to stay in Iquitos to take care of personal matters, making me quite literally lost for words for a substantial part of my time in the field. In addition, the goods I had bought to trade for food, lodging and interviews did not arrive until the beginning of my last two weeks in field, incidentally together with my host. For more than a month I was thus on my own and completely dependent on the goodwill of the people of Estiron, who, luckily, were both good and willing. Unlike Matlock (2002), I had no difficulties with permissions to visit, unwillingness to share information or excessive demands for material compensation.

## **2.2 Arrival – entering the field**

After a flight to the military post of Angamos, eight hours in a canoe, having lost both interpreter and goods of the way, and managed to find a place to stay my next step unavoidable was to get know people. But how do you get to know someone you cannot share a single word with? I decided that the way forward by necessity started with a week of devoting myself to language studies. So I did, with two interruptions. The first was a rumor that I was an agent of Petro Peru sent out to spy on the Matses. This led to a meeting where I got the chance to explain myself and my reasons for visiting to a majority of Estiron's adult population. Although not very pleasant at the time, this meeting proved very productive since my assurances that I wanted to learn everything about Matses life earned me several invitations to partake in various activities and learn all types of traditional handicraft. Very tentatively, I felt like I was starting to find my way through the seemingly impenetrable thicket of incomprehensibility and cultural differences. Then, after four days in the field, one such invitation led to an early wakeup call and inquiries as to whether I wanted to go with another family to hunt for a week in Añushiyacu. Of course I wanted to, and twenty minutes later I was on my way.

## **2.3 Añushiyacu – life and death in an outlier settlement**

### **2.3.1 A more traditional setup**

The settlement at Añushiyacu consists of one small but traditional longhouse accompanied by one smaller house, a large outdoor kitchen and some small and temporary huts for working. Like all Matses settlements, it is located near a river. In accordance with the earlier settlement pattern now abandoned by the Matses, the buildings are in the center of a garden where all the usual crops have been planted. It is by far the most traditional setup I had the chance to see. Construction of the buildings as well as the clearing and planting of the field was initiated and organized by two of the leading men in the village, and the place is used by them and their extended families.

Añushiyacu is a place where people go to hunt and eat meat and can according to me together with the village be considered the continuation of what Romanoff during his time with the Matses in the mid-seventies described as a center/outlier settlement pattern. According to him, this pattern arose because of the increasing sedentarization and concentration of the population around the new missionary station on upper Choba creek, leading to depletion of game and sanitary problems near this main settlement. To counter the ill effects of this while not giving up the benefits of being close to the missionaries, people started to build outlier longhouses where they spent part of the year instead of moving from house to house abandoning the old settlement completely, as before (Romanoff 1984: 186).

Although they no longer live with the missionaries, the settlement pattern of the Matses is perhaps more sedentary today than before, because even though people may move from settlement to settlement, the actual villages are of a more permanent nature. The outliers of today, however, and judging from Añushiyacu, are used for shorter visits of one or two weeks rather than as actual second homes used for longer periods of time.

People go there to eat meat when the diet in Estiron gets boring, and also bring back as much smoked meat as possible. The difference in diet is in fact striking, with large quantities of meat served with every meal.

### **2.3.3 Longhouse life behind the curtains**

Limited as I was by linguistic difficulties, my activities in Añushiyacu mainly consisted of getting accustomed to real life in the jungle through observation and participation in daily activities. Most of all, I got over my squeamishness and learnt a lot about the killing, singeing, gutting and cooking of a whole range of animals I formerly only had seen at the zoo. This later proved very hard for me to do in Estiron, since people there live and hunt separately and all catches are taken home to be treated in the back yard.

Living so closely together with other people also made it impossible to avoid such mandatory activities as bathing every dawn and sunset, sleeping above burning embers to keep warm despite the heat, eat monkey intestine soup and in other ways adapt to Matses daily life. Long-house life is also far less private than village life, where sleeping quarters for an example are separated from the rest of the house and rarely are entered or seen by guests. To live in such a setting gave me a greater understanding of their society both now and earlier. The degree of social control, for example, must vary immensely with settlement pattern. There is nowhere to hide in a longhouse; the presence of others and the social pressure to behave correctly was constantly there.

Apart from invaluable friendships with the two brothers and their families I was there with, which became an absolute key in accessing the field that helped me immensely once back in Estiron, the most instructive part of being in Añushiyacu was an understanding of the time and skills required for hunting as well as for the elevated status of the good hunter in Matses society. I too soon shouted with excitement when the homecoming hunters first could be heard and enthusiastically inspected and inquired about the day's kills. A welcome break from more monotonous household chores, the return of the hunters felt like Christmas every day.

## **2.4 Estiron**

### **2.4.1 The village**

Estiron is a relatively large village of approximately 200 persons, children included. It is located on an elevation right next to a few sharp turns of Choba creek and is centered on a large field most frequently used for soccer and volleyball. There is a new and very basic medical station, a church and two small shops mainly devoted to selling cookies when someone asks for it. The first houses were built in the year 2000 by people moving away from the large but diminishing settlement further up the river, where the missionaries until then had been stationed. People mostly live in nuclear family dwellings, although some older women live with their sons and young adults or recent arrivals who have yet to build their first house live with their parents or in-laws. Note also that a nuclear family can include more than one wife.



A large fraction of the villagers are closely related. The rest come from different families more distantly, but nevertheless also, related to the rest. The village also harbors a bird of a different feather, namely Dr. David Fleck, who recently moved there to go native full time. His presence, knowledge and fluency in Matses were immensely helpful to me, for which I am greatly thankful.

### **2.4.2 An interpreter and social as well as academic developments**

Right after my return from Añushiyacu, Estiron hosted a meeting of all Matses chiefs, giving me a great chance to dip my ears into a torrent of gossip and get a better grasp of Matses relations with the outside world as well as the internal political structure and situation. The main benefit of the meeting, for me, was the appearance of a man from another village who for many years worked with Dr. Fleck. A proposition was made and I suddenly has a guide and interpreter for five days.

Despite some differences in sense of humor, we had five productive days together, doing 16 interviews which became crucial for narrowing my topic and tailoring the ones who followed later. Dr. Fleck also helped me go through material gathered on medicinal walks, i.e. trips to the jungle to learn about Matses medicine, health and illness. This too helped me see the gaps in my early questions so that I could correct and better them for coming trips. With an interpreter I could also make introductory social visits to most houses, after which I was able to slowly start building by own social network. I learnt that it was both acceptable and expected of me to go on spontaneous visits, invariably involving food, although I never quite got used to doing it. The more I got to know people, the more we could also talk to each other; me learning some Matses, them losing some of their inhibitions to speak Spanish and both parties starting to have some common experiences talk about. In fact, my single most effective icebreaker was a story of how I in Añushiyacu first had started to cry when a sloth was singed alive and then had refused to eat a monkey head for dinner. Small things can become great tools.

#### **2.4.2.2 Less talking, more doing**

When the end of my five days came, both doctor and interpreter left for Angamos. Again unable to interview or have substantial conversations, I decided that the best thing to do was to continue working on both language and social relationships by taking part in as many activities as possible. The following week was thus filled with a bout of very classic participant observation where I learnt (well, sort of) how to fish with hooks and poison, harvest manioc, make manioc flour, make two types of fermented drinks, weed fields, gather wild fruits, spin cotton, make traditional bracelets (although that is a skill I never got the hang of), make string from palm-leaf fiber and weave that string into hammocks, ornaments and fishing nets, weave fans, mats and baskets and gather and prepare the materials for doing so. I also partook in my first frog poison ritual. I will return to this ritual and the skill transfer in greater detail later on, for now, it suffices to say that taking part, which means having someone burn holes on your arm, pinch the skin off and put the toxic secretions of an arboreal jungle frog in the wounds to make you vomit bile and feel as if your blood volume just doubled and all of it tries to fit into your head, certainly gave me more respect among the villagers.

### 2.4.2.3 From misery to magic

I remember the long visits I paid to the village during the first weeks; the feeling of hopelessness and despair after many obstinate but futile attempts had entirely failed to bring me into real touch with the natives, or supply me with any material. I had periods of despondency, when I buried myself in the reading of novels, as a man might take to drink in a fit of tropical depression and boredom (Malinowski 1922: 4)

Again, Malinowski manages to capture my feelings, for the following week was indeed one of despondence, doubts and despair. First at all, everyone got malaria. At least that is what it seemed like. All in all, about a quarter of the population got malaria during my time in Estiron. This was the first outbreak, which gave me ample opportunities to talk about health and illness, but which also meant that many of my newfound acquaintances and informants left for Angamos to seek treatment for themselves or their children. Despicable in itself, the outbreak also joined forces with a bronchial infection that had me floored for a few days. After giving away some of my supply of gas to transport the sick downstream, I thus spent most of the week ill, lonely and homesick, buried in a novel and wondering if my things and my interpreter would ever arrive, knowing very well that their absence was the only thing between me, a completed study and a quick escape. By the end of the week, just when I had truly given up hope, both interpreter and goods arrived.

Once there, my host turned out to be very helpful and full of good information. After spending a few days getting to know each other, we started to do between three and four interviews each day. These were usually completed around mid-day, giving us time to help his wife in the kitchen, go on medicinal walks, fishing trips or visits, him time to spend with his family and for his daily game of soccer with the guys, and me time for taking photos and my daily game of volleyball with the girls as well as writing and going through notes and interviews to check my progress and find gaps that needed filling.

Life thus settled in to a new and pleasant routine. My understanding of Matses language developed rapidly from hearing my own questions and peoples answers translated several times a day. I spent a day as school and family photographer. One early morning I did my second frog poison ceremony, feeling like I still had not really experienced what it was like. After doubling the dose from the first time, I instead felt that frog poison is something I have no desire to ever do again. My host decided to make me his adopted sister, which in turn made me related to almost the whole village and crosscousin, and thus available for teasing and flirting to at least half its men. Evenings were spent with my family or visiting friends and listening to fabulous stories of brave but warlike ancestors, evil shamans, men turning into jaguars at night, spirit pranks and killings in the forest or children adopted by boas and peccaries. I started to feel at home, but more than that, I started to feel as if a veil had fallen from my eyes, revealing an amazing, magical world I had never experienced before. Life in the jungle like non I have ever experienced, and I am incredibly grateful I had the chance to let it seep under my skin. I suffered at times, but when the day came to leave, I cried. Then I had to bribe a pilot to come and get me.

## 2.5 A look at some methodological issues

### 2.5.1 Observing, participating, being observed

Life does not only consist of thinking and talking, and to me, learning through the body, through making your body do new things, should not be underestimated. Apart from the fun, participant observation was absolutely invaluable for my understanding of Matses life. I would, for example, never have understood the time, skill and amount of work it takes to make maize drink, bring home manioc, make a swidden or keep one clean if I had not physically done those very things. To me, there is definitely a point in physically living someone else's life instead of merely talking about it or watching it.

Not only was participation very valuable for my understanding of Matses life, it also seemed to prove to the Matses that I was genuinely interested in it. Another benefit was my helplessness and the lousy job I did of everything but basket weaving and tolerating frog poison. There is no way around the fact that going from Sweden to a village in the Amazon also means going from a place of power to a place in the periphery. I can go there, they cannot come here, I have money, they do not, I am respected by *mestizos*, they are not, I come flying in with trunks full of desirable trade goods, they could not even dream of owning such a surplus. I might admire, value and appreciate their way of life, but to them I still come from a world where an Indian is about as low as you can get and the distance to Indian-ness is measured in skin-color and money. They are not wrong, for that is indeed what they do when they deal with Peruvian nationals. As a fieldworker, whether I wanted it or not I thus came in from above and had to deal with this systemically constituted asymmetry in all my relationships in the field. For me, to reveal both my ineptitudes and my genuine will to learn worked as the equivalent of getting of a high horse I did not want to sit on in the first place.

However much can be learnt or gained through putting oneself through the paces of another's life, local life is not all about what happens in interactions with inept ethnographers. As Barth says, it is in the interaction with each other, through the way we act upon our understandings and interpretations of reality and through the consequences of these activities that we create the world we live in (Barth 1989:140). That world is thus not accessible without paying also attention to how people act and interact, not only with the ethnographer, but with each other. This type of observation of daily interactions would have been relatively easy, had it not been for the language barrier. Finding it easy to be fly on the wall, wrapped up in a hammock in a dark corner of a kitchen but incapable of understanding verbal interaction, I nevertheless had the opportunity to observe such things as the division of chores between family members and people of different age and sex, the tone and amount of interaction between different people, the style, tone and visitors of meetings in church, the external characteristics and public interaction of the who attended the big meeting in Estiron and the patterns of movement and interaction between Matses and *mestizos*. I also had the chance to observe the preparation and administration of plant medicines. To really take advantage of this ethnographic snooping, however, I really see no way around learning the language well enough to understand people's everyday conversation.

## **2.5.2 Medicinal walks**

'Medicinal walks' is the name I have chosen for the trips into the jungle I took to learn more about medicinal plants and the ideas of health and illness underpinning their use. The purpose was more to find an easy way to approach ideas of health and illness and the constitution of the person rather than collecting plant specimens. On a walk, I would note down the name of the medicine, for which symptoms it is used, why someone would have those symptoms and how they are treated as well as how the medicine works and how it is possible to know the exact cause of illness. I also noted down any observations or comments concerning the plants or illnesses that struck me as interesting. All such walks were then followed up with several interviews where I went through the gathered material, filled in any gaps and asked more in-depth questions. I went on walks with the three people in Estiron considered to be most knowledgeable male (2) and female (1) experts in the field and gathered a total of 140 different medicines. The material gathered this way was later assembled in a single document and has been crucial for what I argue in this thesis.

## **2.5.3 Interviews and verbal interaction**

### **2.5.3.1 The limitations of language and talk**

During my time in Estiron, I was able to talk to steadily increasing number of people, but apart from a few exceptions, we rarely shared enough common language to get beyond telling simple stories and talking about family. As it was, a large part of my spoken interactions with the Matses thus took place in the form of interviews. Although I tried to make these interviews resemble normal conversations, there are clearly limits to the formality and artificial nature of the situation, in addition to the problem of working through an interpreter. I would have loved to speak enough Matses to take part in normal interactions, especially between young people and women who were more difficult to interview; hear the gossip at the volleyball court, snap up stories by the fireplace or while peeling yucca, and those sorts of things.

The limitation of all types of interviews and talk is also quite naturally that it produces knowledge only of what people say they do, not of what they actually do. I place great value on my recorded material and the conversations I had, but am happy I had the chance to complete them with other forms of gathering data.

### **2.5.3.2 My informants**

I did a total of 49 recorded interviews with 37 people whereof 18 were women ranging from 18 to very old and 18 were men between the ages of 16 and very old. I was interested to see the distribution and variation of knowledge and opinions between different families, ages and sexes. I was also curious to hear both women and men as well as young and old speak of their own situation in their own words. I thus made a point of visiting all households at least once and tried to get an even number of men and women as well as a good spread in age. Despite this aim, my material is somewhat dominated by men. This has many reasons, as will be seen in the rest of this section.

In addition to the recorded interviews, there were some unrecorded interviews and many instances of simple questions or deeper conversations with those of my

informants proficient enough in Spanish – all but one of them male. That it was easier to interact with men depended only on the fact that they were more confident speaking Spanish. It took until the last week for most women to feel comfortable enough in my company to reveal that they too could speak.

There are also some people who have shared more with me than others and thus also have shaped this thesis more than others. The most striking thing they have in common is that they are all men above thirty. Here too, it is clear that although I aimed to pay equal attention to the ideas of everyone who have come more into contact with those of men. Apart from the factors already mentioned, I think part of the reason for this is that some of my areas of interest, such as medicine, are considered male areas of expertise. Also, the building and construction of the male person is considered to be a longer and more complicated process than the building of the female one, which means that some aspects of this body-building, such as rituals for the transfer of skill, courage and marksmanship, also are areas where men are more involved and are considered more knowledgeable than women. As will be shown, men are also those who normally deal with people from the outside.

### **2.5.3.3 Interviews – form and difficulties**

The interviews were all done with the help of an interpreter and loosely structured around key areas of interest, meaning I focused more on what I wanted to find out than on asking identical questions every time. I prefer this type of interview since it to me more closely resembles a normal conversation and I want informants to feel as relaxed and free to speak their heart as possible while talking. Working in a language largely beyond my comprehension, I was naturally clueless of which concepts best fit what I was trying get at. My interpreters were therefore very helpful when it came to phrasing my questions, although I still discovered several misunderstandings when I started to understand enough Matses to get the gist of what was actually said.

The recorded interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half, mainly depending on the talkativeness of the informant. As mentioned above, most people interviewed more than once were male. There was also a tendency for old people to be more knowledgeable in my area of interest. Younger people were asked the same questions but could often not answer or did not have explanations as elaborate as the older. Wanting to look at change over time, I was also interested in asking the older generations about their memories of times gone by whereas the younger people only could tell me about their life right now, which in no means was less interesting, it just took less time.

I also found that many of the women below 25 as well as the youngest man were somewhat intimidated by the situation of being interviewed and had less trust in that what they had to say would be of interest to me. A situation I tried to remedy by carefully explaining my interest in what they had to say as well as always starting with some small talk to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Thinking about the reasons for this nervousness and lack of self-confidence I came up with two main ideas. One has to do with the social and historical context in which our interactions took place and is treated in some length in the following section on roles. The other is that I was working

with male interpreters and also asked some questions about distinctly male areas of life; something that might have made especially younger women but also the young men afraid of making fools of themselves in the eyes of my interpreters. Working with an interpreter amounts to exactly what it is, namely creating a situation where three rather than two people are interacting and where the relationship between all three of them has a bearing on the end result. Apart from the obvious fact that direct access to the words of the informant is impossible it is also central that the meeting between researcher and informant is filtered through another person and thus is shaped by the personality, knowledge and interests of him or her. In a sense, both my interpreters became key informants and I am very thankful to them both for helping me, for without them this thesis could not have been written. Also very helpful is that I completely trusted them both to tell me if someone was telling me an outright lie. Ideally, however, I would have liked to work with one man and one woman and also befriend a woman in the closer way I got to know my host and interpreter.

## **2.6 The dynamics of social interactions in the field**

### **2.6.1 Relating in a global and historical context**

Doing fieldwork with an indigenous community in South America, I found it impossible not to consider the inequalities between Matses and national society and the local heritage of 500 years of colonialism and oppression. This has of course influenced my work and shaped how the Matses and I interacted with one another. Consider for example that the Matses who venture out to live and work with *mestizos* more often than not are looked down upon, cheated and in other ways treated quite badly by members of national society. No wonder then that I was treated with some suspicion in the beginning. Additionally, since 1969, and probably before that, non-Peruvian foreigners, mostly missionaries, have told the Matses that their ways are wrong, barbaric, shameful or devilish.

Still, most Matses are today dependent on having some sort of contact with *mestizo* society for goods and money, and many from the younger generations clearly value and long for the goods, possibilities and excitement to be found there. The relationship to national society is thus ambivalent. It cannot be easy to maintain good self confidence when representatives for something you want to approach constantly encourage you to look upon yourself with shame and disdain. It is also natural that I was not free to relate to people outside of this social context.

As for the difference between young and old in this matter I think it depends on the different social positions, dreams and life-histories of the different generations. To me, older people generally appeared to have the status, self-confidence and high regard for things that were that I think established members of societies all over the world have. They also appear to have a more stable sense of what it is to be and live as a Matses rather than as something else. Younger people have on their hand lived their whole lives in a society radically influenced by both missionaries and increasing peaceful contacts with the *mestizos*. According to what they themselves say, they instead of valuing life as

it used to be balance between the comfort and security of life in the Matses village and the admiration, envy, fear and pull of material goods and life in the *mestizo* communities. I thus think that the way I was cast and what my white skin symbolized, i.e. the context-dependent role I was given, was harder for young people to handle. This in fact has to do with the changing notions of personhood that this thesis investigates.

My role can thus roughly be cast as an outsider novice in relation to the older generation and their skills and identities but as an outsider and possibly disdainful expert in relation to the strivings of the younger generation. Put in other words, those of my informants who value their own society more and have a stronger position therein (two factors most likely connected) and those who place greater value on things from the outside and not yet have reached positions of high social standing in their own society have different starting points in dealing with the type of asymmetric relationship between me and them that I have already described above. This was especially apparent during interviews, but noticeable also in everyday interactions.

To overcome this, I think I would have needed more time and a greater knowledge of the local language to be able to meet younger people more on their own terms and turf. This is especially so since the relationship I found closest at hand in my interactions with them was friendship and that being a friend for me was a hard role to just slip into at will. With older people, on the other hand, it was relatively easy to pretend to be a younger person in need of instruction; a very good role for eliciting information and asking ignorant questions. It is also possible that it was easier simply because there was a pre-existing place lower in social status that I comfortably, for both parties, could fit into with regards to people older than myself whereas I really had to build up real personal relationships with the younger in order to overcome my unwanted elevated position with regards to them. Local social structure thus also played a role.

### **2.6.2 Roles and gender roles**

Gender is another side of how my role was shaped in interaction with the people I came in contact with. I was prepared that my female gender would make it easier for me to access some parts of the field while making access to others more difficult. The gender roles of the Matses, my personal preferences and my research interests did, however, interact to shape my role in the field in a way I could not have foreseen. All in all, I felt like an interstitial creature, neither blending in nor wanting to adapt fully to either of the genders available to me. Being a child or inhabiting the type of ‘almost ready for real life’ role a university student in Sweden can take would have suited me fine, but considering that most Matses women my age have been mothers for ten years that option was also not open to me. As Hume and Mulcock point out, a researcher’s field-identity is indeed constructed in collaboration with active research participants who all have their own expectations and personalities (Hume & Mulcock 2004: xxi)

As I have pointed out above, my research interests and the villagers knowledge of Spanish made my interactions somewhat male-dominated. When writing or going through notes and interviews, doing interviews or reading I also adopted to a male way of considering the work of women a service there to be enjoyed rather than an activity I should prioritize taking part in, although I also chose not to take part in the

quintessential male chore – hunting. At the same time it was clear that the people around me encouraged me to live up to my biological gender. Examples of this was constant talk and combing of my unruly hair and the many appreciative comments I got once it became clear that I had learnt how to make fermented drinks; a female chore which although not considered as important as male hunting can be considered the oppositional pair of it (e.g. Erikson 1999). The fact that I treated the kitchen in the way men do, by coming and going when called to eat and contributing by giving things to the women to cook rather than cooking myself also elicited some angry comments by a young woman in my household; comments that quickly made me change my ways and spend more time in the kitchen, which in turn led to a more intimate relationship between me and the women of the house. In these ways I was ‘chastised’ into adapting to Matses ideas of womanhood. Again, I must point at that there is much to be learnt from physically participating in another’s daily life, because from this pressure to adapt I gained a lot of insight into Matses ideas of ideal male and female human persons.

The reason I initially stayed away from the kitchen was for example simply that I felt like I was intruding every time I came there without being called. To me, a proper person does not intrude into private areas. To the Matses, as will be shown, a proper person is one who shares private and domestic life with others. The significance of this goes beyond me being shy, because I the reason I felt more like an intruder in my own kitchen than at a meeting for the chiefs of all Matses communities is the division of private and public I myself brought with me from home. To me, public affairs are public, private are not, making it more socially awkward for me to take part in anything I saw as private, which included a lot of chores and situations dominated by women. This was probably also a factor in why I found it easier to interact with men and talk about male things. Because of my preconceived ideas of public and private, male and female I thus acted in a way opposite to what the Matses expected of a woman. All together, it is clear that I alone did not have the power over what roles I took or was cast in. My own social limitations, the way other people could and chose to relate to me and the context we were in were very important factors in my research. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, it is also clear that it is very productive to direct attention towards clashes, misunderstandings and awkwardness, because in them one can find great clues to how both parties involved imagine the world to be.



# 3 The Matses

## 3.1 Who are the Matses?

The Matses, who are also known by the name Mayoruna, live western Amazonia on both sides of the Peru-Brazil border, mainly along the Yavari and Galvez rivers as well as on Choba and Lobo creeks<sup>2</sup>. The population was in 2003 estimated to be 2000-2200, and is likely to be somewhat higher today (Fleck 2003: 22). In 1976, there were only about 820 Matses (Romanoff 1984), meaning that the population may have almost tripled in the last 32 years.

In 2003, this growing population lived in 17 villages, 14 of which were located in Peru (Fleck 2003: 22). At a census carried out in 1998, populations of the individual villages ranged between 24 to 435 with the typical small village having approximately 50 inhabitants and a then still existing large aggregate missionary village having as many as 650 (Matlock 2002). Since then, many Matses have moved away from the missionary settlement, which also has been abandoned by the missionaries, and taken up living in new and existing settlements, to my knowledge mainly along the Galvez River and Choba Creek. There are only two non-Matses towns near the main concentration of Matses villages. One is Colonia Angamos, the seat of the district of Yaquerana, which has a military garrison, and is located just below the confluence of the Upper Javari and Gálvez Rivers. The other is the Brazilian town of Palmeiras, also with a military garrison, located a few kilometers downriver from Colonia Angamos. There are some Matses living in both of these towns.

The Matses are speakers of a Northern Panoan language, also called Matses. Other Northern Panoan speakers include the Matis and Korubo of Brazil, and the Mayo and Pisabo of Peru. The term Mayoruna, long used as a synonym for Matses, is of uncertain origin and etymology and has been used in various ways in past, often referring to many different groups within the Panoan family, or as in the case of Tessmann (1930), even to groups that are non-Panoan (Fleck, in progress, Matlock 2002, Erikson 1994). This confusion makes it difficult to draw straight conclusions from much older material as well as standard works such as the *Handbook of South American Indians* by Steward and Métraux (1948). Today, following Erikson's (1994) review of historical and ethnographic material, Mayoruna most often refers to a subgroup within the Panoan family in which Erikson (1994) counts the Matses, Matis, Korubo, Maya, and Kulina-Pano. Erikson also argues that these groups share a common history as well as several linguistic and cultural traits. Within the larger group of Panoans, the Matses are linguistic relatives of the better-known Shipibo, Amahuaca and Cashinahua of central Peru as well as the Marubo, Cashinahua and Remo in Brazil, who used to be their neighbors (Matlock 2002: 35). The term Matses, which remains the same in singular

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<sup>2</sup> For a map of the territory see appendix 2

and plural, was first used by Romanoff (1984) and is today used as an ethnonym by the Matses themselves, although the word originally simply means person, people or people of our group. While Matses is used in modern academic literature and throughout Peru, Mayoruna still occurs in Brazil, where it is used by for example the Brazilian Indigenous Agency, FUNAI. For a more thorough discussion of Matses auto-denominations I refer to chapter 11 of this thesis.

Below, I present a very condensed look at Matses history for the past 150 years. Choosing my battles, I have based this mostly on Romanoff's account, limited myself to the period from the Rubber boom and on and have not myself read much of the historical material first hand. For more comprehensive treatments of Matses, and Panoan, history, I recommend Romanoff (1984), Erikson (1994), Matlock (2002) and Fleck (2003).

### **3.2 From boom to bureaucracy - A very brief historical overview**

For all Amazonian groups, population characteristics, resource use and settlement pattern have changed markedly the past 100 years. As Romanoff rightly points out, discussions of all aspects of Matses society must thus recognize the effects of missions, slave raids, introduced diseases, the rubber boom, and modern bureaucracies (Romanoff 1984: 20). Accordingly, Romanoff also argues that it is the social rather than natural environment that for the past century has presented the more severe danger to the Matses and other groups in the region. More specifically, Romanoff argues that the critical problems Matses and similar groups have faced for the past 150 years have stemmed from dealing with outsiders; meaning members of the national rather than the Amerindian population. More specifically, it is the temporary occupation of Matses territory by outsiders seeking to extract rubber latex as well as the current expansion of national society into the jungle that has had the most drastic impact on Amerindians living in the Amazon basin. The social environment, meaning the non-Matses actions that have influenced the Matses, has also called for more energetic and extreme changes of behavior and social organization. (Romanoff 1984: 3). Matlock too takes the position that social factors are more important than ecological and ideational in explanations of how Matses society are changing (Matlock 2002: 3).

The most intense period of rubber extraction is called the rubber boom and had a severe and often fatal impact on the groups living in the Amazon basin. The boom began in the late nineteenth century and is said to have ended either in 1913, when the price of rubber fell, or in 1920, when production along the Yavari River declined dramatically (Romanoff 1984: 21). All Amazonian groups were affected by the boom, either because tappers moved into their territory or because they were drafted to work as tappers themselves. Some were, however, affected more than others, and each group reacted with its own mix of resistance, cooperation, assimilation or ethnic affirmation (ibid.: 12). Concerning the Matses, Romanoff, building on Steward's (1948) division of areas directly or indirectly affected by the boom, locates them and some closely related

Panoan groups in what he calls the rubber core area; an area more thoroughly penetrated by tappers and producing more latex than any other locality. From looking at the histories of these groups, he concludes that the tribes in this area either reached an accommodation with tappers or suffered extreme depopulation (Romanoff 1984: 9). At the turn of the last century, in the midst of the boom, the core group that would develop into the present day Matses was thus one of many Matses and linguistically related longhouse groups of the upper Yavari River Basin, but by the time the boom ended a few decades later, it was uncertain whether the decimated Matses would survive at all (Romanoff 1984: 4).

In the recession period following the collapse of the rubber trade, most rubber ranches closed down as nationals withdrew from the region, although occasional parties still came to extract whatever product fetched a high price at the time. The present period of new integration with national economies began with the return of outsiders, including settler colonists, rubber tappers, wood cutters, oil exploration crews, missionaries and government officials (ibid. :22). At the time of his writing, Romanoff thus argued that the critical process going on among the Matses in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was the formation of hybrid settlements of Amerindians and bureaucracies such as religious groups or government agencies (Romanoff 1984: 5).

### **3.3 Four periods, four ways of dealing with outsiders**

Romanoff divides Matses history into four parts defined by the dominant method adopted for dealing with nationals. In the early rubber boom, the Matses had little contact with members of national society. Romanoff calls it the period of avoidance. In the late rubber boom, the period of intermittent contact, they were occasionally in contact with nationals and at times participated in rubber extraction, although such instances were brief and often ended with violent separation. This was followed by a period of raiding, during which the Matses with violent means sought steel tools and later also women from nationals as well as other groups and also were subject to several attacks from both. The raiding lasted until 1969, when the Matses established the non-violent contact with outsiders (Romanoff 1984: 22). This period is according to me still ongoing.

#### **3.3.1 The Period of Avoidance**

Based on reports from elderly informants telling what their parents told them, Romanoff (1984: 30ff) has sketched an image of Matses life at the turn of the last century. At that time, there were many longhouses and more people than at the time of his writing. People hunted with blowguns, their ornaments were different, just as the thatch of their houses and many other aspects of their material culture. They did not use steel tools, but stone axes and sharp rodent teeth for chores that today are carried out with machetes, knives and steel axes. Although the area was completely penetrated by rubber estates and tappers, contact with nationals was very infrequent, largely because the Matses withdrew from all major rivers and isolated themselves along small streams in interfluvial areas. Despite this isolation, many longhouses seem to have disappeared,

leaving the core group that would develop into today's Matses. Still, Romanoff (1984: 34) argues that the Matses by avoiding contact preserved their autonomy and avoided the slavery, complete extinction or assimilation that befell other groups in the area.

### **3.3.2 The Period of Intermittent Contact**

Beginning in the 1920's, at the time of the end of the rubber boom and the concomitant decolonization of the Amazon basin and recession of the local national economy, there was an increase in contact between Matses and nationals. Most accounts show, however, that only a part of the Matses group would be in contact at any one time, with the other one retreating and thus also always surviving if things took a turn for the worse. In all cases, the contact was also broken completely after some time. In most accounts, the Matses acquire steel tools through these brushes with outsiders. By the end of the period, they were thus using machetes and axes as well as the occasional shotgun. Romanoff argues that the Matses during this period maintained autonomy by never staying in contact with outsiders, but did so enough to have a small supply of steel tools. In addition to adopting steel tools, they also gave up blowguns and adopted bows, most likely from the Marubo, with whom they were on friendly terms at the time. The population of the Matses at the time, however, was very small, fitting into a few longhouses (Romanoff 1984: 34ff).

### **3.3.3 The Period of Raiding**

There were instances of violent contact during the periods of avoidance and intermittent contact as well, but from the 1930s to the end of the 1960s, raiding was the only way the Matses dealt with outsiders. In the thirties, the Matses thus began to raid Spanish speakers as well as other Amerindian groups for tools and also took unprecedented numbers of captives. Doing this augmented the population and secured a supply of tools needed for agriculture, which contributed to the survival of the Matses as an autonomous population. It did, however, also have heavy costs for the Matses, who brought back diseases from the raids and who were themselves attacked by others (Romanoff 1984: 40). Despite attacks and counterattacks as well as disease brought in through contact, however, the Matses population grew to about 600 people during this time.

The raids lasted up to a month or more, were organized by mature and fierce men skilled at finding the way to other groups and included younger followers from several longhouses. Contrary to current practice, shotguns, which were stolen from others, were only used for warfare, never to hunt (Romanoff 1984: 47). Motives for raiding were a desire to capture women, revenge for incursions into Matses territory, general animosity to nationals and belief that a particular group had attacked and killed the Matses with magic (*ibid.*: 40). Fleck also adds that elderly informants today often tell that the real motive for raids on other Amerindian groups was to join up with them, in essence to civilize and make Matses of them, although they would always do something that made the Matses attack instead, killing all men and taking the women as captives (Fleck, forthcoming: chapter 7)

### 3.3.4 The Period of Non-violent Contact

The current period of Matses history began with cessation of raiding and the establishment of non-violent relations with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a U.S.-based missionary organization. This took place in 1969. At this time, the Matses had been suffering from illnesses and were in fear of attacks by outsiders. Additionally, a majority of the fierce old men responsible for organizing the raids had died, either through illness or in a fateful attack and counterattack by the Marubo. Shortly after contact was made with SIL, another longhouse group approached a Peruvian forest worker, from which followed relations with the Peruvians of the garrison town of Angamos. More contacts quickly followed with, among others, a Catholic missionary, timber cutters, oil exploration crews in both Brazil and Peru and the Brazilian Amerindian agency (FUNAI). Within five years of 1969, the social environment of the Matses had thus changed dramatically (Romanoff 1984: 49f).

The most significant of these contacts were for a long time the one with SIL. At the time of Romanoff's writing, a majority of the Matses population had moved to live in a cluster of longhouses scattered around the missionaries' airstrip in the upper Choba Creek. After an initial period of relatively high mortality due to an influx of new diseases, mortality stabilized at a very low level. This unusually large settlement remained there until the first large wave of malaria hit the Matses in the end of the nineties, killing many before proper medication reached the area. At that time, many started to move away. Around the year 2003, SIL themselves left for good and now almost no one lives there.

Romanoff was told by his informants that the main attractions of the SIL settlements were medicine, trade goods and protection from the attacks of nationals. SIL did provide the Matses with medicines and basic medical care. They also brought in goods like clothes, pots, machetes and axes to trade for handicrafts and pelts. Apart from this, their major activities were evangelization, translation of the bible, linguistic study and the construction of various works such as the airstrip and some fish ponds. SIL also acted as intermediaries between the Matses and outsiders, for example in setting up contracts with oil explorers to cut paths in the area (Romanoff 1984: 51).

Those Matses who did not move to the SIL settlement on the upper Choba instead moved to live closer to FUNAI in Brazil, with a Peruvian patron at the mouth of the Choba or, after 1976, to the lower Galvez River to be with Peruvian missionaries (*ibid.*: 55). As I already mentioned, Romanoff argues that the critical process going on among the Matses in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was the formation of such hybrid settlements of Amerindians and bureaucracy, be it a religious group or a government agency. In the following quote, he points to many changes that it according to me is quite possible to see the consequences of today.

The process of establishing hybrid settlements has many subsidiary aspects to which the Matses are adapting: migrations to establish relations with non-Matses, demographic sedentarization and aggregation, cessation of raiding for women, acquisition of unprecedented quantities of manufactured objects, social relations with non-Matses and formation of the hybrid settlements themselves. The ways in

which they adapt are creative, often modifying a pre-1969 pattern of behavior to fit new circumstances: adjusting settlement pattern so that it permits some mobility while keeping a presence in one place, modifying the practice of wife capture to try to get old men to give up some wives, using hunting magic to improve shotgun as well as bow marksmanship, and so on. (Romanoff 1984: 5)

If there is a Matses culture in the next century, Romanoff (1984: 5) writes “it will be as profoundly changed by the social grafting that is going on now as the last generation was changed by the rubber boom”. I like to think that this thesis is exactly about some of those changes. I would therefore like to take a closer look at Matses society in the late seventies, based on Romanoff’s account and stories told to me by my informants. This is also meant to give a more solid background to coming discussions of changes in social reproduction, whereby I have chosen to focus on elements related to subsistence, production and exchange.

### **3.4 Continued integration with outsiders – the Matses from the late seventies to today**

In 1976, in the 11,000 square kilometers of tropical rainforest considered Matses territory there were approximately 800 Matses in four settlements, two Peruvian and two Brazilian, plus two frontier towns and a growing number of rubber tappers. The largest Matses settlement comprised more than half of the population living in sixteen communal longhouses scattered around the headwaters of Choba Creek in Peru (Romanoff 1984: 1). Estiron, where I spent almost all of my time, came into existence in the year 2000 and mainly consists of people who formerly lived in this large settlement described by Romanoff. Many of my informants thus grew up in longhouses on the upper Choba.

Notable features of Matses culture at the time included residence in large, closed longhouses, the largest of which held 100 people, and subsistence based on hunting and slash-and-burn horticulture. At that time, in the second half of the seventies, missionaries and the Brazilian Indian agency FUNAI maintained a significant presence and settlers were moving into Matses territory, but the Matses themselves had so far only had intermittent contact with outsiders apart from SIL (Romanoff 1984: 1).

#### **3.4.1 Settlement and subsistence**

Traditionally, a Matses settlement consisted of a longhouse located in the middle of a field. Each longhouse group has several such houses and fields. Use of the different houses was determined largely by the crop cycle, where the fields were of different ages and thus produced different crops. The principal place of residence was the house surrounded by a field in the yucca and plantain phase of production (Romanoff 1984: 182).

In the late seventies, the longhouse was still the basic unit of settlement and agriculture was largely unchanged from pre-1969 practices. Romanoff, however, points out three major changes in settlement patterns influencing Matses society at the time.

The first is migration to live with outsiders, such as SIL and FUNAI and. The second is increasing sedentarization and concentration of the population to the upper Choba Creek settlement, which at that time comprised more than 500 people who had been there for as long as seven years – both numbers much higher than usual. According to Romanoff, except one group in Brazil, all Matses had established such sedentary hybrid settlements with outsiders. The third change is the development of what Romanoff calls a center-outlier pattern, which has already been discussed in the chapter on methodology. At the time of Romanoff's writing, people lived part of the year near the SIL airstrip and part of the year in the outlier, where they stayed from anywhere between a few weeks and several months. In the earlier pattern, the old settlement would have been gradually abandoned instead (Romanoff 1984: 187).

The last Peruvian longhouse was abandoned in the very first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and today, all Matses live in single family houses. In cases where a man has several wives, these have separate kitchens connected to common sleeping quarters by walkways. Fields are no longer located around the house, neither are they shared with people outside of the immediate family. Each family thus has its own fields, usually located approximately within half an hour's walk away from the village. Villages retain the permanent character of the former settlement on the upper Choba, although people may move between villages every now and then. The reason for this given to me was the need to stay in one place to be registered as a settlement with the Peruvian state, which in turn is a prerequisite for having a school and a medical post.

Having left Matses territory completely, SIL naturally no longer occupies a central position in Matses settlement or society, but in this way, the co-residence with bureaucracies pointed out by Romanoff still exists. This is also apparent in the location of Matses settlements, with many people moving to be closer to the garrison town of Angamos or to Brazilian equivalents. Some Matses have secondary houses in Angamos which they use during periods of salaried work or medical treatment, and some have even moved there permanently. The reason to move closer is the access to money, trade goods and medicine; the same things that attracted people to live with SIL a few decades earlier.

As was discussed in the preceding chapter, there are still outlier settlements of the kind described by Romanoff, now in the form of small longhouses surrounded by traditional fields, but these are smaller, involving only a couple of families instead of the whole group, and only visited for shorter intervals. The expressed reason to move to the outlier for some days or a few weeks remains, it is to eat meat. There is an interesting parallel here, where some families build a secondary house in Angamos where they go to make money and buy goods while others build them farther into the forest where game is plentiful and they go to eat meat. The existence of such parallel practices of improving one's situation will be discussed at some length towards the end of this thesis since they to me are intimately connected to changes in notions of personhood.

### 3.4.2 Production and exchange networks

As will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter, Ekholm and Friedman suggest a view of society that takes social reproduction as its base; a concept they define as the cycles leading from production to consumption to new production (Ekholm & Friedman 1985: 105). Bering this in mind I find the detailed account that Romanoff gives of the productive activities of different age and sex groups a very good base for further discussions. The same goes for his characterization of exchange networks. The division of work, first, is presented in table 1 here below.

Age Range	Men	Women
<b>Old</b>	Medicine, bows, spears, tobacco powder, baskets, tapir meat, "energy"	Pots, strainers, medicine (few), woven tump strap, "energy" (some)
<b>Middle Age</b>	Medicine (some), tobacco (some), baskets, larger animals, "energy" (some)	Pots (some), hunt (some), hammock (some)
<b>Young Adult</b>	Arrows, raw materials for crafts, medium animals, agricultural labor	Wrist decoration, hunt, hammock
<b>Unmarried</b>	Same as for young adult, but less work (few)	Domestic chore, wrist decoration

Table 1, Ideal Age/Sex Division of Labor: Items Produced (adapted from Romanoff 1984: 153)

Some of these things are no longer produced at all, such as pots, some only on a small scale, like bows, spears, tobacco and tapir meat, and some have fallen out of use although people still know how to make them, such as various ornaments and wrist decorations. Since women now live in single family households I also find that today all women, regardless of age, are occupied with domestic chores. That which Romanoff calls "energy" in this thesis goes under the Matses names of *sinan* and *dayac*, both of which are thoroughly discussed in the section called Interlude 1.

As can be seen in the table, as people grow older, they shift from more physical and repetitive work to production of crafts. These crafts were in turn exchanged for food, so that a younger woman always had to give food to the older woman who had given her the pot which she cooked in and a younger man similarly owed a share of his meat to the older man who had crafted his bow. Older people also exchanged skill, knowledge and prestige in the form of *sinan* or *dayac* for physical labor. This was particularly pronounced for older men, who were also longhouse leaders and thus responsible for organizing work, which they did exactly through prestige and the exchange of *sinan* for the physical labor of younger men. Because of the high value the Matses placed on skill and energy, older people, the providers of these substances, thus enjoyed a very central and privileged place in Matses society.

Speaking of this, Romanoff also details a career path for men and women, who as they moved through the stages in productive capacity also moved to occupy different positions in local exchange networks. Men thus passed from labor to middle management to longhouse leader. Women had a similar career path, albeit to a lesser extent. The difference between the genders he relates to the degree to which they become the center of redistribution for the group. While women distributed goods to



children, grandchildren, in-laws and a few younger women of their house, older men thus redistributed the meat produced by a whole longhouse, and some had exchange relations with people of most of the other houses as well (Romanoff 1985: 151). Women had their own exchange networks for meat, but these were smaller.

#### **3.4.2.1 The devaluation of old people**

Romanoff argues that it is of particular importance that exchange patterns in fact created or reinforced the prestige of old people; the same people who at the time of his writing and to an certain extent still inhabit a central role in Matses social life, residential patterns and kinship networks. The exchanges he describes provided older women with more security than they would otherwise have and older men with a place in the redistributive network that allowed them to support several wives and lead a longhouse group (Romanoff 1984: 175). Many of these relationships underwent large changes when the Matses went from living in longhouses to living in nuclear family dwellings. Although the sharing of meat is still important, for example, it is less conspicuous and seldom includes all members of a residential group. Without longhouses, the need to organize collective work has also lessened, just as the physical place for daily collective consumption and acting out of leadership is gone.

Romanoff in fact identifies these exchange patterns as one of the most fragile elements of Matses culture in the current contact situation. Prior to 1969, there was a permanent need for new earthen pots as old ones broke or were left at an abandoned house. When metal pots replaced earthen, the prestige of older women pot-makers diminished, as did their food supply since younger women suddenly were free of the obligation to give meat to the woman who supplied the pot. Similarly, as shotguns replace bows as the hunting weapon of choice, the exchange of food for bows between younger and older men also disappears. With the influx of new medicines, the importance of leaf medicine is also decreasing, and with it the prestige of older men. In all these cases brought to the fore by Romanoff (1984: 59), an outside source of objects replaces a local manufacturer. Today, this affects not only older people, but younger as well. One example is ornaments and decorations, earlier made by women and now replaced by bought jewelry and clothes. Arrow-making too is becoming redundant, or would become almost completely so if people had enough money to maintain a steady supply of shotgun shells. The trend that Romanoff distinguished in the seventies is thus even stronger today. This will be discussed again towards the end of this thesis.

#### **3.4.2.2 A change in the value of products**

Another effect of the current integration with the national economy that Romanoff observed was a change in the importance of producers, also to the detriment of older generations. As it happened, it turned out to be the objects made by young people that were considered sellable by SIL, and to a degree still are by tourists (Romanoff 1984: 59). Since SIL moved away around the year 2003, trade in crafts with outsiders has diminished, but while they were there, young people were thus in a better position than old to procure objects from the outside, such as clothes, pots and machetes. Today too, it is mainly younger men who travel to settlements of nationals to seek salaried work and thereby be able to buy what is necessary from the outside. Interestingly, as SIL

moved away the possibility to trade goods for crafts diminished, making work and money more important than before. Today, the Matses are for example again dependent on outside employment, as they were during parts of the rubber boom, and trade with nationals to acquire the steel tools they formerly raided for or got through SIL.

### **3.5 Conclusion – a process of ongoing change**

In accordance with what Romanoff argues, Matses history of the past century can be seen as a history of social changes wrought by contact with outsiders and the different strategies used to cope with their presence in the region. I would add that access to external goods also has been a critical factor which remains so today when dependency on such goods is increasing so that it to a greater and greater degree replaces products made by the Matses themselves. This in turn affects exchange networks and thus the whole social structure of Matses society. It is worth to point out that Romanoff to me in detail shows that these changes are not the result of the unilateral action of colonists, but the collected result of many different people's shifting strategies of practice.

Another change that Romanoff brings up is the tendency to take up residence with different kinds of bureaucracies and the increasing sedentarism that has followed. To this, I add the nucleification of dwellings, which has had great impact on the spatial aspect of Matses social life and thus also has changed the conditions for how the Matses practice their culture.

We have also seen that the attacks, migration, depopulation, loss of social organization and the acquired need for steel tools the rubber boom engendered created conditions that affected the Matses for a very long time. The current changes happening in Matses society are naturally connected to and situated within this historical context of colonization and integration into the global economy. We therefore now turn to the next chapter, which apart from a discussion of personhood provides a stronger theoretical framework for the analysis of such processes.

# 4 Personhood and agency; agency structure and culture

## 4.1 Personhood

The idea of personhood is central to this thesis. On a basic level, Bielo (2007: 323) suggests that personhood can be defined as a concept that refers to the “collection of traits and qualities that constitute the nature of human beings among a certain social group”. In different words and with one important addition, Heelas identifies what he calls indigenous psychologies as statements about the nature of the person and the person’s relations to the world (Heelas 1981: 3). If we remove the assumption that a person has to be human, I find these two definitions adequate when combined. That such an extended view of personhood as a potentially general characteristic is necessary to understand Amerindian conceptions of the matter is for example pointed out by Bird-David, who refers to how Hallowell in his studies of Ojibwa ontology observes that they instead of considering ‘person’ to be a subcategory of ‘human’ conceive of ‘person’ as an overarching category within which ‘human person’ and ‘animal person’ are subcategories (Bird-David 1999: 71). I will argue that the situation is much the same in Amazonia and thus need a concept open enough to allow for this type of world view. I am also not interested in theories of personhood that take the division between modern and primitive societies as their baseline for explanations, again preferring a more open investigation instead of a predetermined categorization of Matsigenka society and persons.

As Bielo (2007: 323) correctly points out, both Anthropologists and Sociologists have had much to say about the historically and culturally contingent nature of personhood and how notions of personhood are a structuring model for other cultural practices and ideologies (323). One famous example would naturally be Symbolic Interactionism, where Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) emphasize the central role of what they call the Self in organizing social interaction and performance. I agree with this general sentiment that much of what people say, do, think and feel is structured by their dominant ideas about what distinguishes them as persons. I also find especially Goffman’s focus on performance and interaction interesting. At the end of the day, however, I am more interested in investigating personhood in terms of how structure and culture interact to shape strategies of practice rather than how the self interprets and creates meaning in interactions with others. In doing this, I have chosen to use the term personhood in a way that closely resembles those of Pollock and Harris, who both conceive of personhood as connected to agency in a specific sociocultural context. I find that their contributions both bring greater clarity and supply me with concepts that easily allow for the open and cross-cultural definition of personhood I am looking for.

### **4.1.1 Body, self and the person as an agent-in-society**

Pollock exemplifies the different uses of personhood in anthropology by pointing to Mauss's (1950) analysis of the emergence of conscious self-awareness and Kirkpatrick's (1983) ethnosemantic analysis of Marquessan categories of humanness. Pollock himself is critical of what he considers to be a tendency to treat the body or the self as pre-cultural givens. Discussions of the self, he claims, are often conducted outside the context of specific cultures and their specific conceptions and forms of practice. The most conspicuous examples concerning the body are to him the assumption that the body is a universal substrate used as a repository or canvas for social symbols (e.g. Douglas 1966, 1970 and Turner 1995) and the assumption that it is the locus of authentic experience in the form of embodied reality supposedly hidden or distorted by cultural ideas such as the division of mind and body (e.g. Csordas 1990, 1993 and Lock 1993) (Pollock 1996: 320).

Distancing himself from these approaches, Pollock in his own work shifts the analysis towards the notion of personhood. To him, this requires focusing on the ways in which persons are understood and constructed in any particular culture. His notion of personhood is if not borrowed at least very much inspired by Harris, who in her own words "asserts the need to distinguish among "individual," "self," and "person" as biologicistic, psychologistic, and sociologicistic modes of conceptualizing human beings" (Harris 1989: 599). To her, an individual is member of a group, such as humankind, a self a locus of experience and a person an agent-in-society (Harris 1989: 599).

Harris' view of the person thus entails the idea of a human, or other, being as an agent, which to her means being the "author of action purposively directed towards a goal" (Harris 1989: 602). Also, since a person is an agent-in-society, being a person means acting in a social context and being publicly recognized as and considered to be an agent. According to Harris, to focus on the person thus brings properties of the social order and what she calls its "cultural forms" to the forefront since these as a consequence are seen as constitutive of agency (Harris 1989: 608). Pollock similarly considers persons to be "agents of meaningful action or, perhaps more precisely, beings who are assumed to possess the capacity to be agents of meaningful action" (Pollock 1996: 320). As we can see here, this treatment of personhood emphasizes factors external to the individual more than the experiences of the Self.

### **4.1.2 The specifically human person**

When it comes to my understanding of a specific human personhood, the idea of the ideal human being is according to me central. Harris lends support to this by adding that to her it seems like people everywhere look to an ideal of normal human characteristics; characteristics considered to make possible the performance of meaningful conduct. Meaningful conduct she defines as that which is construable or interpretable as action according to a certain and culture-specific system of principles (Harris 1989: 600, 603). Although I agree with Harris in principle, I think that she here is too anthropocentric for her ideas to be fully applicable in the Amerindian context, where, as she herself indicates is possible, personhood is not restricted to human persons. To in such a context say that meaningful conduct is denotative of *human* personhood to me instead

amounts to saying that no other being can be an agent-in-society. I instead prefer to look for the specific set of principles used to differentiate *human* personhood, and properly human agency, from a more general category of meaningful social action. To be both human and meaningful, action thus has to take place in a social context and conform to what is considered (ideal) human action, which is determined by the set of culturally specific principles through which the action is viewed. The same is true of gendered personhood, which also figures in this thesis.

#### **4.1.3 Social kinds, agentive capacities and the capacity to act**

Harris suggests two approaches to the analysis of personhood in a particular society, of which I have used both. The first approach consists of an analysis of what she calls social kinds, comprised of the interconnected agentive capacities supposed to characterize a person or a class of persons, such as men or women. Attention to this type of social identity can show how different members of a society are considered to have differing agentive capacities as well as how different social kinds are considered to relate to each other. Second, inspired by Goffman she also suggests that each person has a biography that, matched to local expectations, becomes a moral career. Moving through this career, the individual may or may not become a full person, and even if full personhood is reached, it can be partly or fully annulled later. To pay attention to this type of social life cycle can, according to Harris, show how differing agentive capacities become imputed to, bestowed on or withdrawn from (etc.) an individual entering and leaving different social kinds during life (Harris 1989: 604). Crucially, Harris also points out that attributing people with an absence of such capacities renders them lesser persons, non-persons or former persons (Harris 1989: 605).

I find both the definition of a person as an agent-in-society and Harris' suggestions for how one might approach the analysis of personhood in a certain society very useful. Much of my material is thus presented in a way related to these recommendation; showing the social kinds that a Matses person ideally passes through during his or her moral career and how and from where agentive capacities come or are withdrawn. To this I would like to add Lock's suggestion to also look for the source of personhood and personal integrity, which can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Lock 1981: 34f).

In accordance with Harris, I define *agentive capacity* as a way of action considered possible and suitable for a certain social kind. By this definition, non-action can very well also be an agentive capacity. Just as agentive capacity thus is not about how many different things a person can do, personhood also has nothing to do with an endless accumulation of capacities. Being a person in the sense that the word is used in this thesis is instead about acting in the particular way that in accordance with the agentive capacities allotted to a certain social kind is construed as meaningful for a particular individual.

To this I would like to add the concept *capacity to act*, which I define as a person's ability to actually act in accordance with his or her social kind and the agentive capacities constituting it. I hope the similarity of the terms will not cause undue confusion. Agentive capacity is thus a particular way of acting, while capacity to act is

the ability, or possibility of doing so. As will be seen below, I argue that the capacity to act to some extent is determined by social structure.

As indicated above, I would also like to distinguish between personhood in general, drawing on the idea of the person as agent-in-society, and human personhood, which I would like to consider the locally prescribed way of acting like a proper human being. This is definitely also emically relevant since the Matses explicitly place great importance on the acquisition of properly human, actually male and female, skills and capabilities – or agentive capacities. I will thus look for the distribution of personhood, more specifically who and what is considered to be a person and thus also an agent in Matses society. My focus will, however, be on specifically human and gendered personhood, whereby I need to identify the agentive capacities that distinguish the human person from the nonhuman one and female personhood from male ditto. To do so, it is necessary to understand what it is that is considered meaningful action, in contrast to mere behavior, for these different social kinds. This is what I have chosen to call ideal, real or properly human agency. One central area of inquiry will thus be what agentive capacities the Matses consider crucial for human, male and female personhood, essentially the ideal shape and scope of human as well as male and female agency. Another is how an individual may come about or lose these capacities; meaning the things or processes that add to, detract from or change a person's social kind or status as a human being, man or woman. As will be seen in the next section, this focus on agency will also help me analyze how personhood is connected to social structure and how it may change as that structure changes.

## **4.2 The sociocultural context of personhood**

Personhood is thus tied to agency, and to me, the possibilities and shapes of action depend not only on the cultural context of the actor, but on the structural one as well. The parameters and character of agency thus varies depending on the actor's temporal, geographical and social position. In accordance with Harris and Pollock, it also varies with respect to local understandings of the human person and her place in the world; an understanding that to me is the baseline from which we all formulate our strategies for action. Naturally, interpretations of the world are themselves a part of the social context since they shape the behavior of all actors and thus influence the constitution of the social field. I will here account for some of my inspirations for this view of agency, starting with the relationship between social structure and culture.

### **4.2.1 The cultural and the social**

Culture alone does not determine social behavior. The notion of an original unity between culture and social structure, which is temporarily disturbed by external influences, leading to modifications and innovations in the cultural sphere, is an anthropological myth, even a foundation myth. (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 6)

As can be seen in the citation above, Ekholm-Friedman conceptualizes culture and social structure as two different things that together shape social behavior. As a consequence, she also argues that the relationship between the two should be investigated (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 4). The way that she sets out to do so in an exploration of the dynamic interplay of structure, culture, personhood and social change in Congo has been of great importance to me in the conceptualization of the work presented here (see Ekholm-Friedman 1991).

To Ekholm-Friedman, the human being acts in an arena that is partly a creation of his own and partly a product of external forces, both natural and social. As was shown in chapter 3, Romanoff (1984: 3) argues that of these two, the social environment has for the past century been the most critical for the Matses. The place of culture, Ekholm-Friedman claims, is between human beings and these external factors. To her, culture consists of our techniques of coping with the world, our interpretation of it and the content of our intentional actions or strategies to change or preserve the conditions we find ourselves in (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 6). It is worth to note that she here gives individual action a place in the creation of the social field of the actor, but also points out how that action is fundamentally cultural in nature. This is to me a clear parallel to the idea of the person as a culturally constituted agent-in-society presented above.

Elaborating on the relationship between culture and social structure, Friedman suggests a view of culture that connects social conditions of existence to the formation of shared experience, to the elaboration of interpretations of the world and, in extension, to the production of cultural artifacts (Friedman 2004: 224). It may be suggested, he argues, that shared social experience generates a tendency to interpret the world in similar ways as well as a tendency for such interpretations to resonate positively within the larger population. This sharedness of ideas and, as a result, patterns for behavior is, as Ekholm-Friedman points out, often central in definitions of culture (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 6).

Shared experience, Friedman continues, is produced in social fields that provide the basis of such sharedness. Distinguishing shared social experience from culture, however, is not meant to indicate an ontological difference between the two, but to outline two complementary but different aspects of what Friedman understands as the cultural. Since shared experience is permeated with an array of interpretative possibilities the cultural is, naturally, already present in the existential situation of people in a particular social field. Friedman's central argument is, however, that the production of culture, in the sense of cosmologies, texts, representations and so on, is dependent upon what he calls the existential substrates within which they are produced (Friedman 2004: 225).

The baseline for this common experience, the existential substrate, is to Friedman the global system (*ibid.*: 224). This is an idea he shares with Ekholm-Friedman (1991), who in her work also conceptualizes the external factors discussed above as systemic rather than institutional. Having made clear that social behavior, and thus also agency, is not dependent on culture alone and accepting that the other factor to account for is to be found in the global system, a closer discussion of this system is important to better understand the framework within which personhood is shaped and practiced.

### 4.2.2 The social as systemic

In the global systems approach, the global refers to the total social arena within which social life is reproduced, and the global systemic refers to the properties of the complex cycles of global social reproduction, the way in which they constitute local institutional forms, identities, as well as economic and political cycles of expansion and contraction (Friedman 2007: 11).

As can be seen in the excerpt above, the concept of social reproduction is central to the global systems approach. In a different article, Ekholm and Friedman together define social reproduction as a concept that “traces the cycles leading from production to consumption to new production, in whatever social form, and provides the framework within which we can ascertain the conditions of existence and functioning of the societies we confront” (Ekholm & Friedman 1985: 105). These cycles of reproduction are not necessarily bounded by individual societies but consist of all the relations and processes, local as well as regional and global, that a society is dependent on to reproduce itself (ibid.). A clear and highly relevant example is the Matses’ shifting dependency on outside sources for necessary products and the concomitant changes in exchange networks and process of economic integration described in the preceding chapter.

Rather than making the local unit, its institutional arrangements or cultural meanings the base or framework for analysis, the global systems approach thus attempts to understand local social forms as constituted by processes of production, distribution and consumption, which Friedman argue make up the basic framework through which a population reproduces itself. Social reproduction, he claims, “is a process of self-constitution of social form over time” (Friedman 2007: 109). Clearly then, if the conditions for social reproduction changes, society will change too, which in turn will affect both ideals and possibilities to act as a human person. In my analysis of changes in Matses notions of personhood I thus focus on how changes in social reproduction affect the nature and possibilities for properly human action.

As the basic functioning of societies comes to be seen as a result of a web of relationships and processes, a focus on social reproduction also encourages diachronic analyses of how the society in question appears at any one point in time. It also demands that social change, or stability, is analyzed in relation to larger systemic processes. In this way, how a particular society is integrated into and dependent on a larger framework of global processes is brought to the forefront (Ekholm & Friedman 1985: 105). In more general terms, this approach, like other structuralist approaches, postulates that it is the relation that constitutes its units (Friedman 2007: 117). Social and political units are thus also seen as constituted in larger relations within the global.

Importantly, global here does not refer to a separate level or entity but to the properties of the systemic processes that connect the world’s localities (Friedman 2007: 111). To Friedman, these properties make up the global system and are to be explored in terms of ideas such as expansion and contraction, the formation and demise of center – periphery relations and the relations between cultural identity and global hegemony. In these terms, the social environment that Romanoff (1984: 3) deems so critical for



Matses social and cultural changes is fundamentally shaped by European expansion and the concomitant center-periphery relations between Amazonian peoples and national, earlier colonial, society.

Furthermore, and to again reconnect to the discussion of the cultural and the social, Friedman maintains that the specific or cultural properties of a society cannot be accounted for in global systemic terms. Instead, these remain specific, whereas it is its more general properties that are deducible from the global system and the relations characterizing it at any one point (Friedman 2007: 118). The local is thus, just as has been discussed in the section above, an articulation between a specific cultural and localized set of practices and a larger field of forces and conditions of social reproduction (ibid.). This view is what underlies my analysis of Matses society and how and why it is changing. This is also to me what Friedman refers to when he suggests a view of culture that connects social conditions of existence, i.e. the conditions of social reproduction, to the formation of shared experience, the experiential substrate, to the elaboration of interpretations of reality and, in extension, to the production of both cultural artifacts and strategies for action (Friedman 2004: 224).

#### **4.2.3 Personhood, culture and social reproduction**

Having explained the underlying analytical framework with which I approach Matses society, I now wish to return more explicitly to the place of the person as an agent-in-society within this framework. First of all, personhood is a cultural product, as such, it belongs to what Friedman calls the specificities of the global system and defines as “personhood and experience and the way they are connected to the production of representations of the world and the formation of strategies of practice” (Friedman 1994: 25). To me, this connection of cosmology, personhood and strategies of practice is central since I use a concept of personhood centered on notions of agency as this is construed in a specific cultural setting; a concept that, as I have shown above, dovetails with the ideas of Harris and Pollock, where the latter considers a person to be an agent of meaningful action (Pollock 1996: 320) and the former defines meaningful conduct as conduct construable as action according to a certain and culture-specific system of principles (Harris 1989: 603).

Clear too, however, is that social structure, not in the sense of bounded and local social institutions but rather in terms of social reproduction, has great bearings on notions of personhood, the context within which agentive capacities are practiced and the capacity to actually act. We act from within our cultures, informed by our specific understanding of the world and our place in it; an understanding we tend to share with others who share our experience of the world. That experience is shaped by culture in the sense that it is interpreted through a cultural framework, but it is also shaped by the global system, the substrate for our experiences. Agency is thus also dependent on our position within the global system, including the local social structure since it is shaped by the dynamics of social reproduction that make up the global system.

Just as culture tends to assign some actors more far-reaching agentive capacities, as Harris for example points out (Harris 1989: 604), the global system according to me bestows different agentive capacities and abilities to actors in different positions. A

person's position in the social system is also bound to shape his or her capacity to act. Together, culture and system interact to create the social field within which personhood is practiced and to place different actors in different positions on it. Agency is thus distributed, not equal. What is considered appropriate and meaningful action for who and when and, crucially, what possibility an individual has to actually fulfill the requirements for being a person, depends on this articulation of structural position and cultural notions and distributions of personhood.

To me, this underlines that personhood and agency are relational, properties of the structural and cultural relations that constitute agents and place them in certain positions relative to each other, not properties of individuals as such. In terms of social reproduction and global systems this ought to be self-evident since that system by definition is made up of relations between units constituted by that very relation. But as Harris maintains, agency in the form of personhood is also relational in the cultural sense since action there, as opposed to mere behavior, is dependent on a social context where it can be publicly recognized as such (Harris 1989: 602). To be a person, the individual thus needs a social arena within which her behavior is construed as meaningful action. To bring back Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman into the discussion, that social arena is created in an articulation of cultural specificities and global processes.

This framework can for example be used to account for the strange position I found myself in during my initial time with the Matses. In one sense I was no one and could do nothing because in the local social arena I stood outside of all social relations. On the other hand, my position in the wider scheme of things, in the global system, bestows me with more possibilities and alternatives for action as well as significantly more capacity to act on a larger social arena than one local society. That my social arena is much larger would not really have mattered so much if it was not also increasingly penetrating theirs in a process of economic and cultural integration placing Matses society in a peripheral position relative to my own. Because of this, I was a nobody with access to resources and actions meaningful but beyond the reach of the Matses, and my relationship to different people in Estiron, as described in the chapter on methodology, was marked by how they related to that difference in access and power as well as how we managed to really make me someone by mutually creating relationships within the structure of the local social field; relations that to a great extent required me to learn and adapt to local cultural notions of proper human, and female, ways to act.

#### **4.2.4 The person as the core of culture**

In very general, and structuralist, terms it is here argued that the relation constitutes the unit. Just as there can be no relationships without units, however, social structure is dependent on human action to exist. Consider for example Bunge (2000), who maintains that all social processes contain countless individual choices and actions, but that those actions always occur within and through social systems. Sayer similarly maintains that the reproduction of social structures is a contingent product of human action. Action, however, requires preexisting resources and media, many of which have a social dimension and thus cannot be reduced to the properties of single individuals

(Sayer 2000: 18). To both Bunge and Sayer, the capacity to act is thus a systemic rather than individual property. I think that statement against the background of what has already been said safely can be rephrased to say that we act as persons, not individuals.

Worth to mention is also that Friedman argues that the analysis of process by necessity also is an investigation of the conditions of action with a particular arena, indicating that notions of personhood as well as social structure are of central importance (Friedman 2007: 122). Speaking of action, Ekholm-Friedman in fact argues that the person is the core of culture since the social constitution of the person is the mediator between representations of the world and social structure (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 8). This mediation takes place through culturally informed individual action, strategies of practice intimately related to personhood. What we have is thus a view where the constitution of personhood is the nexus where culture and social structure meet and articulate.

#### **4.2.5 Power, personhood and social change**

As discussed above, both agentic capacities and the capacity to act are unevenly distributed within the social arena. I would like to consider this in the light of Ekholm-Friedman's (1991: 252) statement that culture can be understood as a class product. To me, personhood can thus also be analyzed in relation to power structures, and as Ekholm-Friedman explains in the rather extensive quote below, it is important to do so in analyses of social change. This is also brought forth by Harris, who says that it is known that changes in thought respond to social changes, with one important result being shifts in the conceptualization of human beings (Harris 1989: 608).

Writing about how the colonization of the Congo area was accompanied by dramatic cultural changes in the same way as has happened in other parts of the world which similarly have been penetrated by Western capitalism, Ekholm-Friedman asks herself how it comes that social change leads to cultural change, and comes up with the following answer:

There are two main perspectives. The first has to do with the establishment of a new social world with new problems to solve and the other with the breakdown of authority structures in society. Culture is produced within a given power structure. It emanates from the top, from the ruling elite and from other influential actors and it is maintained by them as it expresses their interests and their identities. There is, accordingly, a tendency to freeze patterns of thought and behavior within a given socio-political structure. If this strategy is successful, it looks as though one is born into a given culture. The latter rules everybody's life. No one is free to step outside.

The colonization of the Lower Congo led to serious disturbances in the authority structure. Political hierarchies collapsed, chiefs lost their power, religious authority was undermined. In this situation, people were free to forget old truths and try new methods. Some of the new was clearly self destructive, but colonization also led to creation and innovation. In the confrontation with Western capitalism, however, all they did was in vain. ... The immediate outcome of the encounter was, after all, dependent on the control of sources of power... (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 255)

This passage is very important for how I have approached and analyzed the social and cultural changes the Matses are going through. The first aspect I would like to highlight is the connection between personhood and power. With power I here mean the ability to act upon others rather than being acted upon, which can be related both to agentive capacities and the capacity to act. In Ekholm-Friedman's perspective it is to me the people at the top of the social hierarchy whose agency has the largest reach. And why? Because their position allows them to extend their version of the world to the rest of society; an interpretation of the world that in Ekholm-Friedman's words expresses their interests and identities. To me, this implies that definitions of the human person during times of social stability tend to justify and reinforce status quo by ascribing ideal agentive capacities to those at the top of the authority structure; people who because of their position also have the greatest capacity to act accordingly. A certain person can thus have more or less scope and possibility to act, just as different persons may be construed as capable of acting in different ways.

Personhood, like culture, can therefore be considered a class product, and agentive capacities are distributed not randomly but in accordance with the local power structure and ideals of ideal human agency. Given the focus on social reproduction, furthermore, one's position in any power structure should be a function of one's place in and degree of control over that process. That place, as has been discussed to some extent above, is determined in an articulation of global processes and local interpretations of the world, including notions of personhood and how agentive capacities are distributed. Differences in agentive capacity and power thus stem from both social and cultural factors. This is to me a crucial addition to the ideal of Harris and Pollock.

I find that the approach taken here also indicates that any capacity to act is dependent on a certain social structure through which the action is carried out. We act as persons, and personhood is relational. As a consequence, certain strategies and takes on personhood might become impossible when conditions for social reproduction changes, just as Ekholm-Friedman describes. As Ekholm-Friedman also shows, there is thus in times of social stability a rather tight fit between culture and local power structures, whereas culture, and therefore also personhood, is transformed and redistributed when political hierarchies collapse (1991: 253). In her example, the changes she analyses came about as a result of the penetration of the region by Western capitalism and the concurrent changes in the social reproduction of Congolese society as well as how these changes gave or divested people of the possibility to in certain ways. The shifting integration with the national economy and dependency on products from an outside source described in the preceding chapter on Matses history and society is to me an example of a similar process. Crucially, Ekholm-Friedman also mentions that all that the Congolese did was in vain since they were not in control of sufficient sources of power. When it comes to Matses society, I will return to this notion since being a Matses person practicing Matses culture to me will become increasingly difficult as long as the control of the necessary elements of social reproduction is not put back into Matses hands. With these words I would like to take one step closer to the Matses by turning to the anthropological theoretical debate concerning society and personhood in Amazonia; an excursion into the cultural specificities of the region.

# 5 The Amazon of Anthropologia

## 5.1 Amazonian sociocosmologies - two styles of analysis

### 5.1.1 The moral economy of intimacy

Following a classification first outlined by Viveiros de Castro, Djup presents two analytical styles that currently dominate anthropological work on Amazonia. One of these is called the “moral economy of intimacy” approach and can according to Djup be found in the works of Overing (1989, 1992, 1993, 2003) and her former students (e.g. Bellaunde 1992, Gow, 1991, Ellis 1996, McCallum 1989, 1999, 2001, Santos-Granero 1991). Others influenced by this analytical style are according to Djup Perruchon (2003) and Rosengren (1998, 2000, 2005). As Djup writes, these authors have primarily concerned themselves with local understandings of community, “the good life” and the sociocultural practices linked with these (Djup 2007: 4). They are also deeply influenced by the feminist critique of the public – domestic dichotomy, and particularly by the ideas of Strathern, who argue that such a gendered distinction and dichotomized view of the social domain can be a hindrance in the study of indigenous communities. Overing and Passes, strong proponents of this analytical style, thus point to Strathern’s observation that for the Melanesian peoples she has studied, the domestic and the public merge to such an extent that most of men’s activities are directed towards the same production of kinship, growth and fertility that concerns the women (Strathern 1988: 94f). The same goes, according to Overing and Passes, for the indigenous peoples of Amazonia (Overing & Passes 2000b: 4).

Also in line with Strathern, the term ‘society’ is usually avoided in favor of ‘sociality’; a concept meant to reject a notion of the social as transcending the individual while underlining the idea that the social domain is constituted in and by the interactions of moral subjects (McCallum 1999: 444). Through what Djup defines as an essentially moral view of sociality, these authors primarily pay attention to human sociability, which is characterized by peaceful, non-coercive, egalitarian, cooperative, friendly, harmonious and caring relations ideally played out in daily interactions within the local group (Djup 2007: 4f). It is, however, also emphasized that the daily creation of this social world cannot be understood without considering the wider cosmic and inter-local relationships. These exterior domains are, however, regarded as lying beyond the social, and as being quintessentially asocial, non-human and amoral (Overing and Passes 2000, McCallum 2001).

### 5.1.2 The symbolic economy of alterity

The relationship with the outside world is in fact a major bone of contention between the “moral economy of intimacy” approach and the other major analytical style, which Viveiros de Castro calls “the symbolic economy of alterity”, because whereas the

former sees the social, and, in fact, the human, as constituted by the mutuality of everyday interaction between genealogical kin, the latter considers structures of reciprocity and symbolic expressions of affinity to be the locus of social reproduction, including the constitution of humanity (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 190).

Interested in the connections between sociologies and cosmologies, the structuralist-inspired anthropologists of the “symbolic economy of alterity” style (e.g. Descola 1992, 1993 and 1994, Erikson 1993 and 1999, Lima 1999, Taylor 1996, Vilaça 2000, Viveiros de Castro 1992, Århem 1993, 1996, 2001), have thus tended to focus on processes of symbolic exchange, such as war, cannibalism, hunting and shamanism, that all cross ontological, cosmological and sociopolitical boundaries and thereby play a central role in the definition of collective identities (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 1989). The works of these authors have emphasized exchange and what they call ontological predation, and, as noted above, the importance of affinity in the extended sense of potential or symbolic affinity, for understanding Amazonian constructions of the social. As Djup (2007: 5) notes, hostility and conflict thus stand out as central components of social relations, leading some authors to argue that acts such as killing, cannibalism and predation are the primary means of social reproduction throughout Amazonia (Viveiros de Castro 1992, Århem 1993, 1996), or that homicide and warfare are a central source of a group’s fertility and procreative power (Taylor 1996).

## **5.2 Human bodies, human persons**

### **5.2.1 The human body and Amazonian corporeality**

It has for the past thirty years become increasingly accepted that the human body is central to the analysis of Amazonian communities. There is also a general agreement that the human body by Amazonian peoples themselves is thought of as dependent on human ritual action and intervention to develop properly, rather than as something that grows naturally (McCallum 1996: 349). Concerning the growth of children, for example, the literature shows that in Amazonia, a lot of effort and attention goes to making children grow into productive, strong, healthy and beautiful adults by means of various treatments and modifications of their bodies (Belaunde 1992, Erikson 1999, Gow 2001, Hugh-Jones 1979, McCallum 1996, 2001). This view of the body is summed up by Viveiros de Castro in an article from 1987, here cited from McCallum who provides a translation from the original Portuguese:

... the human body needs to be submitted periodically to intentional processes of fabrication. The sexual relations between the genitors of a future individual are merely the initial moment of this task. And such fabrication is conceived mainly, but not exclusively, as a systematic combination of interventions over the substances that connect the body to the world: corporeal fluids, foods, emetics, tobacco, oils and vegetable dyes (Viveiros de Castro 1987: 31, translated and cited in McCallum 1996: 349)

Viveiros de Castro, and many others, also emphasize that the transformations of the body produced by these interventions at the same time bring about changes in social identity; as the body is grown, the social position of the person thus changes (McCallum 1996: 349). Speaking about personhood in the terms of Harris, the transition between social kinds is thus a product of action directed towards shaping or growing an individual's body. This action does not have to be carried out by the individual concerned, but can be allotted to, or taken by, different persons throughout his or her lifespan. Exactly how and by whom the human person is shaped and grown is, however, subject to some disagreement, and will thus be investigated here.

### **5.2.2 Two ways to understand what it is to be human**

McCallum presents one characterization of the approaches to notions of personhood and corporeality within current anthropology of Amazonia that follows the same basic division as the general one discussed above. In the first one, which is the one tied to the 'moral economy of intimacy' approach as well as the one in which she places herself, the emphasis lies on the "... participation of bodies in the economic cycles that constitute lived sociality..." (McCallum 1999: 444). Focus thus lies on the living and producing human person who in her actions works to constitute sociality. The person is seen as interconnected with and created in and by the actions of other human persons within the same web of sociality. These actions are essentially moral, since amoral actions do not constitute sociality. It is thus by living together as moral human agents that individuals are made and remain human persons (e.g. McCallum 1996, 1999, Overing 1981, Overing & Passes 2000b).

The other approach, tied to the 'symbolic economy of alterity' line of thought, to McCallum (1999: 444) instead sees the body as primarily inserted into a universe of symbols. Its shape, human or other, will thus depend on symbolic relations to other entities. In this approach too, acting as a human being is a prerequisite for having a human body with human agency. The actions, however, place us in such symbolic relations to other persons, human as well as nonhuman, and it is the nature of these relations that determine body shape and personhood, not the network of intrahuman relations that make up sociality (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998, Vilaça 2002).

The dependency on the actions of other persons for growth and development of the body and the actions of an individual to maintain a specifically human personhood, and thereby also a social identity, is thus something that the two approaches according to me agree on. The disagreement concerns what types of action and which persons it is that are primarily involved. I will now highlight some aspects of the two approaches through a discussion of two central ideas – sociality and perspectivism, which to me clarify the strengths and differences of the two approaches in a way that also supplies an important theoretical background for the analysis of my material on the Matsigenka.

### **5.2.3 Body, personhood and alterity – Amerindian perspectivism**

Under the heading Amerindian perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro has developed ideas concerning the extended social universes of Amazonian peoples and the notions of humanity and personhood implicated therein. Central to perspectivism is the idea that

the visible form of each species is an envelope or clothing concealing an internal human form, usually only visible to the species itself and to beings such as shamans, who possess the ability to transcend perspectives and bodily specificity. This internal form, in turn, is the soul or spirit, which Viveiros de Castro suggests should be viewed as “an intentionality or subjectivity formally identical to human consciousness” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471). Each such person, in possession of a soul, looks at the world from a point of view, and that point of view is what constitutes the subject. What Viveiros de Castro also argues with regards to Amerindian cosmologies is that “all beings see (‘represent’) the world in the same way – what changes is the world that they see” (ibid.: 476f). The result, he describes like this:

Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators). By the same token, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture - they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the maggots in rotting meat as grilled fish, etc.), they see their bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks etc.) as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (with chiefs, shamans, ceremonies, exogamous moieties, etc.). (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 470)

To see here refers literally to percepts, not analogically to concepts. This ability to have a point of view is according to Viveiros de Castro a power of the soul. Nonhumans are thus subjects if they have, or are, spirit, but since the soul is universal, the difference in point of view lies not there, but in the specificities of bodies. Different beings thus see different things because their bodies are different. These bodily differences, however, are not physiological, but concern the affects dispositions and capacities that make the body of each being unique, such as what it eats, how it lives, how it communicates and so on. The shape of the actual, physical body might be a strong sign of such differences, but what Viveiros de Castro calls ‘body’ is according to him better conceived of as a habitus; a collection of affects or ways of being (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 478).

### **5.2.3.3 Perspective, humanity, consubstantiality and transformation**

Our habitus also places us in a certain relation to other entities; relations that in fact constitute both them and us. As can be seen in the quote above and as has been pointed out, Viveiros de Castro and others in the same tradition argue that the relationship between prey and predator is the most central of these, but it is not the only one. Instead, perspectivism shows us a radically relational universe; one where relation always takes precedence over substance. Thus, a fish instead of being intrinsically fishy is a fish only by virtue of someone else whose fish it is. The thought is easier to understand by a comparison with kinship, where a person for example is a mother only because there is someone else whose mother she is. Viveiros de Castro challenges his



readers to imagine that all Amerindian substances are of this relational sort. Just as siblings are those who have the same parents, similar beings are thus be those who have the same fish, the same hammock, the same house, and so on (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 473). We are like those who share our habitus, do as we do, and who by doing so also share the same point of view, the same kind of body and the same kind of relations to the rest of the world. Humanity and being a human person is thus performative and dependent on maintaining a human perspective, not a matter of fixed substance, soul or character. As a consequence of this, transformations and interspecies metamorphoses are a definite possibility within the Amerindian framework, and are also frequent themes in myths and stories. For Viveiros de Castro, it is the relative and relational statuses of predator and prey that are at the core of such perspectival inversions (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 480).

From the point of view of perspectivism, to be a specifically human person thus means maintaining a specifically human body, differentiated from a more general substrate and from other beings by maintaining a distinctly human habitus and thus also perspective – by seeing the world as a human being instead of something else. Considering the fabricated nature of the human body discussed above, becoming human and remaining such is therefore from a perspectivist point of view a process of continuously shaping the body, its dispositions, behavior and capacities in a way that makes it increasingly, and specifically, human (Viveiros de Castro 1998, Vilaça 2002). In addition, the possibility of sameness turning into difference and the idea that sameness indeed is created out of difference makes proponents of this approach place alterity at the core of personhood. It is also why authors like Vilaça argue that the exterior is a constitutive part of kinship relations in Amazonia since all such relations are constructed from alterity as a starting point (Vilaça 349).

### **5.2.3 Body, personhood and intimacy – sociality**

#### **5.2.3.1 True persons work**

“A true person works and makes others consume, thus growing their bodies and strengthening sociality.” (McCallum 2001: 7)

A major proponent of the approach to human personhood that emphasizes the importance of sociality, McCallum, speaking of the Panoan Cashinahua, as can be seen in the citation above defines personhood in terms of production and consumption. According to her, Cashinahua persons are first and foremost the authors of substances or items that are either alienated or consumed. They cease to be persons when they are incapable of such authorship, for example while traveling or after death. As Overing points out, for many Amerindians, work is thus a manifestation of a productive knowledge that not only makes the creation of food and various items possible, but that also confers human status (Overing 1989: 164).

Having a properly human body, furthermore, is a prerequisite for what McCallum calls ‘moral personhood’ (1999: 444). Such personhood is not fixed and must therefore be realized continuously in daily life through the acts and human interactions that

constitute sociality. By exercising a moral personhood, dependent on having a properly human body, properly human persons thus both maintain their own human status and grow other properly human bodies capable of exercising a properly human, and moral, personhood. The same interchanges that constitute sociality, are thus "... the very economic processes whereby proper human persons are formed and "grown," and thus the intimacy between the body's material progress and the constitution of personhood, on the one hand, and of "society," on the other, is great, greater perhaps than in any other ethnographic area" (McCallum 1999: 444).

Beyond the sphere of moral human agency there is according to McCallum no properly social domain. In the interactions that constitute sociality, human persons instead also repel its opposite, antisociality, which is an inherent quality of nonhuman bodies and spirits who both are incapable of moral action. Relationships with the world outside the sphere of sociality thus always threaten to break down the human body and the sociality it both depends on and produces. To strengthen sociality and repel antisociality is crucial for the survival of human persons as well as human society (ibid.: 445).

### **5.2.3.3 Conviviality and consubstantiality**

To denote Amazonian sociality, many authors have chosen to use the word conviviality since it is considered to fit the stress upon the affective side of properly human agency apparent in the region. Overing and Passes (2000b: 14), for example, claim that "affect and the establishment of convivial affect is what Amazonian society is about". The same authors make the following description of the features they see as central to the notion of conviviality.

These features would include peacefulness, high morale and high affectivity, a metaphysics of human and non-human interconnectedness, a stress on kinship, good gifting-sharing, work relations and dialogue, a propensity for the informal and performative as against the formal and institutional, and an intense ethical and aesthetic valuing of sociable sociality. (Overing & Passes 2000a: xiif)

Relationships between people, communities and nature are only considered sociable, and thus also moral and properly human, when they are enacted in accordance with these expectations of generosity caring, sharing and friendship (Overing & Passes 2000b: 6). By entering into the relationships of caring and sharing, people also enter into the same sphere of mutual nurturance and contribution to the constitution of human bodies. As a result, living together creates a kind of material, bodily homogeneity, where people who from the beginning might have been dangerously different instead become both safe and similar. Here again then, eating and the sharing of food becomes a central aspect of a person's social identity. Consubstantiality in Amazonia, according to this approach, is thus constructed and maintained by nurturing relationships and, particularly, by the sharing of food (e.g. McCallum 1999, Overing 1996: 7).

### **5.2.3.4 Gendered personhood**

Just as the distinction between kin and others as well as human and nonhuman bodies is made in the course of the production of human sociality, gender differences are

according to McCallum based on the different roles men and women have in the process of production. Real people know how to work and produce properly. Real women harvest manioc and bananas, fish streams, weave ornaments and hammocks, make fermented drinks and cook real food. Real men, on the other hand, hunt, fish lakes and rivers and turn bits of the forest into fields. There is thus a notion of a gendered personhood manifested in the performance of properly male and female productive activities (McCallum 1990: 417). McCallum also shows that to the Cashinahua, the differences between men and women stem from the fact that men and women have different souls. This is because all the things a person learns becomes embodied in what the Cashinahua call the body soul, which is one of many souls they consider a person to have (McCallum 1999: 450). Much of what a proper adult person knows how to do is considered to be an aspect of the body-soul, aspects acquired when the person learnt to do a certain thing. The creation of gender is therefore also tied to the formation of the body soul. The same goes for differences between age-groups and social kinds, where older people have more powerful body-souls, as do shamans and medicine men.

Interestingly, McCallum claims that all capacities ingrained in the body-soul from the beginning are captured from outside the individual, be it from plants and animals or from elder kin. In all cases, knowledge is attached to the body by various means and manifests itself as a capacity to act in various ways. Like difference, similarity may also be ingrained in the soul, making people who live together and know and do the same things similar on a spiritual plane. Just as the body-soul is intimately connected to the physical body, spiritual sameness and consubstantiality, as discussed above, are thus very closely related (McCallum 1999: 449).

### **5.3 Two ways to become human – a summary**

As have been shown, these two approaches to personhood differ in perspective but agree on some central problems and aspects. Some points of agreement are the fabricated nature of the human body, the importance of the properly human body for human personhood, the relational understanding of what it is to be human and the importance of food for the creation of consubstantiality.

Another thing they agree on is the performative nature of human nature, meaning that it is the appropriate act that creates relation and social position instead of the other way around (Sahlins 1985: xi). Looking back at the general discussion on personhood and agentive capacities, a performative society could thus be assumed to judge the possession of such capacities on the basis and to the degree that these are performed. Here, a person cannot be something that is never acted out.

Because of the general theoretical agreement that being human is dependent on a certain set of social relations, it can also be claimed that in Amazonia, the appropriate act by creating the appropriate relation also creates the appropriate subject. Since shared substance or bodily similarity, and in extension also agentive capacity, is seen as created by such social acts, a person is, furthermore, not only dependent on his or her own agency to belong to a certain social kind, but on the agentive capacities of other persons.

The disagreement between the two approaches to personhood presented here to me mainly concern what acts and what social relations it is that creates the human body, and thus also the human person.

In perspectivism, agency determines physical shape. Being human is equated with having a human habitus, seeing the world as a human being does and by doing so maintaining a human perspective or point of view. All these things places the person in a certain set of relations to other types of beings; relations that both constitute the subject and that can be reversed by atypical action or seeing. Similar beings see in the same way. Becoming a specifically human being is a process of differentiating the body, its dispositions, behavior and capacities from a general substrate of universal personhood. If this process is reversed or the perspective is altered, humanity is lost.

For those who instead stress the importance of sociality, the human body is grown by the actions of moral human subjects within the same web of convivial social relations. Here, body, soul, gender and human personhood all stem from the continuous acting out of the tranquil, caring and sharing relationships identified as properly human. By acting in a morally proper way only available to those having a human body, people both maintain their own status as human persons and contribute to the growing and shaping of properly human bodies capable of the same kind of action. By sharing substances people strengthen both sociality and humanity. A person who does not act in a way that constitutes sociality is not a human person, nor is she kin.

## **5.4 A more unrestricted approach to Amazonian personhood**

I really do think that these approaches are closer to each other than they like to make out. I also do not understand the seemingly pressing need to generalize one of them to all Amazonian peoples. It would be much more interesting to show how these approaches complete and tie in to each other and how any one society may exhibit a mix of elements from both, with a possible emphasis on one or the other. I thus find both of these approaches interesting and useful and am not ready, or willing, to commit to any one of them beforehand. Like Djup, I prefer a starting point that neither almost exclusively privileges intralocal relations of caring and sharing, nor extralocal relationships characterized by what she succinctly calls "... a reciprocity always on the verge of predatory violence" (Djup 2007: 6). I am also quite fond of how Vilaça although leaning towards the symbolic economy approach attempts to, at least to some extent, connect the two approaches by showing that neither can fully account for the constitution of Amazonian persons and societies (Vilaça 2002: 348). I will thus approach my material in a more open-ended way, but hope that my material may help shed light on life in Amazonia in a way that helps to overcome what to me seems to be a theoretical line too sharply drawn.

## 6 Beginner humans

### 6.1 Behavioral restrictions during pregnancy – the danger of physical transformation

In accordance with reports from other Amazonian peoples, the Matses do not seem to care much for or have any elaborate theories of conception. There is an awareness that menstruation and sex is a prerequisite for becoming pregnant, but no notion that the fetus is formed by blood and/or semen, which reportedly is common in other parts of lowland South America (see for example Rosengren 2006: 84, McCallum 2001: 16, Vilaça 2002: 252). When it comes to the origin of the human spirit people generally say that they do not know where it comes from. When pressed, some suggest that it comes from god, meaning the Christian god, and that people earlier really had no idea. Its origin can thus be said to be external, as far as anyone can tell.

Regardless of how it comes into being and who its parents are, the human shape and disposition of the future child is dependent on the doings of others rather than given from the moment of conception. As Vilaça points out with respect to a wide variety of Amazonian groups, the humanity of a child's parents is no assurance that the child itself will be fully human; instead, the its humanity must be controlled and fixed to make sure it does not assume a nonhuman body (Vilaça 2002: 349). Amongst the Matses, this control is in the hands of the parents, who by behaving correctly make sure that their child is born a fully human being. Behaving correctly to a large extent here means observing a number of dietary and hunting restrictions. Since men are the main providers of meat, the hunting restrictions apply almost exclusively to them.

The dietary restrictions connected to childbearing can be divided into two classes, those aiming to make the birth easier for the woman and those that ensure that the baby is born with a human physiology. Generally, it is more important for the mother to avoid the foods that make the birth slow and painful while both parents need to avoid food that places the baby in danger of physical transformation. A good example of an explanation of these restrictions is presented in the quote below.

A: When the woman is pregnant, there are things the parents are not supposed to do, right?

D: Yes, it is like that. They cannot eat the heads of peccaries, tapirs, stingrays and howler monkeys, but they can eat the heads of wooly monkeys, because they are pretty, so that the baby will look pretty. If they eat the head of a peccary the baby may come out with a pointed head, like a peccary, if it is stingray it will have a split lip, if it's the head of a tapir a hunchback. Feet of turtles or tortoises are also bad; the baby will come out like that. And women cannot eat armored catfish [L.Sp. *carachama*] because then the baby will not come out, because the body of the catfish is very scaly and the baby will get stuck in the vagina. They can also not

eat deer, because they have horns that can get stuck, and no wolf fish [L.Sp. *huasaco*] because then the woman will bleed too much when giving birth.

A: What can they eat?

D: Electric eel, because they are slippery so the baby will come out faster.

As can be seen, the general rule is that the child will take on the physical characteristics of the animal ingested by its parents. Generally, the heads of all game animals and some fish are dangerous to eat since eating them may cause the head of the baby to take on the shape of for example a tapir, peccary, spider monkey or some food fish species. Some informants also identify arms and legs, including hands and feet, as particularly likely to cause transformation, not of the head, but of the limbs of the unborn child, making it incapable of walking or using its hands. More particular transformations can also be caused by the dusky titi monkey, which gives, and has, ugly teeth. As the man in the quote says, the stingray may also apart from changing the whole head of the baby give it a split lip that looks like that of a ray. One informant also told me that the parents should avoid not heads but brains since the baby otherwise can be born with a body looking like brains. Not a very nice scenario.

Children born with transformations are usually killed and buried by the mother at the birth-site, which traditionally was in the forest. Nowadays, some women give birth at home and I have no information as to how a transformed child born there would be disposed of. Several people told me stories of others who recently had given birth deformed to newborns and because of the deformities had thrown them away (Sp. *botar*), so apparently infanticide is still practiced. In the words of one old woman, those babies who are like animals, they are no good (Sp. *ellos no vale*).

All of these transformations are caused by the retaliation of an animal spirit against the unborn child of the person who ate the animal. It is thus the doings of animal persons that make the child take on an animal form. Animal spirits also retaliate against the children of persons who kill them, and that is where hunting restrictions enter the picture. As was pointed out in the introducing chapter of this thesis, I am using the word 'retaliate' to refer to what spirits do since it is the direct translation of the Matsigenka word *quid*. The word also translates as 'reciprocate', indicating that it most definitely is the aggravating action directed against it that makes an animal spirit take revenge. By inference, more positive interactions should also be possible, which may help explain the functioning of the medicines discussed above. The word used to denote the action in Spanish is *cutipar*, which is the regional word used to refer to shamanic attack.

Most people I talked to agree that the danger of transformation ceases towards the last trimester of the pregnancy. Before that, the baby is considered to be unformed, weak, lacking in force (M. *uidën* or Sp. *fuera*), have a soft body and not yet be like a person. As such, it is completely dependent on its parents' actions to safeguard it from malignant animal agency and keep it in human form. By breaking dietary prohibitions, parents thus risk opening up for other beings to affect the development of the child in ways that make it lose its humanity. When it comes to what *should* be done during pregnancy, all women adamantly argue that they do all types of work. Some also told me that it in fact is important that pregnant women work hard, as they always do. If they

did not, their children would become lazy and incapable of work. It is thus through the controlling actions of both parents and nonhuman persons that the child receives its final physical form. The child itself is passive, a non-actor and definitely not yet a human person.

## **6.2 The couvade in theoretical terms**

To better understand the significance of these restrictions it seems natural to turn to the discussion of the couvade, reinitiated in 1974 when Rivière attempted a reformulation of the concept. What Rivière suggests is that the ritual actions of the parents connected to childbirth are not concerned with the creation of the child's physical being, but with that of her spiritual existence. This spiritual birth may take longer than the physical one, it may even take years before the spiritual creation is completed and the parts coalesce to form an independent individual. The prenatal couvade similarly indicates that the process of combining soul and body starts before birth (Rivière 1974: 431).

To exemplify, Rivière brings up the Tiro, who believe that there is a pool of soul matter at the end of the world from which the soul of each individual is drawn at birth and returns after death. Early in life, this soul matter is not properly fixed in the newborn, who also does not have enough to make her an independent being. The short-lived infant is thus regarded as someone who has not made a proper and complete entrance into the world. This soul flows into the child through its parents through what the Tiro depict as a spiritual umbilical cord that survives long after birth and gradually disappears as the child becomes stronger and more independent. Whereas other peoples may not depict the spiritual connection as graphically, Rivière still claims that similar ideas lie behind the practices of the couvade (*ibid.*: 429). As he points out, the couvade is associated with the creation of a new member of society, a new human person. This person is not just a physical object but an animate being often composed of a body and one or many souls; elements can be hard to distinguish during life although most societies have ways of properly disposing of both after death. Birth, he suggests, presents a similar if opposite problem, because for birth to be successful, there must be spiritual as well as physical creation (Rivière 1974: 431).

To the Matses, the length of the couvade is variable since it is related to the condition of the child, which is the case in the material brought up by Rivière as well. Rivière also points out that although different informants tend to give different lists of the restrictions involved, the purpose of the couvade is never in doubt. Instead, that purpose is achieved by a pragmatic selection of behavior that experience suggests are effective in attaining the required end in any individual case (Rivière 1974: 429). This too is true of the Matses. No single person I talked to observe all restrictions discussed here, but everyone knows about them. Some people choose to observe several restrictions stringently, whereas others are much more lax. Only one person I talked to maintained that none of these rules matter and that nothing will happen when they are broken. Considering the prenatal couvade among the Matses, which was discussed above, it is clear that the notion of physical and spiritual creation suggested by Rivière is applicable, although to me the relationship of soul and body is unclear. Is the

couvade, as Rivière argues, about the fixation of spirit, or is it about the creation and differentiation of the body, which is what most current anthropological theory of the Amazon suggests? Most likely it is about both. There is a blending of body and soul and a need to fixate both in order to create a human child.

### **6.3 Birth and acceptance as a human being**

When the child is still within its mother, and especially before the last trimester of pregnancy, it may thus physically transform. If this happens, it does so because its parents instead of safeguarding the helpless and still unformed human by restricting their contact with the non-human world have allowed animal spirits to influence their child to become more like them. Parental interaction with the world outside the human sphere thus entails an element of danger particularly pertinent to those most vulnerable, the unborn humans-to-be.

As pointed out above, the spirits do this in retaliation for actions committed against them. There is, however, no notion that they try to change human babies so that they can take the place of the dead animal, become its kin or something like that. Instead, deformed babies reportedly have the same post-mortem fate as other human beings. Regarding the question of body and soul raised above, this could indeed indicate that the aim of the couvade is to secure the shape of the physical body while the soul as such always is and will be human, much like Viveiros de Castro argues.

Clear too is that a child born with the physical characteristics of an animal is considered unfit to be taken up into the human community. At the time of Romanoff's writing, there were no "unintentional" infanticides, where a child is starved or neglected to death, and I could not find any evidence that this had changed. Then as now, once a child is nursed and taken back to the house, it is accepted (Romanoff 1984: 77). Apart from being born with a human physiology, being offered and eating human food and being taken to live with human beings is thus what initially confirms the human status of a newborn. Here, there is an interesting parallel to what occurs at death. In brief, the spirit of a dying human leaves its body to go visit its dead ancestors who live in a longhouse in the sky. There, the ancestors will offer the spirit of the still living human maize drink and tapir meat. If the spirit accepts the offer and eats, he or she will never return to the waiting body, which will die, leaving the spirit to take its place among its kin in the sky instead of remaining with its kin on earth.

This role played by the giving and eating of food for obtaining a certain status, such as that of a human being, to me highlights the importance of food noted by both approaches to Amazonian personhood I discussed earlier. What the examples above show is according to me that the provision of food not only keeps an infant alive but also makes it human and keeps it as such as long as the food is produced and given by humans rather than other beings. By the same logic, someone who is dead or is born with a nonhuman physiology cannot eat human food. It is, however, not only the eating of human food given by human kin that makes a child develop properly. Instead, the continuation of the couvade and the application of a number of different plant medicines is also necessary



## 6.4 Medicines to build strong and proper human children

Although the danger of physical transformation is over, a newborn is still extremely vulnerable to spirit retaliation as well as weak and moldable in other respects. Parents thus ideally eat very carefully until the child starts to gain weight and grow stronger, when they step by step resume a normal diet. In addition, they treat the child with different plant medicines to make it grow in different ways.

One of these medicines is called *Bacuë machinte neste*, or child top of head wetting medicine, and is used on newborns and toddlers as a prevention and protection against spirit retaliation. After the child is treated the first time, parents do not have to follow the dietary restrictions as strictly as before and may resume hunting without acute fear of harming their child. The medicine is applied in the form of an infusion used to bathe the child's whole body and, like almost all Matses medicines, works on the spirit plane. It is the spirits of the two plants used that are strong and able to protect the child. Treatment thus involves four-way interaction between the infant, the person treating it, the spirit of the animal retaliator and the spirits of the medicinal plants. In this interaction, the child remains passive, potentially under the attack of a spirit acting against it because of something its parents did and under the protection of plant spirits acting on behalf of it. To me, this medicine appears to work by plant spirits protecting the child until it is strong enough to withstand attacks by itself. That strength, however, is apart from the giving of food also a result of medicinal treatment.

One such medicine is *uidën daue*, or force/strength medicine, where *cuebu uidën daue*, Spix's guan strength medicine seems to be the kind most frequently used. This medicine is used to make the legs of children strong so that they can walk far and fast without getting tired. It is applied by bathing the legs and is normally used until the child is about 5 years old, but if an older child or adult is lazy or has weak legs it is used on them too. I for example witnessed a 14 year old boy who was considered weak and unwilling to work the fields, learn to hunt and carry heavy loads receive treatment.

While the legs are bathed, the person doing the bathing, usually a knowledgeable uncle, repeatedly tells the child to "run like a Spix's guan". With different plants, other animals may also be invoked, such as deer and jaguars, where deer too are fast runners and jaguars according to an informant run more and faster than anything else. Interestingly, the same plant used for deer force medicine is also used to treat illness brought on by deer. The speech is directed towards the child, but it is reportedly the spirit of the animal invoked that gives its power through the medicine. It is thus of central importance that Spix's guans, deer and jaguars run fast. It was also pointed out to me that the plant used for *Cuebu uidën daue* has very strong, unbreakable branches.

The plant spirits, in turn, are those who allow safe communication with the animal spirit. Since there is indication that the same plants that do this also may be used to cure a person made ill by the animal associated with the plant, my guess is that curing too is a process where the plant spirit acts as an intermediate powerful enough to protect the sick person. Crucially, the animal spirits are here with the help of plant spirits asked in a safe way to contribute to the child's development whereas they in all other cases retaliate directly and as a response to unwanted human action directed against them.

A third medicine interesting to discuss here is *Chu daue*, or heat medicine. This medicine is used only once on each newborn. The purpose is to make sure the child for the rest of its life will be warm and sweaty when it wakes up. I have no information about how this medicine works, but to wake up sweating is by the Matses considered to be a very good thing. Not only does it mean you will not freeze in cooler weather, heat and sweat are also associated with power and energy and are seen as a negation of laziness. The medicine can thus be seen as a help in the creation of a productive human person. The same goes for the other medicines discussed here. Heat, strength and the ability to willingly walk fast and far without complaining are obviously important skills for the Matses to impart on their children. As will be seen as we go along, to work the fields, go hunting, get up early in the morning and generally be an energetic person are in fact highly valued virtues considered vital for good persons. To understand the full significance of the first medicine mentioned in this section, the *bacüe machinte neste*, however, it is necessary to look at childhood illness, which, as it turns out, also gives a better picture of what it is that is considered normal for a human child and how that normalcy is achieved.

## **6.5 Illness during childhood – spirit retaliation and the danger of gaining an animal disposition**

During pregnancy animal spirits are as we have seen strong enough in relation to the child to transform his or her physical body to resemble the animal in question. Once the child is born, its basic physical form is considered fixed. The child is, however, still very vulnerable to spirit attack, but instead of leading to physical transformations, such attacks cause the child to fall ill, take on animal behavioral characteristics and eventually die if the situation is not solved. Dietary and hunting restrictions thus continue until the child is strong enough to withstand the danger.

The transfer of animal characteristics is seemingly not an uncommon idea in lowland South America. Lima, for example, writes that among the Juruna too, the breaking of dietary restrictions causes a conjunction between the child and the animal whereby the child assumes the characteristics of the animal or plant food (Lima 1995: 180-187). Vilaça similarly points out that post-partum restrictions among the Tupi-Guarani-speaking Sirionó, the Carib-speaking Yekuana and various Gê-speaking groups such as the Apinayé, the Suyá and the Panará are all explained in similar fashion, and goes on to quote Seeger (1981: 152), who maintains that “If the parents eat the animal, the child will have the animal’s characteristics” (Vilaça 2002: 357).

### **6.5.1 Illness, power and animal influence**

Most cases of illness in pre-pubertal children result in fever, and the cause is almost always spirit retaliation by an animal that the child’s parents have interacted with in some way. This type of fever is particular to children and does not affect adults except for in serious cases, when very powerful spirits retaliate. As the child grows older and starts to interact with the world to a greater extent, its own actions against other beings

may also lead to illness, albeit of a less serious kind since a child is unlikely to come into direct contact with the more powerful beings, like jaguars and spirits, that dwell and move outside of the human sphere.

The fever will be stronger and more dangerous when the retaliator is a powerful, like a jaguar, boa, tapir or spirit. Following the same logic, there are some beings considered too weak to retaliate against adults. Examples of these are young pacas and agoutis (both rodents of various sizes) as well as coatis. Retaliation by a coati will make the child of the person who killed the coati claw at its mother, just like a coati, which has long and sharp claws. The black agouti will make children fall ill with fever and make them rub their faces like a rodent cleaning itself. Other animals that primarily retaliate against children and all cause fevers are the electric eel, who makes the child cramp as if electrocuted, the stingray, who causes twitching, flopping around and a continuous opening and closing of the mouth, and the parrot, who makes children pant as if they are constantly out of breath. In the two latter cases, the symptoms mimic the behavior of a dying stingray and parrot respectively. These animals may retaliate successfully against children up to the age between 10 and 12. In all these cases, the illness is a consequence of the child's parents killing or eating the animal in question.

There are also beings that cause different symptoms in children and adults. Here, the tortoise is a good example. Retaliating against children, a tortoise spirit will cause high fever and a difficulty to open one's eyes. Younger children will also pull arms and legs together, like a tortoise pulling its limbs in. Adults will instead get fever and abdominal pains caused either by constipation, meaning the excrement stays inside like the limbs of a threatened tortoise, or by a hard swelling reminiscent of a tortoise lodged inside the body. Similarly, a retaliating alligator spirit will, apart from the fever, cause children to lie on their backs with palms facing upwards and fingers splayed out, just like a dead alligator, whereas adults will merely show their eye whites. Children may also get similar symptoms from mistreating lizards. Other beings that make children ill after direct interaction are all of a much less imposing character, such as the papaya, which causes the tongue to become white and filled with small sores, and the ball or gourd, which causing a swelling of the belly after being played with.

In contrast to these more harmless characters, some animals are capable of retaliating against and killing anyone, although it takes less provocation for them to retaliate against a child. Here, it is the degree of provocation that determines the strength of the response. Two good examples are the most powerful animals of all, namely boas and jaguars. The boa causes strong fevers and makes the sick person hug things to their bodies very hard, just like a boa. If a person only looks at a boa, it can make his or her children sick in this way. If the person plays with it, disturbs it or kills it, the spirit will make a direct attack instead. The jaguar, similarly, will retaliate against those below 15 years of age when a parent looks at it but directly against those adults who kill a jaguar or touch its urine, which is said to enter the body as the force of the jaguar spirit.

Screaming and sleeplessness are other afflictions common to children, and especially young ones. In contrast to the vast majority of the ones mentioned above, they may be caused by the child direct interaction with a seemingly rather harmless

being such as the butterfly, which may retaliate against those who treat it roughly. A person suffering because of butterfly spirit retaliation will constantly wake up as if frightened by something and move restlessly in sleep, much like a fluttering butterfly. Parents, on the other hand, may cause sleeplessness and screaming in their child by for example touching, killing or eating the more powerful owls or by looking in a mirror or at a television. When it comes to the mirror or television, the original word for mirror in Matsigenka is *isnante*, meaning instrument for looking at each other, where each other refer to a person and her spirit. The moving images on the TV are also considered to belong to the realm of spirits. Screaming can also be caused by other kinds of spirits retaliating by causing fevers and behavioral changes. This is because they will show themselves in the sick person's dreams. Feverish children may thus see images of large fish, tapirs or spider monkeys that come out of the dark to get them and will scream out of fear.

### **6.5.2 Passivity and mutated personhood**

In all the cases mentioned so far, apart from the lizard, the papaya, the ball and the butterfly, the child is, in contrast to adults, still passive, dependent upon other people's actions and acted upon rather than capable of acting upon the world and beings around it. It is, so to say, a receiver of action instead of an agent in itself. Being acted upon by various kinds of spirits, furthermore, almost always changes the behavior of the child, who generally takes on a central behavioral characteristic of its retaliator. Instead of the prenatal physical transformation, there is thus a postnatal behavioral one.

Considering the importance of practice in Amazonian societies, this is a very grave matter. A person acting as an animal has, if we use the ideas of Viveiros de Castro (1998), lost her human habitus and thus suffers a deadly incompatibility between habitus and physical shape. Turning instead to McCallum (1996) and Overing and Passes (2000), a child acting as an animal is unable to uphold the relations that create both human persons and sociality and to partake in the sharing of human food so central to maintaining a human body. In line with this, Lagrou presents a picture of Cashinahua illness that is very similar to my understanding of the Matsigenka equivalent and consequently suggest that illness should be seen as "... a dangerous and uncontrolled process of becoming other and nonhuman. The body mimics its invader in such a way that its human existence is placed in danger." (Lagrou 2004: 251).

Concerning the frequently occurring fevers, they come from what I would like to call systemic illness, meaning that the retaliation is directed against the whole human being rather than against a part of it and that the spirit retaliating does so with its whole being rather than with a part of it, which is the case for many illnesses afflicting adults. Illness in this sense can clearly be interpreted as a dehumanizing process where the capacity and propensity for human action is mutated to resemble an animal personhood instead. As will be shown in a later discussion, there are other types of illnesses that instead dehumanize by making proper human action impossible, causing non-action rather than nonhuman action. This type of illness is more common to adults.

## 6.6 The good human child

Children are not always ill and misbehaving because of animal influence, and looking not only at negations but also at how a good and healthy human child is supposed to behave naturally also throws light on Matses personhood. Apart from shaping the new human being with the help of plant spirits, parents are also responsible for giving it food and teaching it to behave in a proper way. As was seen in the discussion of *uidën* and *chu daue* above, strength and energy are two important characteristics of good children. To this, obedience and diligence, which in fact only is energy coupled with obedience, should be added. This does not mean that children are not allowed to play, but that they as they grow older are expected to help out more and more in the household and that they should do so with energy and without complaining. The child thus has to do what its mother asks it to do. In return, the mother should be responsive when the child needs something. As could be seen above, this harmonious relationship can be disturbed by, amongst others, the *coati*, which may cause the child to claw at its mother instead. To grow well, a child should also bathe (as grownups do) at least twice a day. If it does not, it will according to some become short and lazy. Lazy children are admonished or treated with plant medicines or emetics.

The chores children are expected to assist with are gender specific. According to many parents, the definition of a good daughter is one who does what her mother wants even before she is asked to do it, such as doing laundry and getting manioc from the garden. A good son is one who gets firewood, fishes and hunts (when he is older). When it comes to moods and dispositions, it is considered good for both boys and girls to be lively and energetic but more important for girls to be obedient and easy to deal with and for boys to be outgoing. According to several informants of different age and gender, if a girl is diligent, nice to her parents and easy and smooth do deal with it is seen as a sign that she will make a good wife in the future.

The division of chores is not absolute, there are plenty of things that both boys and girls can do, but expectations on them still differ. As Romanoff says, girls start to help their mothers as soon as they are able to, eventually resuming child-care responsibilities, whereas boys help less often (Romanoff 1984: 138). This can according to me be explained by the simple fact that the household is not the place of male action, but of female ditto. Grown men are instead responsible for hunting, building and working in the fields, both of which very young boys are deemed unfit or too vulnerable to do. Another explanation that will be discussed thoroughly in chapter seven is that girls are considered ready to assume their duties as women several years earlier than boys. Girls thus also learn earlier, during childhood, whereas boys learn to be men during adolescence.

## 6.7 Conclusions so far - agency, humanity and balance in an extended social universe

From the ideas about prenatal transformations and childhood illness presented in this chapter, a few conclusions can be drawn. The first one is that the strength of the

retaliator determines who it can retaliate against and whether that retaliation will be partial, afflicting a part of the body, or systemic, causing fever and behavioral changes. At the same time, children are less able to withstand retaliation than adults, and may also easily fall ill because of something their parents, rather than themselves, do. As they grow older and become stronger and more independent, they are not ill as often as earlier and the illnesses they have are less serious, to a lesser degree caused by their parents and to some degree cause by their own actions against other types of persons. During childhood a person thus goes from being very vulnerable and extremely passive as a newborn, to progressively becoming stronger, more active and more resilient. Most vulnerable of all are unborn children, who may transform physically.

The capacity to withstand transformation and illness is, furthermore, coupled with the child's capacity to act in the world as a human person. The stronger the hold on human personhood, the less likely a child is to fall ill. The first step is to be born with a human shape, but that is indeed only the first step. As the child grows, it is also less and less likely to fall ill because of actions carried out by its parents, indicating that the bond between them also diminishes when the child becomes more independent and has a firmer grip on its own human personhood. As it becomes a human person in its own right, the child thus starts to become an agent in herself, rather than a passive entity completely abandoned to the actions of others.

Returning to the discussion of the *couvade* as well as sociality and perspectivism, this progressive strengthening of the child could be seen to coincide with the successive fixation of the soul in the body, the differentiation of the body and the successful building of it through nurturance and the giving and eating of human food. Indicating that this is the case in other parts of Amazonia, Da Matta (1971, cited in Rivière 1974: 433) for example shows that for the Apinayé, the child is not a complete being until she is about eight years old since she until that age is liable to soul loss. Pollock, on the other hand, phrases the fact that a child is at all subject to harm through indirect means, through its parents, as an indication of the infant's lack of the capacities of personhood. According to the Kulina, the group Pollock writes about, the danger disappears only after the child has consumed sufficient mild substances to be completely formed as a person (Pollock 1996: 327).

Childhood illness also gives indications to how a child behaves when it is healthy and thus also fully human. A fully human baby does not scream and sleeps calmly at night. This is, together with the clawing of the mother caused by *coati* spirit retaliation, especially interesting in the light of the weight Amazonian peoples according to the 'moral economy of intimacy' scholars place on smooth, calm and happy relationships between kin as necessary for the sociality that secures human identity (e.g. Gow 2000). The clawing, screaming and sleepless child's abnormal and demanding behavior, caused by animosity directed against it by various spirits and oftentimes by the taking on of animal behavior, could thus be seen as upsetting the loving relationships upon which the child depend for its humanity. This can be interpreted in different ways depending on the theoretical approach used, but either way it is possible to with certainty say that the process of becoming and staying human involves many different types of people, both human and not, that all have the capacity to shape the developing child in some way.

Apart from the struggles with illness, transformation and building of strength and force, growing up as a Matses child as also means acquiring the proper skills of being a Matses boy or girl, essentially a process of learning how to act as proper and gendered human person. This is probably true for human societies everywhere. Through the giving of food, application of medicines and attentions of their parents, children thus slowly acquire a capacity for gendered human agency. Interestingly, this capacity is to some extent bestowed on the child by the spirits of plants and animals, indicating that humanity also is captured from the world outside the sphere of human sociality.

This growth of human agentive capacity takes place at the same time as it gets more difficult for other kinds of persons to act upon the child. Preadolescents are, however, always dependent on their relatives and parents not only for food, shelter and guidance, but also because spirits may still retaliate because of something their parents did. In terms of personhood they are thus still in a phase of becoming, of acquiring the proper agentive capacities as well as the power to act and exercise those capacities in a world inhabited by several other types of (nonhuman) persons of varying power with whom it is important to maintain good relations. As children, they are not yet capable of exercising a full human personhood and are still more acted on than acting; the balance of power with the nonhuman is not in their favor.

Remembering the words of McCallum (2001: 7) who claims that “[a] true person works and makes others consume, thus growing their bodies and strengthening sociality”, it can also be seen that the child, itself lacking in the personhood department, is dependent on the work of others to grow without contributing much in return. Here too, the balance with other persons is different than for a fully grown human being. Interestingly, it is also not until the child is old, and human, enough to itself provide for and grow others that the danger of childhood disease and illness brought on by parental actions ceases. This happens at early puberty, where both boys and girls assume the roles of growers, albeit in different ways. During this phase in life, another type of active building of the skills needed for proper personhood also becomes important, namely that of the transfer of gender-specific skills and energy from old to young. Before moving on to the making of men and women during adolescence, we will therefore take a closer look at the concepts *sinan*, *sian* and *dayac* and the beliefs and practices linked with these.

# Interlude 1: A closer look at *sinan* and *dayac*

D: *Sinan* means, for example, if I do not have *sinan*, I will not kill monkeys with my arrows because they will escape, but he who has *sinan* is a good marksman, he also makes swiddens and is not lazy, he wants to do it, he sweats a lot, he is brave and knows how to get up at two in the morning. He who does not have *sinan* is worthless, not good for anything. That is *sinan*. And *sinan* can also be, if I am a shaman, my spirit (Sp. *espiritu*), that knows how to kill people, is *sinan*. If I do not have it, I am good for nothing. That is *sinan*.

K: Women with *dayac* make maize drink from early morning to very late, grinding corn all day. It is very important to have *dayac* because we want to make maize drink and give it to our men. First you give a lot to your husband, and then you share with women, separately, drinking together.

These two quotes are typical ways of explaining the nature and purpose of *sinan* and *dayac*; two central concepts in Matses conceptions of personhood that as was pointed out in chapter 3 also play an important role in production and exchange patterns. Despite this centrality, they are also something of which people have somewhat diverging views. Thus, while some maintain that *sinan* is all there is, others distinguish between *sinan* and *sian*. Similarly, while some maintain that only men can have *sinan*, others think that only shamans have *sinan* while men, and sometimes women, have *sian*, while yet others think that everyone potentially has *sinan*, although men have more and shamans most. Everybody agrees that women although they do not necessarily have *sinan* or *sian* have *dayac*, which everyone can have. The tendency to associate *sinan* or *sian* more with men than with women and ultimately with shamans is also shared by everyone. The spectra thus runs from *dayac* as the most feminine and common, through *sian* and to *sinan*, the most masculine and most difficult to possess. As will be shown, to possess these traits or substances are crucial for acting like a real Matses, and thus also for being a real person defined by the capacity for proper and gendered human action.

## ***Dayac* – skill in the world of domestic chores**

*Dayac* means hard working or hard-workingness, which is a highly desired trait in both men and women. To have *dayac* and not be lazy is important to be able to fulfill the duties of everyday life without complaint and suffering. It is also important for both men and women to work hard and willingly to keep spouses and other kin happy.

The work for which it is necessary to have *dayac* is primarily the work associated with agriculture and household chores. Most importantly, *dayac* has nothing to do with hunting, which also explains why it is primarily associated with women. Importantly, a



good man also has *dayac* and carries out the chores associated with having it. Hunting and *sinan* are so to say added on top of this to make a complete man. Earlier, women used to hunt too, but this is becoming very rare.

A woman with a lot of *dayac* is thus someone who always works hard to make fermented drinks, harvest and cook yucca and keep the house tidy and well swept, inside and out. In other words, she energetically fulfills her daily chores. One older woman known for her ability to work hard also told me that a woman with *dayac* “gets up early in the morning and works all day, leaves early to clean the field and comes home very late”, although her husband very eagerly pointed out that a good woman also makes drinks. The same woman also explained that men who have *dayac* work hard in the field, clearing new ones or tending to the ones he has. They also always make firewood for their wives or female relatives. For both men and women, to have *dayac* is thus equal to possessing the ability to carry out domestic and horticultural chores. Importantly, for a person who has *dayac*, such work is done not because it has to be done or he or she is told to do it, but because the person wants to do it. The work that is a burden for one without *dayac* is easily and eagerly done by one who has it, whereby the result naturally also is better – more drinks, bigger and cleaner fields, more and better food and so on. The degree to which a person is thought to have *dayac* is indeed deducted from both the quality and quantity of that person's work. Skill and energy go together and practice is the only proof of status.

## ***Sinan* – skillful dealing with the outside world**

The definition of *sinan* and *sian* are less straight forward. As I mentioned in chapter 3, Romanoff (1984) glosses *sinan* as energy, sweat or heat. Fleck, on the other hand, translates it to marksmanship, courage, strength, ability to hunt and shaman's soul. In my conversations with Matses, marksmanship and the ability to always encounter and kill game, especially using bow and arrow, was together with being energetic usually the features that were emphasized the most. Since hunting with bow and arrow is a male chore, perhaps *the* male chore, women are considered to have less or no *sinan*. Women who have it always manage to find sloth, catch frogs and rodents and also go with their men hunting peccary and paca. As with *dayac*, demonstrated skill is what indicated possession of *sinan*. The proof that someone has *sinan* is as can be seen associated with killing, although I think this should be interpreted in a broad sense, as taking charge over someone's life or most forcefully acting upon another being. That a man with *sinan* can impose himself on others I clear in the following words by a man who told me that a person with a lot of *sinan* is not only a good marksman, “but will also not get tired, not even after walking far, and if someone wants to fight him, he always wins, he can fight like a jaguar”.

For those who distinguish between *sinan* and *sian*, the former is for shamans only whereas the latter is what ordinary people may possess. Those who do not distinguish between the two and only acknowledge *sinan* instead maintain that shamans have more *sinan* than anyone else. The *sinan* of shamans, furthermore, is physically present in the shape of insects, larvae, lumps or thorns inside the shaman's chest, whereas the *sinan* or

*sinan* of ordinary people does not take on a physical shape distinct from its possessor. For simplicity, I will from now on only use the term *sinan*.

There are currently no shamans among the Matses, but everybody seems to know that the test to see if a novice had accumulated enough *sinan* to be a shaman was to kill another human being with magic. While a man who has a lot of *sinan* always hits the mark with his arrows, a shaman, who has even more, can thus kill human beings from a distance with the help of magic. The actions that indicate that someone has *sinan* are also all associated with the world outside of the human sphere; the world inhabited by nonhuman persons such as animals and spirits. To me, this is true also for the shaman, because whereas the final exam in shamanistic training was to kill a fellow human, which for that matter in itself is a nonhuman act, a shaman is the person most capable of handling and interacting with nonhuman persons, even sharing their food or becoming classificatory kin, without placing him- or herself in acute danger of illness or involuntary transformation (e.g. Rosengren 2005: 812).

## ***Sinan, dayac* and personhood**

To me, the terms can be placed on a scale from hard-workingness through energetic and able to kill game to able to kill with magical means. There is also a gendered aspect to the scale, where *sinan* is associated with men and *dayac* is associated with women. *Sinan* and *dayac* are, as I pointed out earlier, also central to Matses notions of personhood. A person who has them is a good person; a person who does not is a worthless one – an *uspu*, a lazy person, or a *chutu*, a worthless person, someone who is unable to carry out chores. In the words of one man, himself noted for his *sinan*, “some men will not hunt or even fall swiddens, and those men are *chutu*, they are not even people, they are worthless and fathers would not want to give them their daughters”. To have *dayac* is necessary to be a good woman, without *sinan* you cannot be a good man. If you lack both, your status as a human person is in question.

## **An external source of personhood**

L: There was a young man who never wanted to work and who always returned empty handed from the hunt. To make him better, the old men decided to give him *acate* [frog poison], one day one old man, the next day another one and so on until he step by step recovered his energy. Now, he has his force [Sp. *fuera*], he knows how to get up very early, he knows how to hunt animals, he knows how to work. It's like this, through the old men he got his force.

This story was told to me during a conversation about *sinan*. As can be seen, *sinan* is not innate to the person but has to be transferred from older generations to younger by ritual means. The same goes for *dayac*, and the rituals too are the same. Between men, *sinan* can be transferred through the use of tobacco, bullet ants, nettles, a very bitter oral emetic and frog poison, *acate*. All substances are used in pairs, with one man, the giver of *sinan*, giving or applying it to another. Women use frog poison, in burns on their bellies, and sometimes tobacco as well. Nowadays, men too tend to use only frog poison

and some tobacco. Tobacco was, and is still, more of an everyday thing; earlier shared between men each night, whereas the frog poison ritual was and is done less frequently. In the case of shamans, they according to some receive their *sinan* from powerful boas, according to others from older shamans. In both cases it is sucked out or blown into them with the help of long tubes. A shaman was also dependent on using a lot of tobacco to both maintain and use his powers.

All of these substances cause a sensation of heat, sweating and pain, some also cause vomiting. The heat and sweating is interpreted as *sinan* or *dayac* entering the body while the vomiting equals the expulsion of laziness, which is thought to be present inside the body in the form of a bitter substance in one's stomach. The more a person vomits, the more powerful the giver of the substance and, consequently, the cure.

For tobacco and frog poison, men and women keep separate stores and never administer a substance to an adult of the opposite sex. This is because women are considered to be weaker than men and can pass that weakness to men by sharing substances. I would also say that the separation has to do with the gendered separation of chores since the giver transfers his or her skills to the receiver. Either way, a woman can never give tobacco or frog poison to a man just as a younger, weaker and lazier person can never give to one older, stronger, more skillful and hard working. If this rule is not followed, the weakness rather than the strength will be transferred. Interestingly, this is also the case if a man gives poison or tobacco to a woman, which therefore also is forbidden. The action of giving frog poison is talked about as piercing.

Frog poison is also given to children, but then the gender rule does not apply. One woman who regularly administered frog poison to the children of the village told me she does so because "they are very lazy, they do not want to go to the field to get plantains, they want to be home and play, they do not want to do anything". About the ritual, she says that "we give our energy for work and give the valor needed to work willingly. I give it to my grandchildren for the future, so that they when they are big already can work in the field and plant yucca. Thinking about this, I give them frog poison". Crucially, although the explicit knowledge of *sinan* is much stronger amongst men and older Matses, those who themselves claim to know nothing about it still have a good understanding of the benefits of frog poison. Consider for example the excerpt from an interview here below, where a woman approximately 30 years of age talks about *sinan* and *acate*, or frog poison.

A: What is *sinan*?

C: I don't know. Only the old ones know.

A: Do people here use *acate*?

C: Yes, there are such persons.

A: How about you, do you use *acate*?

C: Yes, sometimes.

A: Why?

C: When someone has laziness, is lazy, they use it. Sometimes I do not want to go get yucca or plantains, I don't want to carry. Then I use *acate* to throw out the

bitter stuff in the belly, and after *acate*, I always find sloth. I used to use it a lot, but now I don't use it anymore. My husband only used it once, he is afraid of vomiting, but he is not lazy. Sometimes he whines, but he goes anyways. It is very good for people to use *acate*, when they use it, they find a lot of sloths. A man who uses a lot of *acate* is a good marksman; a woman is a worker, she works a lot, cleans fields, gets firewood and so on. It is good.

## The frog poison ritual

Frog poison was earlier taken in a collective ritual where the whole longhouse population participated. The ritual was initiated by the longhouse leader, and it was considered a great shame to not participate. Today, frog poison is taken in small groups. Lazy people and bad hunters can be admonished and strongly recommended to take frog poison, but the social pressure to do so is less than it was before. Children are frequently caught and forced to do it. The mere threat of frog poison is also used to make children and young people behave better. Ideally, however, the person in need of more *sinan* or *dayac* him- or herself seeks out a person considered to have especially much in order to get rid of laziness or have better success at hunting.

The ritual takes place outside in the early morning of rainy days, when the cooler air makes the pain and discomfort easier to bear. In preparation, participants drink a large bowl of maize drink to make the vomiting easier and less unpleasant. When the ritual begins, the man or woman giving the poison, and his or her *sinan* or *dayac*, burns a row of small, circular burns on the arm, chest or belly of the receiver with the help of a glowing piece of liana. The more burns, the stronger the treatment.

After the blistered skin is pinched off, the poison is applied to the burns. After only a minute or two, the first effects can be felt. The pulse quickens, the body starts to feel weak, the head starts throbbing and there is a rushing noise in the ears. Symptoms then increase rapidly. Cold sweat, weakness, very high pulse, a throbbing headache and an increasing nausea leading to violent vomiting that continues with retching and dry heaves. After approximately 20 minutes the effects diminish, leaving the person exhausted and weak. The ritual is over shortly after, and participants then take to their hammocks until the weakness dissipates.

After the ritual, there are certain restrictions that to my knowledge only apply to men. Until the burns start to heal, meaning after approximately three days, men should not drink too much water, stay away from sweet things and avoid sexual relations with women. If they do not, their newly acquired *sinan* will be lost. It is also only after three days that a man goes back into the forest to try his luck at hunting, and thus also not until then that he can know how effective the treatment was. For women and for men, the indication of a successful ritual is a newfound will to work, new force and energy and sometimes dreams of working very hard or physically performing much better than others. Ultimately though, you are how you act; what you do is the only proof and expression of how much *sinan* or *dayac* you possess. With these words, we return to the making of real Matsigenka men and women and a closer look at adolescence.

# **7 Of women, men and shamans – three growings, three social kinds**

In chapter 6, we have seen a number of ways in which human personhood, and human agency is safeguarded by treatments and restrictions meant to guarantee that a child is born and grows up with a human body and a well attached or strong spirit able to withstand the actions of other kinds of persons. We have also taken a glance at what a healthy child is expected to do with its capacity to act and at the importance of food for maintaining a strong and human body. In this chapter, we turn to the buildup human agency required to grow girls into women, boys into men and ordinary human persons into shamans. Many of the practices detailed here are undergoing great changes today. These changes are discussed in chapters 10 to 12. What I present here is an image of ideal personhood before the current phase of integration with national society. As such, it is both out of date and constructed from stories and old information rather than observations of current practice, but it is never the less necessary to understand both the significance of the changes discussed later on and, most definitely, Matses notions of personhood both today and yesterday.

## **7.1 Adolescence – becoming an adult**

At the beginning of puberty, or when they are around 12 years old, Matses boys and girls earlier started to take on the roles of adult men and women, which I will argue indicates a change from being primarily grown by others to primarily growing them. For girls, this meant marriage and pregnancy. For boys, it meant entering into a period of training to become hunters. Today, most girls marry later, as do boys, although some boys indeed marry earlier than before. Some boys also do not take their role as hunters as seriously as others. Regardless of time, however, adolescence is a period when differences between male and female personhood crystallize. Not only because women and men do different things but also because boys still require training and buildup to assume their adult roles as husbands, fathers and providers of meat whereas girls at this age are considered ready to become wives and mothers.

### **7.1.1 Female adolescence**

#### **7.1.1.1 Marriage as female initiation**

Until puberty, a girl is dependent on the contributions of her parents or older siblings to eat and grow. When she marries and has children, it is instead she that is responsible for working and growing a new person as well as fully reciprocating the actions of her kin.

According to Romanoff, during his stay in the 70's Matses women usually married at puberty and always before the age of 20 (Romanoff 1984: 93). Today, girls may very well have sexual relations at an early age, but unless they become pregnant they do not necessarily marry until later. I do, however, believe that most girls in fact still are married before the age of 18, and I was told that they do marry between 13 and 17.

Before marriage, regardless of at what age, a girl is, however, not considered to be a woman. This is for example apparent in that people of all ages easily can talk about how a good man, not necessarily a husband, should behave but only ever speak of good women as good wives, even when pressed. More interesting, perhaps, is that it is men who by their actions make a girl grow into a woman. Marriage, Romanoff claims, thus serves as an initiation rite for girls where husbands are said to make their young wives grow by sleeping with them (Romanoff 1984: 207). Similarly, I was told that men through having sexual intercourse with girls open them up and bring about their first menses. In this sense, female agency ultimately comes about as a result of male ditto. There is some indication that the growing associated with sexual intercourse should ideally be done by a husband rather than a lover. Girls are for example advised to not eat too many sweet things since this will make them both promiscuous and easily pregnant. There is also some stigma attached to sleeping with a lot of different men, especially if they are not cross-cousins. A few people thus told me that no one wants to marry a girl who sleeps around a lot and that young men do not want to marry girls who already have children.

That husbands grow their wives is further underlined by the custom where a man who becomes interested in a girl starts to bring meat to her house. Since betrothal formerly could take place at a very early age this was sometimes done from infancy. According to Romanoff, betrothed men used to both work in the gardens of their fathers in law and give meat to their mothers in law (Romanoff 1984: 212). Earlier, there was also an extended period of bride-service. That custom has, however, changed a lot, partly because the time of service has become shorter, partly because many young men have to leave the community to make money in order to be able to start a new household. Through these practices, men do not only contribute to the feeding and growth of their future wife but also enter into a relationship of sharing with her parents, thus turning themselves into closed kin, if we follow McCallum (1996) and those who agree with her.

Earlier, as things progressed and the as of yet unmarried girl was judged to be old enough, the man would then start sleeping next to her and, eventually, have sexual intercourse with her. Romanoff reports that girls were often very young and terrified in the beginning but that repeated intercourse made them get used to it, calm down and eventually accept to live with their husbands instead of with their parents. My informants all tell the same story as Romanoff. By first feeding a girl and then opening her up by having intercourse with her, the man thus helped grow her into a woman, who at the same time as she reached womanhood also became his wife. Today, sexual relations as well as marriage seem to be a more mutual affair.

### **7.1.1.2 The performative marriage**

Importantly, being married, then as now, is not a status conferred to a couple in a ceremony. Instead, married people are people who live together as man and wife, doing husbandly and wifely things for each other. Overing gives an example of the same logic. Should an unmarried man among the Piaroa, she says, give his kill to an unmarried woman and she then prepares and cooks it and gives it to him to eat, they are thereby married. In this process, the man has displayed his skills of the hunt, and the woman her skills for transforming food to edible form. To Overing, they have thereby engaged in the productive actions most stressed in the marital state, namely those attached to feeding (Overing 2003: 300f). Here we can also see the difference between contributing indirectly by giving food to a betrothed's parents and by entering into the direct mutuality of marriage. This is important since the things a woman does before and after marriage are more or less the same. What changes is who she does them for. It is also in marriage that a person's capacity to grow others first and foremost is realized.

Among the Matses, it is clearly the practice of being married rather than the status of being so that counts. A girl has therefore grown into a woman when she assumes the full responsibilities of a wife. As a girl calms down, gets used to her husband and accepts to live with him instead of her parents, or simply by choice enters into the proper relationship with a man of her liking, she thus also assumes the agentive capacities that define her as a real woman. This focus on practice means that to be a woman requires a certain amount of *dayac*, enabling the person to act in a proper way. I did, however, not find any great emphasis on the need to focus on systematic a buildup of *dayac* during a particular time in a woman's life. Rather, women seek out ways to increase their *dayac* if and when they think they need it. There is a clear notion, however, that a good wife needs *dayac*, and thereby also some indication that not only men but also older women are involved in the growing in girls into women.

In my understanding, proper human personhood among the Matses requires marriage since it is there that men and women both reproduce and enter into the relations that require the type of work that in turn defines them as proper men and women. I will return to both marriage and proper male and female agency shortly, but only after a look at male adolescence, which is a quite different affair to its female counterpart.

## **7.1.2 Male adolescence**

### **7.1.2.1 The male puberty rite**

At about the same time that girls are considered ready for marriage, boys ideally enter a period defined by acquiring the skills of a hunter. Earlier, the start of this period was marked by a puberty rite that took place during the ceremony of the singing souls. Each night of the ceremony, the men would tell the women that they were going to visit the underground longhouse of the spirits. After they left, beings clad in big capes would appear and sing with the women (Jimenez Huanan et al. 2004: 131). Romanoff describes the ceremony, including the puberty rite, like this:

The men are taken by the souls to visit the underground longhouses and the souls come to visit the women and children. Covered from head to toe in capes of the inner bark of a tree, the souls stand in a line in the center part of the house, with the women in two lines on either side, and they sing together. Each gowned soul is said to be the "singer" of a particular man (though the man is said to be in the underground house of the singers while the singers are visiting the man's house). The singer of a particular man sings beside a woman who is related to that man, usually as wife or mother. The singers come and go throughout the evening, and the women feed them cooked drinks and sloth heads. (Romanoff 1984: 244)

Young boys stay in the house with their mothers when the men go to the underworld. The women tell them that someday the souls will come for them and do terrible things to them. When the boy is deemed old enough, the singers of some of the boy's male crosscousins grab him and drag him screaming from the house. After several days, the singers bring several initiated boys back to the house and leave them tied and supposedly unconscious at the door. The souls tell the women that they have brought them animals to eat. The women untie the initiates, bring them into the house, wash them, and lay them out on the floor. The women refuse the offer of meat and say that the singers should bring them sloth and other animals. The souls then enter the house and revive the initiates. (ibid.: 245)

What actually happened during the time the boys are away from home is a well guarded secret, meaning that I found no one who wanted to tell me. In a book describing the old ways of the Matsigenka, the authors, however, claim that the singers took the boys so that they would grow faster (Fleck et. al. 2004: 130). Similarly, Romanoff argues that the abduction by the singers is the male equivalent to marriage because just as a girl's husband makes her grow by sleeping with her, the boy's cross-cousin singer is said to make him grow during the ceremony (Romanoff 1984: 207).

In the description of the initiation, one of many interesting points is that the spirits treat the boys as game but also are the ones who revive them and, so to say, make them human again after the women, on their hand, have refused to see their sons as game and thereby also reaffirmed their sons' status as humans, much in line with the ideas of perspectivism. I find this little triangle drama fascinating because here, the women seem to affirm the human status of the boys by refusing to consider them as anything else, but the initiates are woken up and made into men by spirits. Whereas girls are grown into women by their husbands and only move within the sphere of human sociality, boys are thus grown by spirits and become men in the borderlands between the human sphere of kinship and the nonhuman world of spirits. Interestingly, Erikson (1994: 85) claims that these spirits are associated with the ancestors, indicating a possibility that the growing is associated with them. Moving on to what is required of a boy when he learns to hunt, it will be evident, however, that some of this growing is also done by older men who pierce them with *acate*.

#### **7.1.2.2 Learning to hunt**

Even young boys hunt small game such as rodents, but do not enter the woods as hunters until approximately 12 years of age, when they go with their fathers and other



male relatives. As they begin to learn, they also go with friends or alone, but always stick to the path. A good hunter is one who does not have to follow paths, something not everyone achieves. A good hunter naturally also hits the mark with his arrows, or, nowadays, his shotgun, which is considered to be much easier. This bravery, skill and marksmanship require a buildup of *sinan* transferred from older and skillful hunters. Young hunters also have to observe behavioral and dietary restrictions in order not to lose *sinan* or in other ways ruin their possibility of growing into good hunters.

The behavioral restrictions that are meant to guarantee a proper acquisition of *sinan* to me seem to be the restrictions most frequently ignored. The young men that behave in a proper way and follow the restrictions I present here are thus few, although everyone I spoke to knows them very well and also agree that men today are less skilled hunters than men in earlier generations. The following quote from a very accomplished hunter gives a good picture of, restrictions, the qualities of a skillful hunter and some uses of *acate*.

L: Young men who want to learn how to kill with arrows do not eat the intestines of any animal; they do not eat or even touch them. They also do not eat *aguaje* [a type of palm fruit] and *isan* fruit [fruit from another type of palm called *ungurahui* in local Spanish], and they do not eat what they themselves kill, especially when it is the first time they kill that kind of animal ... If you eat intestines you become a poor marksman. My nephew ate the stomach of something he killed himself and became a terrible shot that cannot kill anything. I tried to cure him with *acate* but he is still a poor shot.

They also do not drink any sweet beverages or eat sweet fruits. They should not have sex too frequently and when they do they should be pierced with *acate*. When a young man learns to hunt, he also needs his own plate and bowl because he cannot eat or drink what a woman has touched. Before, even old men would not drink that which a woman has drunk because it would make him lose his marksmanship, but now it is only young men.

Some become real hunters, truly accomplished when they are 16 or 17. When they are younger they may hunt by themselves and go a short distance. When older they go very far, start in the morning and come back in the afternoon, following the sun or crossing the sun whereas when you are younger you stay on the path. Some men just never become hunters at all, but other people, like one of my sons, do... and people like my nephew have to stay on the path.

One interesting thing that can be seen in this quote, and in the restrictions as such, is that the agentic capacities central to male personhood are threatened or negated by contact with women, which may lead to a loss of *sinan*. Male agentic capacities are thus built up by older, skillful men who grow boys by transferring their *sinan*, and potentially broken down by women, both in the way explained here and in the section on *sinan* and *dayac* above. This is only true of women in a reproductive age; premenarchic girls as well as postmenopausal women pose no such danger. Menstruating women, in turn, are considered to be especially harmful to men who ideally should not eat that which a menstruating woman has prepared, sit where she has

sat, stepped over such a place or sleep with her or next to her. The result of doing so will be a loss of marksmanship and, if a man sleeps with a menstruating woman, severe weakness and cramps making it impossible to work or hunt. Blood from childbirth also possesses these powers. To me, a plausible interpretation of this is that the Matses the inside world of humans and the outside world of animals and spirits to be somewhat incompatible; as two things that should be kept apart. This is an interesting issue that I regrettably do not have time to explore now.

### **7.1.2.3 Marriage from a male perspective**

What about marriage then, which I argued to be so important for Matses personhood. At the time of Romanoff's study, all Matses men married, but they did so later than the women. At the time of his writing most men in the age group between 15 and 19 were not married, and in the group between 20 and 24, one third still remained unmarried (Romanoff 1984: 84). At the time of marriage, they were thus already accomplished hunters and, ideally, skilled workers able to play the part of husband and father. This has changed, now boys too can marry when they are younger and cannot hunt. At least some claim that they can. Such husbands, however, rely on meat that their fathers bring home and have thus not completely taken the step to become a grower instead of grown. That hunting skills are important when a girl chooses her partner is emphasized by almost everyone. Consider for example the words of this middle aged man who speaks of how things used to be:

J: The women did not want anyone, they wanted good marksmen, good hunters, so the women thought, if I marry a man who is not a good hunter he will be worthless. They wanted men who could hunt and plant fields, it did not matter that he had other women.

Remember also the quote in the section on *sinan*, where one man says that a man who cannot hunt and will not work in the fields is worthless, not even a person and someone fathers would not want to give their daughters.

None of this, however, indicates that marriage is essential for male personhood, and perhaps it is less so than for women, who as I noted above very rarely are talked about as anything but wives. Still, it is not until a man becomes a father that he places himself in the position of being responsible for both the physical and spiritual growth and wellbeing of another human being, for although an unmarried man with proper male agency in terms of work and hunting will supply his family with meat and share what he has, his bond to them, however consubstantial the sharing makes it, is not the same type of spiritual bond that exists between parents and children before the children themselves are ready to become real men and women. Maybe it is because of this that Rivière points to Huxley's claim that among the Urubu, the child is the ultimate and material proof of the father's soul, which only becomes fully fixed in his body after he becomes a father "... for the child (like the soul) is the fully human creation all men and women are capable of" (Huxley 1963: 185 cited in Rivière 1974: 430). That is, however, only speculation on my part. One could, however, like Pollock also maintain that "[m]arriage tames or domesticates both adolescent boys and girls by regulating and legitimating

their sexual conduct, but also by creating food production, preparation, and exchange relations that are the preeminent displays of proper sociability (Pollock 1996: 324). Also, that polygyny used to be the rule for older men gives some indication that as *sinan* and *dayac* increases, so does the number of marriages. This connection of *sinan*, *dayac*, marriage, production and the growing of others is well worth to examine more closely, which is most easily done by taking a look at the old pinnacles, or centre points, of Matses society – the longhouse owners and their wives.

## 7.2 Great old men and their many good wives

The epitomes of the ideals expressed in the focus on skill, energy and willingness to work used to be the longhouse owners and their wives. To a large extent, they are still who today's men and women are measured against, sometimes wistfully, if you are older, sometimes with only a shrug of the shoulders, if you are younger. Either way, memories, stories and Romanoff's writings all tell of these great men and their generous and hard-working wives; the centers of knowledge, energy, kinship networks and social life. Although the Matses no longer live in longhouses, I find that here is where one gets the best idea of how the powers and capacities of Matses men and women ideally should come to use.

Each longhouse had one or two leading men who organized and motivated the construction of new houses and fields. Most often, such a man was the genealogically central senior man of a patrilocal extended family. As Romanoff writes, these leaders may be called house owners, *shubu icbo*, but they had to right to dispose of the house as property (Romanoff 1984: 135). My informants too define a house owner as a director of work, which can be seen in the following quote, where my informant also makes a very clear connection between work, energy and masculinity.

D: A house owner, he was like a director (Sp. *dirigente*), when the house was going bad he could call everyone, like for a meeting, and they would have cooked drinks and eat and decide to fix the house, to make a new path, cut down the trees. The owner did not tolerate those who remained seated. They had to work, everyone together, and those who remained seated were considered lazy and useless, those who did not know how to work. The owner, or director, he had to make sure that everyone worked together in order to finish quickly, because if only one person did it, it would not be ready quickly. To finish quickly, everybody should work together, with speed, like men, with force, without being lazy or sleepy.

As Romanoff points out, house owners were considered to be 'ones who know a house'; the only persons capable of selecting the main poles for a new house. In daily life, house owners would also distinguish themselves from other men of similar age and marital status by giving more advice, providing medicine and discussing coming activities (Romanoff 1984: 134f). In general then, they are ones who know, indicating that they also are ones with a lot of *sinan*. These men were also called *tsutsiodapa*, big old men; a type of person characterized by his skill and great willingness to work hard and, of course, by having reached an age that informants now consider to be fifty or

more. During the period of predominantly violent contact with outsiders, these directors, or fierce old men, were also the ones to organize raids. According to my informants, a raider was a man who knew the forest and knew where other people were. He brought home tools and women and was naturally important since he could direct parties involving men from several houses. He was so to say a director of directors. A note should be made that this emphasis on knowing is reminiscent of the idea of knowledge and experience incorporated into the body in the form of soul that McCallum reports from the Cashinahua (1996).

To call and motivate workers to work, a house owner would use extortion, food, social debts and, crucially, the transfer of *sinan*. Romanoff even goes so far as to call the giving of *sinan* the central ideological concept for organizing labor (Romanoff 1984: 136). As was shown in chapter 3, that labor is not only organized by older men, but the fruits of it are also given to the same men to distribute or consume in exchange for the *sinan* younger men need to perform their work skillfully, be good workers and marry well. Recalling Romanoff's description of production and exchange discussed in chapter 3, these were thus the men who supplied younger men with *sinan*, who knew medicines and who also acted as centers of distribution for an entire house, and sometimes beyond (Romanoff 1985: 151). The knowledge, *sinan* and social position of long house owners as well as the connection with marriage discussed above are apparent in the following quote from an interview with a man in his fifties.

J: The owner of a house always had *sinan*... A really young person could not be owner. House owners would teach everyone, sitting at the benches, never eating alone but with many people, teaching how to use arrows. There were a lot of youngsters and kids who listened to the owner, it was very interesting. The owner could not eat his meat alone but had to share with everyone. He was a good hunter, so the young ones would gather and ask for frog poison. The owner was the centre of the house, with meat, with marksmanship, everything.

A: How about the women? Was there a woman who was the most important of the house?

J: The owner's wives were very good, they were not stingy. He had four or five. For this reason people came to eat where the owner was, to talk, and the owner did not like to eat alone but always called for everyone to share, and people came because he was very good and important.

A: Why did he have many wives?

J: The women did not want just anyone, they wanted good marksmen, good hunters, so the women thought, if I marry I man who is not a good hunter he will be worthless. They wanted men who could hunt and plant fields, it did not matter that he had other women. And he needed a lot of women who could make drinks because he was a good man who knew how to plant and hunt, and this kind of person is who women want, and he too needs many women, and thus, since there were many women there was also a lot of food and a lot of drinks, so the owner could call others to come and eat meat and drink cooked drinks and at the same time organize and teach others.

Towards the latter end of the above quote, Matses' ideas of the complementary relationship of married men and woman emerge. As can be seen, women are said to want men who can hunt and plant fields to supply them with produce while men need women to turn that produce into proper food and drinks, which in turn are needed in great quantity to share with all the people who come to the man's house in search of knowledge, *sinan* and medicine. This is expressed even more clearly in the following quote from a woman in her mid forties.

P: There was a man, my grandfather, he had a lot of wives and did huge fields and planted maize and his wives did a lot of maize drink and people who lived far away came to his house to drink maize drink. Some came for medicine. There were always a lot of people from far away in the house. He was a real man, he knew medicines, he always made big fields and his wives always made a lot of maize drink and therefore there were always a lot of people in his house. That is why he had many wives. He was very important, he was a hard worker.

It is not only important for men to have *sinan* in order to fulfill their role as husbands, because as was shown in the discussion about *dayac*, a woman needs a lot of *dayac* to make maize drink. A good man would not want a lazy wife, and vice versa. As can be seen in the quotes, apart from skills and hard work, the sharing of food was a very important aspect of longhouse leadership, and the better the person, the more *sinan* or *dayac* he or she had, the greater the sharing.

Taken together, in this characterization a longhouse owner is a man with exceptional hunting skills and a great ability to work and plant fields. This of course indicates that he has a lot of *sinan*, which indeed is the case. He is one who knows how to work and hunt, so younger men seek him out to learn and have him pierce them with frog poison. He also knows about medicines and uses tobacco to heal; another indication of his great possession of *sinan*. Like his wives, he is generous and will not eat alone. Instead, he always shares his meat and drinks with everyone, making people seek out his house not only for knowledge but also for nurturance. An *uspú*, a lazy person, did not have the skills to neither plant large enough fields nor attract enough wives to create such plentitude.

In these ways, a longhouse owner was indeed a lynchpin of Matses society. As Romanoff points out, he was the center of a large patrilocal kinship network. Having more wives than others, he was also likely to have more children than other men and thus also a larger such network and a greater number of people whose labor and produce would be organized and distributed by him. He was also a central source of knowledge, skill and energy, making him the prime giver of *sinan*. In addition, together with his wives he was the prime supplier of food, able to feed more people than other less gifted persons and thus also a center for collective consumption. Looking at Ekholm's and Friedman's (1985: 105) definition of social reproduction as a concept that "traces the cycles leading from production to consumption to new production", I think it is clear that longhouse owners played a central part in the social reproduction of Matses society.

Interestingly, this happens to mean that they supply more of everything that builds or safeguard the human body and human person – nutrition, *sinan* and medicine, and that they do this to more people than anyone else, not only because they have more children but because they distribute and share both surplus and *sinan* with more people.

To hold this position, a man needs wives to give birth to his children and transform his raw products into human food. Their wives thus work hard to provide enough food and maize drink to both give to their husband to share with other men and for themselves to share separately with other women. Meat too, is divided and shared separately between men and women. Since their husband plants larger fields and is a better hunter than others and they have enough *dayac* to deal with his great productive capacity, they too are in a position to produce and share more food than other women and like their men become centers of nutrition and givers of skill and energy. These model men and women at the center of society are thus the Matses with the greatest capacity to build and grow other human beings or safeguard their status as humans by providing properly human food and medicine. For both men and women, social failure and success are thus tied to the same parameters. If you have no partner, no meat, no manioc or plantains, no guests and no social status, it is most likely because you lack *dayac* or *sinan*. Conversely, if you are a great hunter with many wives or a hard-working woman with a good husband and good social standing it is because you have a lot of the same.

As McCallum points out, the super-production and provision of goods for collective consumption commonly expected from leaders in Amazonian societies can be seen as part of the process of creation of human sociality (McCallum 1990: 419). More importantly, I think, is that such super-production indicates a form of super-personhood, where the leader is the greatest human person, growing the greatest number of other human persons and very clearly has the greatest ability to practice those agentive capacities deemed central for being a Matses man. I also think it fair to argue that these men indeed were at the center of Matses society, economically, physically and ideologically, with the giving of *sinan*. The same is to a lesser extent true of his wives. In line with the discussion of power and personhood and social structure in chapter 4, there is thus a connection between social position, power, personhood and a person's role in the process of social reproduction. This is further highlighted by the derision of those who do not work and produce seemingly common in some Amazonian societies. Such persons are worthless, or, in extreme cases, not even persons (Pollock 1996: 331, my own material). As McCallum indicates, non-sharing here translates as nonhuman and indeed all of this goes very well with the emphasis of sociality in discussions on human personhood in Amazonia preferred by for example McCallum (1996, 1999) and Overing and Passes (2000). It is, however, possible to interpret the sharing of food as central for human personhood in the way of Viveiros de Castro, who argues that similarity and humanity is dependent on the eating of similar and properly human food. I also find that the picture gets more complex if we turn back to the processes of becoming and the continued accumulation of the agentive powers associated with *sinan*. We thus leave the longhouse owners to take a closer look at the bitter and the sweet.

### 7.3 Bitter, sweet and a sliding scale of increasing capacity

A careful reader with an eye for things Panoan may have caught four references to sweet food and drink above. One is that sweets are considered to make girls promiscuous and easily pregnant; another that sweets make boys loose *sinan*. Sweets are also abstained from by those who recently took frog poison since it will counteract the purpose of doing so, and by men who want to be good hunters. This includes some kinds of meat, such as that of the tortoise, which are considered sweet. Bearing in mind the opposition between feminine and masculine discussed above, this can hardly be taken as a coincidence.

Looking at literature on other Panoans, bitter, *muka*, and sweet, *bata*, indeed stand out as important. Bitterness is according to Erikson (1994: 77, 1999) ascribed to almost all substances considered to be powerful, such as ayahuasca, tobacco, frog poison, curare and a shamanic substance simply called *muka*. Such bitterness can be stored or inscribed in the body by various means, such as or tattooing or being pierced with frog poison. There thus seems to be some parallels between *muka* and *sinan*. Although I did not find any particular characterization of such substances as bitter, tobacco and frog poison are indeed counterposed to that which is sweet. The main bitter substance the Matses talk about, however, is the bitterness in the stomach that makes a person lazy, which clearly is not to be compared to the other substances I just mentioned. Despite this, I find that material on bitter and sweet from other Panoans shed light on Matses notions of personhood and, particularly, shamanism. Note, however, that there are no shamans among the Matses today.

One interesting example is found in Lagrou's writing about two types of medical experts among the Cashinahua. There is the *dauya*, the one with medicine, and the *mukaya*, the one with bitterness. Whereas the former heals or kills with the help of plant medicines, the latter does the same with the help of spirits and through a bitter substance, *muka*, which is thought to be a materialization of spirit power inside the body of the person (Lagrou 2004: 245). The *mukaya* is also the only human person able to freely communicate with spirits at will (ibid.: 259).

In Matses, the word for medicine is *dauë* while the word for bitter is *muka*, although *dauë choquid*, one with medicine, is associated with biomedicine rather than plant ditto. The type of healer Lagrou describes nevertheless exists and is, as we have seen, typically an older man who also is a skillful hunter and good worker; meaning an older man with a lot of *sinan* who is potentially also a house owner. The other type of healer, that as I mentioned no longer exists, is the *nënë choquid*, the one with tobacco – a bitter substance, who also is the one whose *sinan* is present in a physical form, in the shape of thorns or insects, inside the person's body. For a *nënë choquid*, the consumption of great quantities of tobacco was essential to maintaining power and tobacco also played a part in healing, when patients were smeared with tobacco mixed with spittle. This is the type of shaman able to kill from a distance that I have mentioned above, and indeed Lagrou characterizes the *mukaya* as someone who is able to materialize the spiritual power harnessed inside their bodies and thus cause harm or kill from a distance (Lagrou

2004: 258). Like the *nënë choquid*, the *mukaya* also uses tobacco, just as the Marubo and Katukina equivalent, the *romeya*, the one with tobacco (Lagrou 2004: 262).

Despite the slight differences and implicitness, there are strong indications that Matses thought follows the same pattern of associating the substances that others attribute with bitterness with shamans. In fact, one man in his mid thirties also explicitly told me that the bitter (Sp. *lo amargo*) is for shamans. The connections between bitter, *sinan* and shaman is further emphasized by the fact that shamans had to observe restrictions very similar to hunters in training, meaning they could only eat certain types of meat, in this case non-singed meat, had to abstain from sex and, crucially, also from all sweet drinks and foods. A shaman who broke these restrictions would risk losing his power, an apprentice that broke them most certainly did. The same is true for the *mukaya* (Lagrou 2004: 263).

What emerges here is to me that the shaman rather than being of a different kind than others simply is more, or rather, has more and has taken one more step in the buildup of the capacity to act. This buildup requires the use of substances that other Panoans consider bitter, primarily tobacco, and results in the possession of more *sinan* than regular people have; *sinan* that takes on a physical shape inside the shamans body and enables him or her to not only kill but to kill with magical means and across large distances as well as to communicate freely with spirits.

In accordance, shamanism should be measured on a sliding scale, because to a greater or lesser degree, ordinary men and the occasional woman also have *sinan* as well as a capacity to both kill and heal. As I already mentioned, those with great medical knowledge among the Matses are indeed the same people that are skilled hunters and have a lot of *sinan*, or *dayac* in the case of women who might know medicines but to a lesser extent than men. That type of healing, however, only involves indirect contact with spirits, not direct communication. Interestingly, in one of the quotes about longhouse leaders we also see that the same people also used tobacco in their healing in the way described by this man:

J: The owner of a house always had *sinan*. If another came and asked to get smeared with tobacco, the owner mixed tobacco with saliva and smeared them, and then they felt better.

## 7.4 To become a shaman

As we have seen, while girls are made into women largely by the actions of men and older women, boys are made into men by spirits and older men and in dialogue with other nonhuman beings such as the animals that they learn to kill but whose meat also can rob them of their newfound skill and power. If becoming a shaman is the next step in the accumulation of a similar power, it falls natural to ask who it is that can grow ordinary people into shamans.

Among the Matses, almost everyone above the age of thirty have stories to tell about the nature and doings of shamans. Since Matses shamans of the kind related to the *mukaya* currently do not exist, there is a certain air of legend around them and the stories told, which is not to say that they carry no interest. I am also fairly sure that there



has been an exchange of stories between different groups, partly because of the assimilation of captives, partly because a Matses in need of a shaman today occasionally will contact a *mestizo* or one from another group. When I say shaman, I here refer only to the type related to the *mukaya* described by Lagrou (2004), called *nënë choquid* by the Matses. I repeatedly heard two different stories of how a shaman comes to possess his or her power. I say his or her because everyone does say that women too could be shamans, although in the stories and examples the shaman is always a man.

In the first type of story, a person wanting to become a shaman would seek out one who already was. This person would then transfer his power to his apprentice with the help of a long and narrow tube placed in the apprentice's mouth, through which he blew very hard. He would not lose any power in doing this. The parallels to the local use of tobacco, blown by one with more *sinan* into the nose of one with less, are striking, and in both cases the result is a buildup of *sinan* in the receiver. For shamans, this power would lodge in the chest, often in the shape of insects or thorns but sometimes as an unidentified but physical substance. Here, the shaman is thus grown by someone initially possessing more *sinan* than him, much like a boy has to be pierced with frog poison to become a real man.

In the second type of story, the person who wants to become a shaman instead seeks out a boa and sucks the power of the boa into his chest with the help of the same kind of tube. Here, it is the apprentice who, after a long ordeal involving a lot of snakes and bravery, actually takes the power of the boa. He thus captures a new capacity from one of the most powerful beings, and it is the substance transferred from the boa that changes him into a shaman. This conception is shared by other Panoan groups, where for example the Katukina tell the same story of transfer of power from boa to man in the form of a substance called *rome* (Lagrou 2004: 260). Various other beings, such as spirit lake owners, can also transfer their power to humans and thereby turn them into shamans. In all these cases, the power of the shaman is captured from, given by or associated with the most powerful beings of the forest, who thus are the ones capable of growing an ordinary person into a shaman.

This association with the most powerful beings of the jungle can also be seen in the connections between shamans and jaguars. Romanoff, for example, reports that the Matses during his time of writing claimed that shamans in their chests harbored the spirits of good and bad jaguar spirits (Romanoff 1984: 253). I did not hear this explanation of their power, but several people told me that when a shaman dies, his spirit will not go to the longhouse above, where other Matses go after death, but will transform into one or several jaguars that stay and roam the forest.

Apart from killing by sending invisible objects into the bodies of victims from a distance and curing by sucking out illness in the form of physical object, shamans of the kind concerned here were, as I already mentioned, according to Lagrou (2004: 259) the only ones able to communicate freely with spirits. To me, this statement can be taken even further, because what a shaman has is actually the ability to form sociable relationships with nonhuman persons. Kensinger (1995: 216), for example, writes about how Cashinahua shamans work together with their spirit familiars to cure or for divinations. Rosengren also point to the fact that Matsigenka shamans and their

auxiliary spirits address each other as brothers. What is important in this, Rosengren argues, is not so much the creation of consanguinity itself but the closeness, similarity, trust and cooperation that characterizes the brother relationship in Matsigenka society (Rosengren 2006: 810). I have no data on the Matses that confirms that this is the case for them too, but neither do I have any that contradicts it and spirit helpers or familiars are, I find, a basic staple of shamanism. In contrast to longhouse leaders, who become prime growers of other human persons, a shaman thus enters into mutually sustaining relationships with spirits. These close and sociable relations with nonhuman beings may also explain the shaman's status as a powerful but dangerous and, in fact, not completely human being, who may harbor powers from the outside inside his own body.

Today as well as when shamans still existed among them, the Matses are able to both kill and heal with poison and plant medicine. While this does involve indirect dealing with spirits, there is indeed no one left who is able to fill the role of the shaman and communicate directly with them. This is true to the extent that all ceremonies associated with spirits, including the ceremony of the singing souls, no longer are practiced since they are considered much too dangerous. That which first and foremost has been lost with the disappearing of shamans is thus the capacity to directly enter into mutually supportive rather than antagonistic or dangerous relations with the spirit world.

## **7.5 Conclusion - three steps, three social kinds, three types of human personhood**

To me, what emerges in the discussion in this chapter is a stairway or progression where children become adults and adults become shamans. As we have seen, girls are grown by men, boys are grown by spirits possibly associated with ancestors and shamans are grown by other shamans or by the most powerful nonhuman beings of the forest. As we can see, the growing is in all these cases done by a person more associated with the nonhuman world than the person grown. In this way, the idea that human personhood comes about in dialogue with or is captured from the nonhuman certainly seems to hold.

To take on their new roles, women primarily need *dayac* to work. This is given to them by older women. Men, on their hand, need *sinan* to hunt and be brave. This is given to them by older men. In this way, older generations of the same sex are also intimately involved with the growing of proper men and women. Shamans do not conform to this pattern completely since the being growing them and supplying them with *sinan* is the same one and I lack information on who could give them more if they needed it. Just as men and women, however, they have to use bitter substances to maintain their agentive capacities. Perhaps they get their *sinan* directly from these rather than from another human being. Among the Matses, the bitter substance of shamans was first and foremost tobacco. Also, in contrast to the *dayac* and *sinan* of ordinary human beings, the *sinan* of shamans manifests itself physically within his or her chest.

In accordance with the gendered and specific accumulation of these substances, the skills of a woman are centered on the human sphere of garden, house and village. The skills of a man requires him to in addition also venture into the more dangerous outside

world of animals and spirits, the forest, from where he brings home meat and where he fells trees to make gardens. A skillful hunter is also likely to know medicine and is thus also capable of dealing indirectly with the spirits of plants and animals involved in illness and healing. A shaman, on the other hand, is one who harbors the outside within himself and deals directly with the spirit world. Just as each kind of human person is grown by one more associated with the nonhuman than the person grown, the agentive capacities associated with each social kind also involve progressively greater and more intensive interactions with the nonhuman world. With the risk of oversimplifying, the relationship can be expressed as inside - outside, *dayac* - *sinan*, female – male, with the shaman regardless of gender even more strongly associated with the outside and with *sinan*. Without implying that all of this necessarily should be interpreted in line with the moral economy of intimacy approach, I would like to again quote McCallum, who presents a similar picture of the gendered personhood of Cashinahua men and women:

'Real women' (*ainbu kuin*) harvest manioc and bananas, fish streams, make close-woven cotton hammocks and bags with complex 'real design' (*kene kuin*), and cook real food (*piti kuin*). Theirs are the powers of transformation and incorporation. By their gendered agency and all the processes of production in which they are involved, women are linked to the 'inside', the world of kinship and human sociality. 'Real men' expend hard physical effort in the gardens, destroying trees and plants in the creation of social space; they hunt, fish lakes and rivers (as well as streams together with the women), and trade with Nawa (foreigners), often moving far afield to cities. By their gendered agency, men are linked to the 'outside' and the world of purely fictive affinity and potential enmity, the antithesis of human sociality. Theirs are the powers of destruction, separation, transferral. (McCallum 1990: 417)

As was shown in the discussion of longhouse leaders and their wives, the degree of fulfillment of these chores, in essence a person's capacity to act, indeed also defines a person as good or worthless and to an extent also human or nonhuman. In the discussion of shamans, on the other hand, there were indications that a shaman's agentive capacities can be measured by his or her capacity to act in the sphere of the nonhuman and thus also maintain direct and mutually sustaining relationship with nonhuman persons.

The power to be a proper human man or woman is also, as we have seen, dependent on a transfer of *sinan* and *dayac* from young to old in exchange for food and labor, and thus also dependent on upholding proper relations with other human beings. The same goes for marriage, in itself necessary for the realization of human potential, since no one wants to marry a lazy person and parents indeed may deny a lazy niece or nephew access to his or her cross-cousins. A shaman too, is dependent on *sinan* to both come into and practice his or her agentive capacities, although that *sinan* comes from a source more connected to the nonhuman world. For ordinary people too, the progressive accumulation of power, agentive capacities and humanity requires interactions with nonhuman persons and is in some instances actually directly dependent on nonhuman action, whereby suitable relations with the outside also are of the essence. The full extent of this becomes clear when one looks at the ways an adult may lose his or her capacity to act, where we now turn for the last piece of the puzzle.

# Interlude 2: Threats to adult agency

## Illness as a lessening of capacity

Around the same time that boys and girls start to take on the chores and responsibilities of adult men and women, the spiritual link between them and their parents is broken, whereby the young person no longer is susceptible to spirit retaliation brought on by parental action. For an adult Matses, illness instead comes about through direct and reciprocal interaction with animals and spirits.

As was discussed in the section on childhood illness, adults are also commonly affected in different ways than children. For the latter, I suggested that what I call systemic illness is prototypical. Such illness is characterized by fevers and a taking on of an animal trait caused by the entire spirit of the animal retaliating against the entire spirit of the child. Powerful spirits and animals such as the eagle, vulture, boa, jaguar and tapir may cause similar illness in adults, but what I call partial illness is much more common. Such illness is often more specifically related to a certain part of the animal, and also affects only a part of the sick person. The idea that the sick person takes on some aspect of the retaliator is still central, but elaborated on in different ways.

In one type of illness, the human being simply takes on a central characteristic of the retaliating animal, but without the high fevers afflicting children. One such example is the howler monkey, which may retaliate against those who eat it and thus cause a sore throat accompanied by severe external swelling. The medicine for this is called *achu tëon daue*, howler monkey larynx medicine, and howler monkeys do indeed have very large larynxes. In another type of illness, it is the shape of the retaliator that is central for the symptom. Two examples are *osodquid*, characterized by localized internal swelling and lumps, and *basen*, piercing pains throughout the chest and abdomen. *Osodquid* is caused by a variety of round or lump-like things, such as the tortoise, eel head, stone or a particular large potato-like tuber. Retaliation by these beings against those who eat, handle or pass over them all give rise to hard and painful lumps inside the abdomen. Examples of things that cause *basen* are maize, bamboo (used to make long tips for spears and arrows) and deer horns. Symptoms include a feeling of being stabbed by knives through the chest and upper body. The spirits of these beings retaliate after being handled, dealt with or killed. An example where it is not the shape but another characteristic that is in focus is women's vagina pus. Characterized by heavy white discharge, this affliction is brought on by retaliation against someone who has touched the sperm of an animal. There is an appropriate plant for each animal, but they all contain a thick white sap reminiscent of both discharge and sperm.

Yet another type of illness is instead characterized by a correspondence between the same parts of retaliator and patient. One example is the severe and incapacitating pain in the tendon and muscles of the inner thigh, back of knee or the Achilles tendon, caused by the retaliation of the tendons and veins of a tapir directed against someone who has

killed or eaten it. Similarly, the heart of tapirs may retaliate to cause pain in vertical streaks across chest from which the patient may die screaming in agony. Interestingly, the tapir is powerful and has the largest heart in the jungle and also causes more severe problems than for example the porcupine, whose heart can provoke similar but less brutal symptoms.

When it come to this latest type of illness, informants talk about them as if it was a part of an animal that retaliated by itself. After discussions, however, they usually conclude that it is the spirit of the whole animal that is responsible for the retaliation, or possibly the heart, tendons or such of that spirit. One informant instead maintained that each part capable of causing harm had its own spirit and that these minor spirits are all directed by a director spirit. This is interesting since it is similar to the idea of many souls found for example among the Cashinahua (e.g. McCallum 1996, Kensinger 1995). Everyone but her, however, said that every being has one spirit only. The indication that something has a spirit is however still the capacity to act. If a thing can make noise, know or do something it will also be attributed with a spirit. The same woman maintained that retaliating spirits took away and wanted to keep human spirits; an explanation that also frequently occurs in discussions of illness in the region, but here too she is the only Matses I spoke to who explains illness this way.

Compared to the childhood illnesses discussed in chapter 6, I find that illness in adults to a lesser extent mutates a person's agentive capacities by making the sick person behave like the retaliator. Instead, what they do is make proper human action difficult to carry out. Illness thus translates as a lessening of the capacity to act rather than a change of agentive capacities. Once a person is sick, it also becomes easier for beings normally not strong enough to retaliate successfully, as could be seen in the example with the papaya in chapter 6. Considering the performative emphasis of Matses culture, this decline in the capacity to act can indeed also be interpreted as a decline in humanity. A sick person is less capable of upholding proper relationships with the outside world and less capable of fulfilling her role as a grower of others. Most of the time, this lessening is caused by the actions of other types of persons, who all put a clear mark on the patient. There is, however, also an acceptance that old people sometimes simply get sick because they are old and their bodies are weakening. This weakening is importantly not taken to affect the spirit or possession of *sinan* or *dayac*. An old person can still be powerful in these ways.

Another consequence of the emphasis on practice that is important to note is that there can be no illness without symptom; notions such as hidden infections, recurring illness or incubation time does not exist among the Matses. If a person has headache twice in a day, it cannot be the same headache because the same animal would not retaliate twice. The same goes for contagion since illness is seen as an instance of action and reaction between two distinct beings. Taken together, this has large and potentially dire consequences for how the Matses understand illness that they themselves consider to come from the world of the *meztisos*, such as influenza, malaria, hepatitis and AIDS. It also makes them prone to quit biomedical treatment as soon as the symptoms start to go away, whereby they soon come back.

## Curing and medicines

As I have already mentioned, all medicinal plants are considered to have spirits. The spirit of a plant is the equivalent of their active substance, that which gives the medicine its efficacy. As with other beings, however, I find that the relationship between bodily substance and spirit is complex and that it is hard to say which one, if either, it is that determines the other. One thing I do know, however, is that plants too become consubstantial by living together. Thus, a medicinal plant growing next to a poisonous one will be discarded since it has lost its capacity to heal.

Each plant is, furthermore, connected to a particular animal or part of that animal. When a person falls ill, he or she thus thinks about which animal it is that may cause the symptom, often by considering both the nature of the symptom and any conspicuous interactions with nonhuman persons in the near past. When a conclusion is reached, the appropriate plant is gathered and applied. If this does not work, another theory is formulated, including another suspect, and another plant is collected. This goes on until symptoms disappear, which is an indication of a correct match between retaliator and plant. The plant, most often its leaves, is either applied directly to the exterior of the afflicted area or mashed in warm water that is then used to bathe the body of the patient. The former is more common for partial illness and tends to be called *daue*, medicine, while the latter is used for systemic illness and commonly is called *neste*, which literally means instrument for bathing. Often, several plants are combined to make one medicine. To make jaguar medicine, for example, the plants associated with the jaguar's head, liver, hairs on the lower leg, tail, back and so on are gathered and used at once. After being used, the medicinal leaves are hidden or buried so that no malignant spirit may touch or blow on them and thereby make the person ill again.

Romanoff gives a good description of treatment that seems to largely hold true today as well. First of all, all men know some leaves, but old men know more. As with *sinan*, this is not jealously guarded as a secret but taught to any younger man who shows interest. Older women may also know about medicines, but not as much as the men. There is also a hierarchy of leaf givers so that a prestigious old man may give leaves to another old man who in turn gives them to his son who gives them to his wife so that she can bathe her child. This hierarchy also comes forth in treatment. In the simplest case, a husband gathers leaves for his wife to bathe their child. If the case is more severe, an older man instead gets leaves for the husband, and if the patient is very ill the old man may himself treat the patient. Giving leaves, Romanoff adds, confirms a man as an appropriate husband or head of a house (Romanoff 1984: 160).

A complicated case will of course require more knowledge to correctly identify the symptoms and connect them with the appropriate retaliator and corresponding plant. To me, however, this does not explain why an older and more prestigious man would treat severe cases himself. If it was only up to the leaf, it should be enough to provide the mother with the correct plant. Instead, I propose that more knowledgeable men not only know more about plants but also have greater skill when it comes to dealing with the world of spirits. This is emphasized by the observation that giving medicines affirms a man's status as a proper husband or house owner. As we saw in chapter 7, to be a

proper man requires a capacity to deal with exactly such dangerous beings of the nonhuman world. As was shown there, the more *sinan* a human being has, the greater is this capacity for agency within the nonhuman sphere. It is this confluence between possession of *sinan* and the knowledge and skill to use medicine that to me indicates that the capacity of the one who treats the ill person to successfully deal with the nonhuman also affects the efficacy of the treatment.

## Laziness

Although laziness is an indication of lack of *sinan* or *dayac*, it is not as such intrinsic to a person but also comes about through spirit retaliation and often follows the same logic of transfer of animal characteristics. The howler monkey, for example, often sits as if it were tired, looking limp and sagging. The saki monkey instead habitually sits with its arms crossed, not doing anything. In the words of one young man, “when you eat them, they give their laziness”. An old woman instead points out that “the spirit of the capuchin monkey can enter our body, so we cannot eat it, especially not young people. The howler monkey and the green acouchi also make us lazy, only the old can eat these animals, everyone else will get lazy”.

As was mentioned in the section about *sinan* and *dayac*, the Matses consider laziness to accumulate and be present in the body in the form of a bitter, yellow substance inside the stomach, most likely bile. Foods that make a person lazy thus also cause a buildup of this bitter substance which only be cured with the help of emetics. Long after I left the Matses, it struck me that I do not know if they also treat laziness with plant medicines in order to end the retaliation or if it is enough to only use emetics.

A person can also get lazy by losing that which makes him or her energetic. The older generations argue that both *sinan* and *dayac* will dissipate over time and that it thus is necessary to keep using frog poison and tobacco to maintain a good level of skill and energy. Younger generations are more likely to argue that there is a buildup during a woman’s or man’s younger years but that it after that only is necessary to get pierced with frog poison if something out of the ordinary has happened. After a person gets pierced, he, sometimes she, should avoid bathing, drinking water and sweet drinks until the wounds scab over. After getting pierced, a man should also avoid all close contact with women. The only people ever refused *acate* are according to stories those young men who do not follow these restrictions and thus always just squander the *sinan* older men give them. Apart from that, a person merely has to seek out an older and more skillful person of the same gender and ask to be pierced. As was discussed earlier, men can lose *sinan* to or in contact with women at other times too. Over all, there are more ways for a man to lose strength and energy than there is for a woman, who instead may get the energy her sexual partner loses by being with her.

Laziness can quite naturally be interpreted as a lessening of the capacity to act, so here too is an example of how outside influence or men’s contact with women pose threats to personhood. As can be seen, the remedy comes from people with *sinan* and *dayac*; from those with greater capacities to act as proper Matses men and women. Having clarified this, it is not time to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

# 8 Synthesis 1 – the Matses person

## 8.1 Human personhood and relations with the nonhuman

Concerning the way the Matses conceptualize relations with the nonhuman, I suggest that there is a scale of power, in terms of the ability to impose oneself on others, ranging from the unborn child to the shaman; a scale that also denotes a changing balance of power between the human and the nonhuman. An unborn child is thus completely passive, a non-agent, and also physically moldable. It has no capacity to act and only potentially the body of a human being. Unable to by its own capacities uphold a human form and personhood, it will be born with a body shaped in the likeness of those who have been acting upon it, ideally only its human parents but possibly also animal spirits retaliating against it because of something those parents did. A child born with a nonhuman body cannot ever become a properly human person.

When a child is born, the danger of physical transformation is over, instead, retaliation by spirits causes changes in behavior; a mutation of agentive capacities. The sick child is thus unable both to uphold proper relations with others and to continue living in its human body, meaning that it will die if the retaliating spirit cannot be made to stop. A child is not likely to directly come into contact with the more dangerous nonhuman persons of the forest. Because of the spiritual link between it and its parents, however, it may get ill as a consequence of its parents' interactions with the nonhuman. This danger is most prominent for the newborn, and then gradually dissipates as the child grows stronger, becomes more active and starts to become a human person in its own right. The more capacity to act as a human person child displays, the less prominent the danger of a transformation of agentive capacities.

Adults are even less likely to fall ill and when they do, symptoms are more localized. Despite the fact that there is still a transfer of characteristics from retaliator to patient, these are less likely to mutate the person's agentive capacities than they are to simply lessen his or her capacity to act. For adults, it is their own interactions with nonhuman persons that carry the risk of retaliation. More powerful adults, those with a greater capacity to act, and especially men, also have a greater ability to deal with nonhuman persons, as hunters or as ones who know medicine. These persons thus have the ability to act upon nonhuman beings, either by killing them, perhaps the ultimate imposition, or by indirectly making them use their powers for the good of a human being rather than for revenge. Men are imputed with more agentive capacities needed to do this than women. The person with the greatest capacity to deal with the outside world of animals and spirits, however, is the shaman, who can enter into direct relationships with them without danger to his or her own person. According to some, a shaman also harbors the outside within his own body, and does so without risking involuntary transformations. One example of this is the power sucked out of a boa,



another the presence of good and bad jaguar spirits within the shaman's chest. A shaman can also kill with magic, making him able to act upon others in a most forceful manner across large distances. Some people add that shamans according to old stories may transform into bats and jaguars at will, indicating an absolute counterpoint to the unborn child who is a passive subject to involuntary physical transformation.

What we have is thus a scale from the completely passive unborn child whose physical body may transform through the actions of nonhuman persons to the shaman who can relate freely to such persons or even harbor them inside or change into them and who has the ability to act upon others forcefully and across large distances. In this aspect, the development of Matses personhood is according to me about managing relationships with the nonhuman, or rather, about building up enough power to go from being acted upon to acting upon the persons of the world outside the human sphere. As was discussed earlier, real men are imputed with agentive capacities needed to deal within the sphere of the nonhuman to a greater degree than women, and shamans have such capacities to a greater degree than anyone else. This is also mirrored in the chores appropriate for each category, where shamans need to enter into close relationships with spirits, men work in the forest, hunting or clearing fields and the work of women is located to the human sphere of house and garden.

## **8.2 Human personhood and relations with the human**

To develop skills and power to manage relationships with nonhuman persons is, however, only one half of the process of growing into a real human person. The other half concerns managing relationships with other human persons. From this perspective, the unborn child is the one who is the least able to enter into proper and sociable relationships with fellow humans. It is completely dependent on the proper acts of its parents to even be born with a human body, but it does in no way work to contribute to the growing of others. If it is born with a nonhuman body, it will in fact also be born without the potential of ever doing so.

As the child is born and starts to gain strength, it also starts to be a gendered agent-in-society and takes its first steps towards the nurturing relationships defining a proper human person. As the child grows older, expectations on it to help its parents and other relatives thus increase, although the child still receives more than it provides. In a healthily developing child, the successive taking on of a proper human personhood takes place at the same time as the risk of transmuting illness decreases and the concomitant spiritual link with its parents dissipates. As a child grows into the human world, its capacity to withstand the nonhuman thus increases.

When the child becomes a grownup, it does so by assuming its place as a grower of others in the web of human sociality. While still grown and sustained by the actions of others, the young adult reciprocates those actions fully. At this time, the link with its parents disappears, as does the much of the risk of a mutation of agentive capacities due to spirit retaliation. For girls the shift includes marriage and the concomitant responsibility to transform a man's raw products into cooked foods, as well as pregnancy. For boys, it is about learning to deal with the world outside the human

sphere in a proficient enough manner to provide close kin with the raw building blocks of a good life, such as meat and gardens. As men, and to some extent women, grow older, their capacity to deal with the nonhuman world increases, and as it does, so does their general capacity to act and grow others. A great man is he who has the skill and energy to supply a large surplus of produce. Such a man is also likely to know a lot of medicines, indicating that he is also able to deal indirectly with the spirit world. A great woman, on the other hand, is one capable of turning more produce into food than others. Both are marked by their generosity and willingness to share their goods with everyone, and also share their *sinan* and *dayac*. They thus become the prime growers of others. As such and in acting as centers for distribution of goods and *sinan/dayac*, they also enter into direct relations with more people than others.

The role of the shaman is more ambiguous, because although a shaman has more power, his agentic capacities are not geared towards the growing others in the way that longhouse owners and their wives do. In fact, he may even kill fellow humans instead. What a shaman has, however, is the ability to form sociable relationships with nonhuman persons. A shaman thus has great capacity to act and may do so in a larger social sphere, but will not necessarily do so in a completely human way.

Taken together, these two developments seem to indicate a parallel process of developing relationships with both human and nonhuman persons. For ordinary people, strong and proper relations with other human beings thus gives a person a greater hold on human agentic capacities and thus also a greater capacity act within the sphere of the nonhuman without hurting themselves, which in turn is necessary to uphold those relations with fellow humans. Shamans are, as I explained, different since they may enter into direct relations with spirits without harm. To do so, however, they need to be very powerful and that power, *sinan*, is very much related to that which enables ordinary men and women to act successfully both within and outside the human sphere.

## 8.4 Growth and decline in two parallel worlds

The same intertwining of the human and the nonhuman sphere is also evident in what it is that makes a human person grow and change from one social kind to another. As we saw in chapter 6, to give food to a newborn is to accept and affirm it as a human being. Parents are also responsible for supplying their children with food to make them grow. Importantly, that food supply is dependent on many other persons since meat and drinks are shared widely. This sharing is as important as eating human food for being a fully human person, whereby the production, sharing and eating of human food all are central to the development of properly human persons and relationships.

To be real women in possession of proper agentic capacities as well as the capacity to act them out women primarily need *dayac*, which is given to them by older women. Men also need *sinan*, and both are given to them by older men. Older generations of the same sex are thus also intimately involved with the growing of proper men and women. In this way too, a Matsigenka person is thereby definitely dependent on the contributions of other human persons to develop a proper personhood.

As we have seen, however, girls are turned into women by men, boys are turned into men by spirits possibly associated with ancestors and ordinary people are turned into shamans by older shamans or by the most powerful nonhuman beings of the forest. The imputation of the agentive capacities specific to each social kind is in all these cases done by a person more associated with the nonhuman world than the person undergoing the change. Men are also dependent on the affirmation of their human status given by their female kin who refuse to see them as game animals, which indicates an importance of being seen in the proper way to be properly human. For men and shamans in particular, the idea that human personhood comes about in dialogue with or is captured from the nonhuman therefore certainly seems to hold,

Nonhuman persons are also involved in growing primarily children through various treatments with plant medicines where plant spirits make safe communication with animal spirits possible. More often than not, however, interactions with nonhuman persons are dangerous and may cause illness, which mutates or just mutes human personhood. As we have seen retaliating spirits may change a person's agentive capacities so that he or she becomes more like a nonhuman person as well as lessen a person's capacity to act, making the practice of human agentive capacities difficult, with all the connotations that carries in a performative society. Seen from this perspective, alterity, the possibility to turn into another, is indeed a central notion. To a great extent then, spirit interactions are likely to break down rather than build up, which is the case when people fall ill or become lazy. As we have seen, treatment is also a matter of interacting with spirits, albeit through indirect means. This safeguarding, rather than growing, is, however, also dependent on the skill and strength of the human care-giver.

To me, even though there are several instances where nonhuman persons participate in the buildup of human persons, they are more frequently involved in the opposite. Also, whereas nonhuman persons are involved in bestowing men with male agentive capacities, which in turn makes them able to grow girls into women, the capacity to actually act and to do so in a skillful way does for both men and women come from their human elders. It is also to human elders that a person can go to fill up when the capacity to act for some reason is lacking.

To grow and to change from one social kind to another requires proper relationships with both human and nonhuman persons. To be a full and good human person, however, you need to avoid, or be strong enough to withstand, spirit retaliation and make sure you have a lot of *sinan* and *dayac*. My conclusion is thus that both buildup and break-down of human agency come from external sources, but whereas break-down, in the form of illness and laziness and their consequences, primarily comes from the nonhuman sphere, buildup chiefly comes from the inside of Matses society.

## 8.5 The center of humanity

The inside from which Matses human agency primarily emanates is, however, not only the inside, but also the peak of Matses society, because as we have seen, there is a strong correspondence between personhood and social structure; the more *sinan* and *dayac*, the greater the person and the more central his or her social position. Even

though men in a sense is society's outside, active and productive in forest and further afield, longhouse leaders were thus also clearly centers of Matsigenka society, spatially, socially, economically and ideologically. The same is true for their wives, albeit to a lesser extent. That which makes people human thus first and foremost comes from the center of society, from where it is transferred to others in the form of *sinan* and *dayac* as well as the fruits of human labor, redistributed through exchange networks placing big old men and productive older women at the top. The ability to make wrong relations with the outside right again also rests there, with the skillful men most knowledgeable and powerful when it comes to medicine. Both the safeguarding and the buildup of human personhood thus emanates from these great men at the center of society who together with their wives manage to both grow more people than anyone else and deal with nonhuman people in a more forceful and successful way than their fellow Matsigenkas.

## 8.6 A theoretical commentary

Looking back at the discussions of theory in chapter 5, I find that I agree with the basic premise that in Amazonia, the appropriate act by creating the appropriate relation also creates the appropriate subject. It is also clear beyond doubt that a person is dependent not only on his or her own actions to belong to a certain social kind, but on the actions of other persons who may or may not be human. I earlier argued that the differences between the two main approaches to personhood in Amazonia largely concern what acts relations it is that constitutes the human person. According to the symbolic economy of alterity approach, external relations characterized by a balance of power between predator and prey are seen as that which constitutes the human being by placing her in correct symbolical relations with the nonhuman. In the moral economy of intimacy approach, the argument is instead that it is in the internal and sociable relations between moral human agents that constitute both the human person and the properly human social sphere, which relations with the outside always threaten to break down (Djup 2007: 4f). Just as I predicted, I find that my conclusions place me between these two positions.

To me, both sets of relations are important for being a proper human person; those with nonhuman beings and those with human beings. I thus agree with Vilaça that neither approach can fully account for the constitution of Amazonian persons (Vilaça 2002: 348). In the material presented here, furthermore relations with nonhuman persons can definitely be seen as a matter of balance of power, if not literally of who eats who then at least a matter of who has the greatest capacity to act upon who. This is reminiscent of what is argued by the symbolic economy of alterity approach. It is also possible to interpret the increasing power of human persons with regards to the nonhuman as an increasing capacity to remain in perspective, to keep seeing the world as a human person despite being influenced or attacked by others. In the case of the shaman, this would entail a capacity to actually switch perspectives without being harmed, thus creating perspectival consubstantiality. On the other hand, the agentic capacities of the shaman can to me just as well be interpreted as a capacity to enter into sociable relationships with spirits, which would also explain their nonhuman character

and demeanor. In many cases, I find that interpretations are like this, dependent on preference and focus rather than on the material. This is, however, not always true.

Although it easily comes across as such through the use of the dichotomy human - nonhuman, I also think the distinction between the human and the nonhuman worlds is not absolute and therefore should be seen as one continuum where some people, like the shaman, actually in contrast to what the moral economy theorists argue may enter into sociable relationships with the nonhuman. I therefore also suggest that they should be considered as one social arena. For the Matses, however, the relations that build up the human person or through which such a person realizes his or her gendered human personhood to me seem to be primarily those enacted with other humans. Much in accordance with the moral economy of intimacy approach, I therefore argue that it is the human rather than the nonhuman that is at the center of Matses notions of personhood. I do this despite the fact that relations with the nonhuman and the dangers they carry are important, because while alterity and balance of power with the nonhuman is one aspect of Matses personhood, I do not think that it is the central one or the source from which it flows or is captured. Instead of the central place warfare, hunting, cannibalism and shamanism, all crossing of boundaries, is accorded in the definition of identity by the symbolic economy of alterity approach, I also find that the emphasis the Matses themselves place on correct forms productivity and sharing for being properly human rhymes better with the idea that human personhood depends on the inside world where sociality and humanity is created by the actions of moral human subjects.

I do think, however, that this preference for interpreting internal relations in accordance with the moral economy approach to a degree depends on the focus of my research and my understanding of social reproduction, which similarly bring relations of production and human exchange to the forefront. I have thus also not accorded myth, stories of perspectival inversions and symbolic relationships the place they tend to have in research done within the other tradition. Another reason for this, however, is that I find that the Matses themselves concern themselves less with such things than they do with the carrying out of proper male and female chores. The Matses to me also seem to worry more about what other Matses do than about spirits, although this may very well be a thing that has come about during the current and increasing integration with national society, which in effect has brought with it a step away from the world of the nonhuman. Although I maintain that both theoretical approaches have much to say about Amazonian personhood and that both sets of relations are vital to the constitution of the Matses person, I therefore still find both myself and the Matses closer to the moral economy of intimacy approach.

On a different note, I also find good support for Ekholm-Friedman's argument that societies in times of internal stability exhibit a close fit between social structure and culture. As has been shown, older people and especially longhouse leaders and their wives were people whose greatness, goodness and importance as persons were mirrored by their central positions in the local exchange networks through which Matses society reproduced itself. Since these networks are undergoing great changes, a look at the changing possibilities to act as a longhouse owner is also where the investigation of changes in Matses notions of personhood hereby starts.

# 9 From *sinan* to money – new orientations, new forms of social reproduction

## 9.1 New times, new things that matter

As we have seen, marriage, or entering into the relationships characteristic of married life, is central to Matses notions of personhood since it is in a through marriage that men's and women's productive, and reproductive, capacities come to their full bloom and proper relations with other human persons are established. Since marriage presents itself as such an important measure of social standing and proper human action, it is also one of the avenues through which insight into how both Matses society and personhood are changing can be gained. The Matses no longer live in longhouses so there are no longhouse leaders, but are there people who exhibit the same skill, energy and productivity? How is a man that all girls want to marry today? Some answers to these questions can be found in the following quote, where a man in his fifties insightfully tells me how manufactured goods from national society have replaced big fields as the signs of a good potential husband.

F: Now, women look for those who have things, even if they are lazy. Men need and seek things so that girls will look at them. Actually, it was the same before, now it is one who has things, earlier it was one who made large fields and always has meat, but it is the same, girls come to men who have things, it is the things that are different. Before, it was *sinan* and big fields, manioc, plantains, the things that grow in the field. Now it is things, rice, clothes and so on.

A: And a man with things, does he have *sinan*?

F: He may, but it is not for sure.

Explicit in his explanation is also the decreasing importance of *sinan*. As we have seen, earlier, the possession of big fields and meat was an indication and function of a man's possession of *sinan*, but according to the man in the quote, there is only a tentative connection between having *sinan* and having things. This is according to me no real surprise considering the very specific nature of the skills considered to be connected to *sinan*; primarily hunting with bow and arrow, bravery in fights and forest, knowledge of plant medicines, longhouse building and clearing forest to make fields. These are the skills needed to deal successfully with the outside world of the forest and the nonhuman and bring back products from there, not the ones needed to come into possession of manufactured goods from national society.

What is needed to be successful in a world that requires bought goods from national society, however, is money. In a sense, money is thus to manufactured goods as *sinan* is to meat and fields; something a person needs in order to generate the things deemed necessary for marriage, a good life and good social standing. The analogy is not perfect because money and *sinan* are very different in nature, but looking at how the two are used and talked about to me encourages a comparison that serves its illustrative purpose well. This switch from *sinan* to money, converted into goods produced outside of Matses society, is to me at the heart of many of the ongoing changes for Matses personhood and society.

## 9.2 Accessing money

Amongst the Matses, it is often men who are responsible for securing the needed supply of goods from national society, much as it also mainly falls on them to secure goods from the outside world of the nonhuman, such as meat and gardens. Occasionally, the opportunity to make money at home in the Matses community arises, such as when the regional government carry out construction projects or the occasional mestizo or tourist travels by and buys a chicken. Young men infrequently also work for village teachers, who when they are Matses also are the only Matses who have a regular income. Most of the time, however, making money requires people to work for *mestizos* far from home, with things such as logging or construction work. Some girls reportedly work as part-time maids. Many people also sell chickens, meat and garden produce on a very small scale. This only seems to happen sporadically, when a pressing need or opportunity arises. When tourists or researchers visit, they also tend to bring goods and buy crafts.

Importantly, the Matses do not have the means to make money without relying on national society. In all these cases, money thus flows from national society, mainly from *mestizos*, and to the Matses. Instead of working for elders and longhouse owners in exchange for *sinan* or *dayac*, people thus work for *mestizos*, teachers and the occasional tourist or researcher in exchange for money. In a similar way, while older used to trade crafts and energy for the labor and produce of younger, it is today mainly *mestizos* who trade money and manufactured goods for the same things. The switch is not complete; different people find different points of balance between internal and external exchange relations, although some exchange with national society is necessary to live like a Matses today.

This change and reorientation of exchange networks have far-reaching consequences for how Matses society is structured, and thus also for the internal relations that are central to human personhood. What we can also see, however, is that the outside world of the nonhuman nowadays is but one of two possible outsides from where products and capacities are gathered and where men do their work. The second aspect of personhood too, namely relations with the outside world, have thus also changed. This chapter is primarily about changes in internal relations, although I have found it hard to make a completely stringent division. One big aspect of external relations is, as we have seen, illness, and this will be treated by itself in the chapter after this one.

### 9.3 Limited access, loss of control, newfound poverty

One critical parameter is that access to money is much more limited than access to *sinan*. With *sinan* and *dayac*, all a person has to do is ask an older, energetic and skilled Matses to pierce him or her with frog poison. As I noted earlier, the only instance when a seeker of *sinan* was refused was when he was known to always squander what he got through excessive sexual contact with women. Since the Matses happen to live in a very bountiful natural environment, the same near unlimited access is also true for the things that indicate possession of both *sinan* and *dayac*. The likelihood of bad harvests is minuscule, and even though game is sparser than it used to be, a good hunter will still return with some meat each time he goes hunting. Earlier, this was even less of a problem. Provided that a person upholds the proper relations with other Matses that secures access to the goods they produce, the only thing standing between a Matses and the material wealth associated with possession of *sinan* and *dayac* is thus his or her own work, just as the lack of surplus only can be traced to a certain person's laziness and lack of *dayac*. Before the current and deepening integration with the outside economy, apart from stone and some steel tools, more or less everything that was needed for Matses society to reproduce itself was thus under control of the Matses themselves and depended largely on internal exchange. This is not at all the case today.

Being dependent on national society for access to money and vital goods, the Matses are also at the mercy of nationals and when working or trading, and often find themselves with little or no leverage or control of the situation. When they enter into the national economy, they do it at the very bottom. The market for the labor and goods they have to offer is also largely controlled by buyers, making employment precarious and prices low. Gaining access to money is thus rather difficult and precarious, and the Matses have little or no control of the means to access what they need. The social reproduction of Matses society thus now includes more relations the Matses find themselves powerless to control. It is no longer enough to work hard, because someone has to buy your labor or goods to make it worthwhile.

In addition, relations with *mestizos* are not enacted in the same spirit of mutual exchange and need that largely characterizes relations between Matses. Many Matses are thus tricked by their mestizo employers, who seems to be very imaginative when it comes to coming up with reasons for not paying their workers, and even when they are not tricked they are paid very poorly. One should also not forget that for the Matses, spending time in national society is comparable to spending time in a foreign country where they do not know their way very well and many people treat them as uncivilized inferiors. Like contact with the nonhuman, contact with national society thus carries a definite threat of breakdown, albeit in a different form of attack. Like relations with the nonhuman, relations with national society are also shaped by a shifting balance of power, but whereas Matses power with respect to nonhuman beings as we have seen increases throughout a properly growing person's lifespan, relations with national society are always shaped by a lack or deficit of power that possibly even increases as the person grows older and becomes a less attractive manual laborer. The greater the



dependency on external goods controlled by national society, the more of the relations that used to be internal, nurturing and sociable are moved into this new outside sphere.

This new lack of access and control over social reproduction also impacts Matses life in other ways. One is that the more important manufactured goods become in the definition of proper human life, the less able are the Matses to live it. Another is that when access to manufactured goods and the concomitant skillful dealing with national society becomes a measure of power and personhood, Matses persons are bound to shrink and become powerless. If we consider the position and character of longhouse owners and their wives against this background, it comes as no surprise that there are no people like that today. Their position, built on extreme productivity and control over the distribution of resources, is simply not tenable in a situation where both productivity and control partly lies in the hands of nationals.

## 9.4 Prohibitively pricey polygamy

Another way that the switch from *sinan* to money and the difficulties in accessing the latter have impacted the possibility to reach a position comparable to that of longhouse owners is that it now is prohibitively expensive to have many wives, which is succinctly expressed in the two quotes below.

A: Who has a lot of wives now?

J: There are none, people only have two

A: Why has it changed?

J: Now maybe there is a lot more work, it is hard to buy clothes, make the fields and so on. There are men who can work but there is a new generation and the women need pots, shirts, bras, skirts... everything, for this reason the men think they cannot have many wives, they do not want it.

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D: I cannot have two women, three, four, because now life is different, we are in a different generation, here we buy all the things, like pots, clothes... all the things women need, and it is very expensive. That is why I cannot have neither three nor four women.

In fact, there is no one who has more than three wives today, and those who have three are the only Matses who have a steady income; teachers. Some very good hunters have two wives. These are the same people than others refer to when asked who in the village could have been a longhouse leader if there were still longhouses. There is also a tendency for men who come into office in the regional national government to take an extra wife, often a *mestiza*. More often than not, however, they leave one of their wives, or are left by them, when their time as elected officials is over.

In all three cases, to be able to take an extra wife, for some especially a *mestiza*, does signal success and acts as a marker for social prestige, much as it did earlier. That success and prestige, however, is less than that enjoyed by old time house owners, just

as the number of wives and the man's position on local exchange networks is not what it used to be. This could potentially change if the Matses became monetarily wealthy. Also apparent, however, is that there as I indicated above now exist to ways in which to reach this moderate success. Some polygamous men primarily have meat, others mainly have money. One requires the man to skillfully deal with the beings of the forest, the nonhuman; the other requires him to skillfully deal with the beings of national society, the mestizos.

## 9.4 Changing gender roles

As was mentioned above, like dealing with the world of the nonhuman, dealing with national society and mestizos is a capacity, and responsibility, associated primarily with men. For every object formerly made by a Matses woman that now is bought from the outside, there has thus been a transfer of responsibility and productive capacity from women to men. This is also another reason why marriage has become so expensive.

According to Romanoff (1984: 153), products made by women were pots, strainers, woven tump straps, hammocks and wrist decorations. In addition, they used to hunt, know some medicine and supply *dayac* as well as carry out domestic chores. Of these things, pots and adornments, and to some extent medicine, are bought from the outside, together with other products used by women such as clothes, combs and soap used to wash clothes. Woven tump straps have largely fallen out of use, and in addition, only very few women hunt today. Left are hammocks, strainers and domestic chores, plus *dayac*, which like *sinan* has decreased in importance.

To a large extent, women have thus become domestic workers rather than producers with their own exchange networks. This is not to say that women's domestic work is not important or considered to be so by the Matses. As has been shown, women's capacity to turn raw products into human food and supply the things needed to build strong and proper humans is considered important. Still, in that capacity they were already largely dependent on men to supply the materials they needed, and this is more so now. Earlier, women also shared with co-wives, but having a co-wife is rare today. As we have seen, a Matses person's place in the exchange network also affects that person's social standing and ability to act as a proper man or woman. As women go from producing and exchanging to receiving readymade goods it is thus likely to impact them in this respect too. If nothing else, demands on women are changing, although they still compose what McCallum calls the inside of society (McCallum 1990: 417).

The productive activities of men have, naturally, changed too. Out of the many things formerly produced by men, medicine, bows, arrows, tobacco and raw material for craft are still produced but have to varying degrees either been abandoned or supplanted with things like shotguns and bags. In contrast to women, however, they are still responsible for the acquisition of these objects, to which we now as indicated also can add the above things formerly produced and exchanged by women.

When it comes to meat, both men and women share less and less widely than before. Earlier, all meat would be shared with the whole residential group. Today, when

people live in single family dwellings, a man will still call people to share a large animal, but small ones are usually not shared beyond the immediate family. Large game animals, like the tapir but also the peccary, are also much rarer than before. Like communal consumption, sharing is less conspicuous today when the longhouse – the space and arena for these activities – has been abandoned.

Looking at the importance of production and sharing for personhood, I think that whereas both men and women today by old standards and according to the Matses themselves are lesser persons than they should be, more new capacity has been added to men than it has to women. I think it is too early to say anything conclusive about this tendency or the consequences thereof, although it would be an interesting avenue for further studies. If anything, Matses women to me seem to live a better life today, mainly because they are no longer hit by their husbands or forced into having sex with any cross-cousin that demands it, and although what they need to fulfill their chores still is controlled by men, the difficulties for men to produce as much as before still carries with it something of a leveling of the social position of men and women.

## 9.4 Changing relations between generations

The increasing dependency on external goods thus affects gender relations. In chapter 3 however, it was noted that Romanoff (1984: 175) at his time of writing argued that the increasing dependency on external goods first and foremost affected older generations since it was their crafts that were replaced and thus also their dominant positions in local exchange networks as well as their prestige that diminished. He also noted that the crafts produced by younger men and women, such as arrows and adornments, turned out to be those which were sellable, whereby the prestige and importance of younger generations increased. I agree fully with his characterization.

This development has continued, so that the value of the very skills and capacities of older men and women, embodied in their possession of *sinan* and *dayac*, now has diminished to the degree that younger Matses no longer strive to possess them like they did before. It is thus not only the things produced by older generations that have been replaced with things from the outside; the importance of *sinan* and *dayac* in local trade networks has also faded away. For women, who still move and produce inside Matses society, *dayac* is less important since demands to work hard seemingly have lessened. Women do, however, still carry out many of the same chores, although washing clothes to me seems more important than making maize drink; probably because it is more important to look decent than to supply a large and steady stream of visitors with food. For men, however, the ability to successfully supply the goods needed to live up to ideals of male personhood simply no longer requires the agentive capacities of older generations and their *sinan*. At least, a second set of capacities have become equally important, namely those needed to deal with national society; capacities that no Matses has to the extent that the old and skillful earlier had for dealing with the nonhuman.

In contrast to the situation in the seventies, however, older people are now also able to speak Spanish, at least those below the age of sixty. Technically, most Matses are

thus able to deal with and work for mestizos. Old people are an exception, and are to me also the ones who most drastically have lost their position within Matses society, As Romanoff notes, older generations used to rely on a trade of crafts and energy in exchange for labor and meat supplied by their younger relatives. As the value of their products has decreased, they have gone from being important sources of skill and crafts to being needy burdens dependent on the goodwill of younger kin.

Regardless of goodwill, for a man to plant fields for his mother, work in the field of his father or uncles and share his meat with the man who gave him his bow, he naturally also has to be present in person. Since men generally have to leave Matses society to find work, however, the new dependency on external goods also means that they sometimes are away from their close kin for extended periods of time. This naturally also affects their relationship to older generation, whose situation can turn out much as it has for the woman who told me the following story:

I: I have no husband and cannot cut trees myself, I need help. When they are here, my sons help with the fields and with getting meat of all kinds. Now my sons have left and I have almost nothing to eat. They went to the *mestizos*. They always say they will come back, but they never do. They work for the *mestizos* because they want things. It is important to work there because here there is no work that gives money to buy things, so they left to be able to buy their things. It was important to them.

For these young men and others like them, upholding nurturing and caring relationships with their close kin is clearly not as important as working to buy external goods. Since human personhood as well as consubstantiality used to be intimately connected to such relationships, this indicates a great change. I find it hard to say, however, if young people like these men are ashamed of themselves and feel like lesser humans, or if they are happy to do what they find important for being good and proper men. I suspect that they, like younger generations in most places, feel both.

## 9.5 Young today - new ideals, new priorities

P: For young men today it is not important with *sinan*, they just play, they only think of football. Before, they were out hunting paca. For young women today it is also not important with *sinan*, they do not think about such things but look to see if the boy has clothes and money. It is like that today. Not *sinan*, just money and clothes.

As the woman in the quote above points out, the decreasing importance of *sinan* and the skills and products associated with it is also apparent in how young Matses both act and reason; much to the ire of older generations who generally think young Matses today are too lazy. Regardless of whether they are lazy or not, young Matses do have different priorities in life than those their parents claim to have had when they were young. Many young people thus prefer fishing to hunting and football to horticultural work. Until they are in the upper teens, they also attend school during parts of the year.

Complaining about her daughter, one woman thus told me that she never makes maize drink and refuses to go get pierced with frog poison, she just goes to school and does nothing at home. She was skeptical as to whether going to school required *dayac*.

People like this girl, or boys who play more football than they hunt, are still frowned upon, but from stories of the past it seems like those who do not live up to old ideals for male and female behavior are less dishonored for doing so today than earlier. Since there are no collective frog poison rituals, communal longhouse life, truly collective consumption or collective projects such as building longhouses or making communal fields, the social arenas for shaming those who do not hunt well, work hard or get pierced have shrunk significantly. Just as the social infrastructure for being a great person according to old standards has changed, so has that of being a good-for-nothing. Thus, while it is harder to be really good today, it is definitely easier to be lazy.

Amongst younger generations, to become an excellent hunter or be known to always work hard is still considered to be a very good thing, but as for older men, there are also other ways to gain respect, social standing and the attention of the opposite sex. Everybody below the age of thirty that I spoke to thus told me that it is very important to have clothes and money to be attractive, especially for young men. Girls expect their husbands to provide them with the clothes, pots, knives, soap and other such things that they need. Before they marry, it is their father's responsibility to provide. One woman thus told me that girls want to get married because they want children and because the husband will supply them with clothes, soap and other things. A young man similarly told me that girls like a man with money a lot since they want money too so that they can buy clothes. In the same vein, another man described a good man as someone who converses well with a woman and gives her the things she needs, like perfume, combs and lingerie. This is a radical difference compared to the old ideal

As indicated above, men are, however, still ideally also good suppliers of meat, although opinions on whether meat or things are more important differ. To be considered lazy is still also a definite drawback. Thus, one young woman for example explained to me, that with a lazy partner you will not live a good life but just fight all the time since he or she will never do her part. When talking about good life and good men and women, however, young people do to a much greater extent than their elders focus on the virtues of simply living a calm and quiet life together with one's spouse. They are also much less likely to talk about the mutuality between spouses in terms of meat and drinks, like the older generations do, but constantly mention that it is good to like each other and always work together, side by side. In terms of being a good person, I thus suspect that it is the part to be done that has changed rather than the importance of doing it. This is also true for the strategies of younger Matses, which indicate that while their goals to some extent are the same as those of earlier generations, the means to reach them have changed. Although everyone wants to attract the opposite sex, however, most boys do say that they do not want more than one wife since they do not want to work a lot. Being married is thus not only costly, but is also considered to require hard work that young men are less likely to accept today, maybe because the effort neither pays off as well as it used to before nor is as important in the definition of a good life.

## 9.6 Current use of frog poison

The people who seek out the skills of older Matses and regularly get pierced with frog poison or have tobacco blown up their nose are also very few today. In the village where I was, there was a small group of men who used frog poison regularly. They were all in their fifties, were good hunters and had two wives each. Although young men occasionally get pierced, some people, mainly girls, have never used frog poison and many men and women below 35 say that they used to do it when they were younger but that the vomiting and pain is so unpleasant that they do not do it any longer. Younger generations are also prone to arguing that it is sufficient to get pierced during one's young adulthood since the *sinan* accumulated then is enough and does not dissipate. Men in their fifties and above all argue that emetics should be taken throughout life. The same is true of the woman, mentioned in interlude 1, who usually pierces women and children and who pointed out the responsibility of older Matses to pierce their younger kin so that they will be able to work well and effortlessly when grown. I think there is an interesting parallel to actual performance here, where men today in fact are, or at least are considered to be, less skilled than grown men were earlier. "Men today are like boys", one man told me, "maybe they do not want to grow up".

I suspect that here too, the gain is not worth the pain since a person today can get by without excelling in the tasks connected to their elders, ancestors and the earlier life if the Matses. The value of the chores and skills transferred from old to young is simply not as great as it used to be, just as living up to the idea of proper human personhood inherent in them is less important now that other things matter and there are new ways to (some sort of) social success. If the rather specific agentive capacities associated with *sinan* and *dayac* are different from what a person judges as necessary and also do not add to a person's prestige as they used to, it seems unlikely that he or she will become an ardent user of unpleasant emetics. As I noted above, the social pressure to get pierced is also smaller than before, when ceremonies included all residents of a longhouse.

## 9.7 Boys who go away to be men

A: If a woman wants money, what can she do?

D: Marry.

A: And a man?

D: He can work among the mestizos, but he goes alone, leaving his woman behind, sometimes for years. It is important for the woman that the man has money when he comes back; that he has saved money and can buy things for his wife. Then he does not go again, his wife asks him not to go again. Life is sad when your husband is away. You fish all the time and get meat from your father. And it is lonely. A married woman cannot work alone, it is bad. A widow can, but not a married woman.

As can be seen above, in the words of a young woman, that young men go away to make money does not only affect older generations, but their wives as well. As she

explains, the woman instead of living like a proper woman together with her husband in these cases continues to depend on her father for nurturance. Instead of growing other people together, the woman thus continues to be grown by her parents while her husband alienates himself completely from relations with his close kin.

A similar effect can be seen in practices of brideservice. As I described in chapter 7, a man interested in a girl would start to give meat to her family, and would later also help her father with horticultural work. Since the Matses practice cross-cousin marriage, a man's father in law tends to be his uncle. For a young man, not to work for his uncle, not only during the period of brideservice but earlier as well, brought the risk of being considered lazy and unfit as a husband, whereby the uncle would refuse to allow marriage with any of his daughters. These considerations make the following quote highly significant:

A: What can you do to make money?

E: You can make fields, and help other people make fields. Not like before when you had to help your dad, you uncles and so on. Not these people, but those with money, like teachers, who can pay.

The person telling me this is himself unmarried and nineteen years old. As he explains, young men who want to make money, which they need to become real men, will work not for their uncles whom they normally had to help in order to marry, but for those with enough money to pay for it. Sometimes such people can be found in a Matses community, as is the case with teachers. Other times the young man has to seek work amongst *mestizos* in the way detailed above. Remembering that brideservice also serves to create closer bonds of kinship and consubstantiality (e.g McCallum 1996), we see that a period that used to create similarity between close kin now instead may involve living with *mestizos* and potentially becoming more like them. Upon marriage or the man's return from national society, the goods he brings or later buys for his woman are, however, shared with his wife's close kin as well. This is not always the case with money, which tends to be shared only when explicitly asked for.

There is another parallel here, namely to the period of training and initiation that a boy earlier had to go through to become a proper man. As was described in chapter 7, boys were initiated by their cross-cousin's spirits and needed the *sinan* given to them by skillful older men. Only after these processes were they ready to enter into the mutually sustaining relationships that defined them as real Matses men. Now, young men do not go through initiation, frequently spend less time learning how to hunt, do not use frog poison as much and have to make money by spending time with *mestizos* or others who can pay them before they can be real men. In this respect, they are thus no longer grown by spirits and older men, but by older men and *mestizos*. In this way to, it is from the outside world of national society that some of the capacity for real male personhood comes today, not from spirits or Matses elders. Before we start drawing and final conclusions, however, I would like to again return illness and medicine, which so far have served as an excellent way to understand more about the relations with the outside world necessary for being a properly human person.

# 10 From spirits and ancestors to *mestizos* and God

## 10.1 Illness that comes from outside of us

All Matses agree that today, illness is much more likely to come from the world of the *mestizos*, or, as they say, from outside of us (Sp. *afuera de nosotros*), than from beings of the forest. Flues, bronchial infections, cough, malaria and hepatitis are thus what they identify as the most common afflictions today, for young as well as old. Many in fact point out that earlier, the Matses were not sick so often and only died of old age or because of raids or shamans, whereas illness is much more common today.

There is a very well defined line between these new illnesses and those caused by retaliating spirits. Everybody knows that the new illnesses have nothing to do with spirit action, although almost no one knows enough to even guess where they come from, apart from the outside, or why a person falls ill with them. Having nothing to do with spirits, they are also impossible to cure with plant medicine, just as spirit illness cannot be cured with the medicine of the *mestizos*, *chotacen daue*. If a person who is ill does not get better with *mestizo* medicine, it is thus taken for granted that this is because the illness in fact is caused by a spirit, and vice versa,

## 10.2 Mestizo medicine

Despite that fact that illness may be caused by retaliating spirits, most people say that they try *mestizo* medicines first, at least when they have the money to do so. *Mestizo* medicine can be bought at the local medical post, which stores an assortment of painkillers, anti-inflammatories and antibiotics. The post is run by Matses who have received very elementary training with *mestizo* doctors in Angamos and are titled health promoters, *promotores de salud*. These men, I believe all of them are men, are younger than those who know plant medicine and do not seem to enjoy any particular benefits, social or economical, from their undertakings. I was for example told several times that it was important to maintain good and generous relations with those who know plant medicine, but never heard anything similar concerning the men running the medical post. When asked, they themselves say that they just want to help their people. When it comes to the medicines dispensed, there is a strong preference for injections, which in itself is an interesting parallel to other forms of piercing aimed at building or safeguarding human personhood, such as frog poison and earlier tattooing. That *mestizo* medicine and expertise are sought after is amply illustrated by the amount of painkillers I gave away once word got around that I had them. Having both shown an interest in matters of health and dispensed medicine, I was also called upon to treat a severely infected wound I was sure would cause blood poisoning and death and leave me alone and accused of murder in enemy territory.



### **10.3 New relations, new experts**

Apparently, today, most cases of illness are not interpreted as interactions between human and nonhuman persons, but as a much more abstract and lesser understood threatening flow from the world of the mestizos. Treatment, similarly, does not involve any interaction with the spirit world, but only with mestizos. It is also dependent on access to money, since medicines have to be bought in Angamos or elsewhere. The relations necessary to uphold in order to secure access to treatment are thus also fundamentally different than those concerning plant medicines, where medicine is a part of the larger and largely internal exchange network based on *sinan*, meat and labor. As with many things discussed in the preceding chapter, whereas illness and treatment earlier involved the spirits of the forest and the center of Matses society, they today involve the outside world of national society. Crucially, it is not only illness and medicine that comes from this new outside, but the expertise formerly located at the center of Matses society too.

Interestingly, when there is no medicine at the post, women and men less skilled or inclined to deal with national society ask other people, primarily men, to acquire it for them rather than go to a *mestizo* community themselves. While to some extent a matter of transportation costs, this is also reminiscent of the hierarchy of leaf-givers discussed in interlude 2. There, it was shown how a woman will ask her husband for leaves and the husband in turn will ask a senior man more skilled when it comes to matters of the nonhuman world to actually get the medicine and in severe cases also treat the patient. The most knowledgeable giver of leaf medicine on Choba creek thus himself declined to travel to Angamos to get treatment for his malaria, and preferred to wait for a health promoter to go there with a sample of his blood and return with the appropriate medicine several days later. As with many things in Matses society today, there thus appears to be two main alternatives to how a person can live his or her life; one is oriented towards the forest, the other towards national society, and just as the skills needed to be successful in either are different, so are the people who chose either path.

### **10.3 From longhouse in the sky to hell in the underground**

Another change related to illness and personhood is the influence of Christianity on ideas of postmortem life. In the non-Christian version, the spirit of a dying Matses will leave its body to visit a great longhouse located in a place referred to only as above or the sky (same word). This longhouse is inhabited by the dying person's ancestors, who live there in abundance much as the Matses do, or did, in life. They hunt, go on raids, marry, grow crops, make drinks, eat and so on. As the spirit of the dying person comes to visit, they offer him or her tapir meat and maize drink, both highly valued products of the old and industrious. If the person eats or drinks, his spirit will stay with the ancestors, whereby he will die; if he declines, his spirit will return to his body and his life amongst human kin. Compare this to the following extensive quote from an interview with a Matses minister.

A: And what happens to the spirit of a person that dies?

J: The believers who die, their spirit goes to heaven to be with Jesus Christ in the reign of God. The others go to hell to be with Satan and the dead who were not believers, to hell, that's all.

A: And how is heaven and hell, don't people go to a longhouse where there is meat and drink?

J: For sure, before, those who were dying said that they in their visions had eaten tapir meat and drunk maize drink, that they had entered a very big house with a lot of people that they did not dare to get close to and so on. Now the people who are dying do not say that they have eaten tapir meat and been in a longhouse with a lot of bad people, now they say that there is a good city with wide and brilliant streets, this is what the dying tell us now. But some who are not believers say that the other place exists, where there are spirits, where they eat woolly monkey and tapir, where they drink maize drink and live in longhouses, but believers say that there is a city with a palace and a wide road made of gold. The palaces are beautiful, that is where they go, and Jesus Christ exists, as does this new life and for that reason I believe there are two roads, one of God and one of Satan, God exists and so does Satan, and the spirits. So the believers go to a good and brilliant city. There are those who say that they were suffering a lot, walking in places with a lot of spines [commonly associated with spirit abductions], just sitting and crying, but believers say there was a good path, a good life and a good palace.

A: But, how is hell?

J: The sick ones who are dying tell, before too, that where the dead are, their spirits, they always fight, and they did not say that God exists, only that people fight, they live in a longhouse and they are bad, they fight and kill. This is what they used to see. But now the believers see different things and believe in a second life, eternal, with Jesus.

A: So, hell is this longhouse where people fight?

J: Yes, that is it. And it is below ground. In heaven there is eternal life.

Not only has the longhouse of Matses history, with its ancestors, fierce old men, meat and maize drink been turned into a subterranean hell, but heaven is here portrayed as something hardly any Matses has any relation to and that belongs securely in the outside world; a brilliant city with palaces and streets of gold. Interestingly, the minister points to the existence of two roads in a way that I think resemble the two paths to people choose from in life; one leading to the old ways of the forest, the other towards the cities of national society and beyond. Only a handful of the Matses I spoke to mentioned this version of afterlife, where old Matses society so clearly has been demoted and replaced with a vision of the glory of the outside world. Still, it exists and is together with other changes a part of the larger process of inversions where what used to be the center of society and personhood now has become an unwanted thing of the past. This process is also reflected in Matses self-identification, which where we turn now.

# 11 From perfection to periphery

## 11.1 The 'other' as a mirror for self-identification

Self-identification, individual as well as collective always take place in relation to that which and those who are not included in the person or group. The self-identification of a person or group is thus dependent on images of others and as Lindberg (1998) argues, the traits and characteristics we ascribe to others is as much, or more, a reflection of how we think of ourselves as it is an account of those others.

Lindberg also points out that the mirror image of ourselves we create in our construals of the other has a positive and a negative pole that both affect self-identification. 'Me' or 'us' can thus be seen as both better and worse than 'you', 'them' or the 'other'. As Lindberg shows in his extensive discussion of European conceptions of the people of the new world, both the image and the value we place on that which we see as our 'other' also shifts over time and in tune with social and economic processes. In the way a group conceptualizes those who are not included, one can thus find both a characterization of the group's own self-image as well as a valuation of it; whether 'we' are better than 'them' or vice versa (Lindberg 1998). Lindberg himself connects these shifts to the systemic processes described by Friedman, who has shown how changes in social reproduction and the expansion and contraction of economic centers shape identity formation (e.g. Friedman 1994). Amongst other things, Friedman shows how the expansion of central economic powers leads to integration and peripheralization of other regions and how peripheries in times of such expansion come to devalue their own cultural identities in favor of that of the central power (ibid.). Against this background, I find it very interesting to look changes in Matses construals of their two primary 'others', the *mayu* and the *chotac*.

## 11.2 Earlier 'others'

As Fleck has shown, the Matses classify human beings primarily using three words: *matses*, *mayu*, and *chotac* (Fleck 2003: 18). *Chotac* is used for non-Indians, of which the prototype is the Peruvian mestizo. *Mayu*, on the other hand, is a generic term referring to any non-Matses Indian, the prototype being non-Panoan Indians. With the augmentative -mbo/-quio, *mayumbo* refers to an Indian whose language cannot be understood at all. According to Fleck, "sounds like a frog when they talk" is a common description of *mayumbo* speech offered by Matses speakers. The last term, *matses*, may refer to Matses speakers, Indians, a human person or humanity in general as well as to a person's close kin or tribe. By inference, and according to some older speakers, the Matses at least earlier tended to think of themselves as the quintessential humans,

although this, as Fleck points out, does not mean that others necessarily were considered non-human since the term *matses* can be used to refer to intermediate inclusiveness as well (Fleck 2003: 20). One example of this is the *matses utsi*, or other Matses, typically used to refer to closely related Indians speaking an intelligible language (Fleck 2003: 18f). Another example is the *matsesquio*, the real or true Matses, a word that also means fierce and courageous warrior. A synonym to *matsesquio* is *ombo*. Everyone I asked said the two were the same thing and identified it in the way described above. Interestingly, there are indications that *ombo* is what other groups in the region who used to fight with the Matses used to call them (Fleck 2007: 19).

Much in the same way as Kensinger indicates for the Cashinahua, the Matses, in line with the above observation, do, or did, consider themselves the quintessential humans, living like “real people ought to live” (Kensinger 1995). This is not surprising considering the notion that personhood is dependent on the transfer of proper male and female skills from old to young and the concomitant orientation towards the center of Matses society discussed above. As can be seen in Fleck’s characterization of the other terms, there is thus a sliding scale away from *matses* through the *matses utsi* with their similar speech and habits and the progressively more different *mayu* to the more or less alien *chotac*.

### **11.3 From center to sideline - redefinition and reevaluation of proper human personhood**

If the Matses are the proper humans, living as real people ought to live, *mayu* also denotes an uncivilized Indian; uncivilized in the sense of not behaving in a properly human manner. Looking at exactly what it is that makes the *mayu* uncivilized, we find a big change in Matses self-identification. Earlier, a *mayu* would, as was shown above, for example be someone not tattooed and pierced in the proper way, not speaking the Matses language or eating some strange food normally not eaten by the Matses. Today, a *mayu* is someone who, amongst other things in the same vein, cannot switch on a flashlight, walks barefoot, likes to bathe naked, eats unsalted food and opens easy-to-open cans with a machete. While unsuccessfully trying to switch on my flashlight, my first interpreter thus made a somewhat bitter joke at his own expense, saying that he obviously is more *mayu* than he thought. This redefinition of the *mayu* is often expressed in such slightly derogatory jokes or teases among the younger generations.

To call someone *mayu* would not be so funny if it was not also shameful, which it is since it indicates that someone has been behaving in a silly, stupid, inferior or backward way, acting like a savage rather than a proper human person. To me, the same shame also comes across as insecurity and bad confidence in most dealings with mestizos, harking back to the days when Matses were taunted for their facial tattoos and so called primitive ways or were told by missionaries that it was ugly to be naked and that they worshipped the devil. Fleck too, notes that many of the younger men, meaning those below 35, who move in national society on a regular basis dislike being identified as Indians and are ashamed to speak Matses around those who do not. While visiting non-

tribal towns and cities, Fleck points out, younger Matses exhibit lack of self-pride that one usually does not detect while in Matses villages. Fleck 2003: 55

Older Matses, on their hand, do not share the same idea of neither fun nor *mayu*. The same actions that may prompt a young person to call someone *mayu* can thus lead an older person to call that someone an ancestor, because as Fleck points out, the traits or behavior that make people call you *mayu* today are in fact the same ones that only a few decades ago were considered the properly human way to be. (Fleck 2003: 19, personal communication). What has taken place is thus a redefinition of what it means to be a Matses, where young Matses have incorporated not only the things but also some of the agentive capacities and ways of being of *chotac* into their definition of a proper human person. That this is so is to me clear throughout the discussions of how Matses society and personhood are changing.

The degree to which capacities related to the *chotac* have come to be seen as part of being Matses differs between people, much as we have seen how some prefer to hunt, work in gardens or make drinks while others find it more important to become skilled at harvesting the fruits of national society. What I suggest has happened regardless of degree is a revaluation and repositioning of the *chotac* category from its place as the most different and savage to a new position much closer to the definition of proper human persons, whereby the *mayu* have become the new savages. Looking at it one step removed, I am tempted to say that the *chotac* in fact have become the new epitome of humanity, with the Matses as an intermediary category on the way to *mayu*. There are several signs of this, among them the decreased importance of *sinan* and the reorientation from the world of the nonhuman and the center of Matses society to national society described in the preceding sections. I still think, however, that most Matses think that their way is superior to that of the mestizos, even though there is no consensus as to exactly what their way is. This lack of consensus is also something that I think is apparent throughout the discussion of current changes in Matses society.

Looking at all my findings, the flow of money contrasted to the flow of *sinan*, the strivings of young people, the shame connected to older Matses ways and the general bad confidence I find characterize Matses dealings with national society, I am still prepared to argue that at least younger Matses are more likely to consider mestizo society to be the center from where humanity flows than they are to place themselves in that position. Instead of a concentric social universe with the Matses, the humans *par excellence*, at the center, they have thus placed national society at the center and themselves one step removed; a new worldview that effectively mirrors the ongoing socioeconomic process of integration and peripheralization with regards to national society and the global economy.

# 12 Synthesis 2 - of insides, outsides and possibilities

## 12.1 A new orientation - from Matses to *mestizo*

As was discussed earlier, *sinan* and *dayac* come from the center of Matses society. *Sinan* adds to the capacity to both deal with the dangerous world of the nonhuman, where men's productive capacity primarily is exercised, and uphold a great network of properly human relations with other human persons; for a man, the more *sinan*, the greater the capacity to be productive, grow other humans and withstand and deal with the nonhuman. For women, *dayac* similarly gives the capacity to perform the actions that both constitute women's relations to others and define them as good female persons. As we have seen, people who have a lot of *sinan* and *dayac* also used to possess central positions in Matses society, economically, spatially, socially and ideologically. Since these substances are transferred from old to young and have been so for generations, furthermore, the capacity they give is in a sense shared with ancestors and has filtered down from there. With such a source and definition of proper personhood, Matses society was bound to be directed inwards, towards those defined as the real Matses according to old ideals.

Money instead comes from the outside. Not only from outside of Matses society, but from outside of the forest as well. It is controlled by nationals and may or may not be accessible to the Matses that seek it. To have it, however, is just as necessary to fulfill one's obligations as a man, start a family, lead a productive life and deal with the world outside of Matses society as *sinan* and *dayac* were to earlier generations. To come by it, however, one has to be oriented towards that outside, towards national society, rather than towards the inside. Money flows not from ancestors and real Matses persons, but from *mestizos*. In this way, the substance needed to be a proper person no longer comes from the inside center of Matses society, but from the inside and center of national society, where wealth and control of resources is located. This new center is also where redefinitions of Matses self-identifications and human personhood point.

As we have seen, different people seek these two sources of personhood to different degrees depending on how they want to live and the expectations placed upon them by others. Older men are thus more likely to concentrate on *sinan*, while younger prefer money. The same seems to go for their wives, or potential wives, who place different value on the products coming from of the forest or from national society. Since the Matses population is young and the authority of older generations is dissipating, the balance between these two versions of the human person is likely to shift in favor of those oriented towards national society. Even today, everyone is acquired to deal with national society in some way, directly or indirectly, since everybody needs some of the

products coming from there. Crucially, access to the substance needed to be powerful and bring back goods from national society, money, is in comparison with *sinan* and *dayac* much harder to access, being as it is, under the control of outsiders who are not prone to share what they have. The more money is needed to act as a proper Matses person, the less do the Matses themselves thus control the means of being such a person. The result is as we have seen a lacking capacity to act that affects both inside and outside relations. Since a person in a performative society cannot be what she cannot act, this has resulted in a perceived lessening of the Matses person.

## **12.2 A new outside - from the nonhuman to the national**

The outside that a successful man is good at dealing with may thus differ according to personal choice and preference, but to some extent the world of the *mestizos* has replaced the world of animals, plants and spirits as the sphere where male agency is practiced. It also seems likely that it will do so more if the young of today maintain their current ideas of proper personhood and the good life. The ability to safely bring back a surplus of produce from the outside is, as we have seen, a significant aspect of Matses personhood, especially for men. Like I argued above, possession of manufactured goods thus indicates skillful dealings with the outside world of the *mestizos* and the possession of money, just as possession of meat and fields indicate skillful dealings with the outside world of the nonhuman and possession of *sinan*. It is not a perfect semblance, there is one step missing where possession of money and things both in fact come from the skillful dealing with the world of the *mestizos*, but having money also makes it much easier to deal successfully with that world and to bring back the sought after products that come from there, which is very similar to the workings of *sinan*.

As we have seen, the main products that mark a man as good and desirable have changed in a manner that fits this switch of outsides. Earlier, they were meat, plantains, yucca and medicines brought in or produced through hard work in or contact with the outside world of the forest, with its animals, plants and spirits. Now, they are the clothes, pots, accessories, medicines and occasional foodstuffs brought in by hard work in and contact with the outside world of national society. As was also pointed out, however, in contrast to how it was earlier, simply working is not enough to secure a supply of these new products. This is because whereas the Matses earlier stood in direct relation to a great surplus of that which they needed to be productive, they are now dependent on people with money to give them salaried jobs, pay them and sell them products or buy the products the Matses have to offer. To depend on national society and the global economy is not like depending on a natural environment characterized by great abundance. The production of surplus that earlier served as a marker of human personhood has thus become impossible today.

## **12.3 A new set of relations**

As was shown in synthesis 1, for a Matses person to grow and change from one social kind to another required proper relationships with both the human and the nonhuman

world. Proper relations with other Matses were a source of buildup of human personhood through the sharing of food, exchange of goods and transfer of *sinan* and *dayac*. Relations with nonhuman persons were instead characterized by balance of power that shifted more to the favor of the human person the firmer his or her grip on human personhood was; a grip that depended on the strength, reach and magnitude of that person's relations with fellow humans. Relations with fellow humans thus created and upheld the similarity with human kin needed to deal with the nonhuman without risking breakdown or transformations, whether that similarity is created by eating the same things and living the same way or by the continuous sharing and mutual working and growing of others.

Today, relations with other Matses as well as nonhuman persons are still important, but to this we must add relations to national society. In addition, whereas national society is a source of both threats and products where maintaining a good balance of power is necessary, much as the nonhuman world is, relations with it has also come to replace some of the internal relations on which proper human personhood depends. In contrast to internal relations with fellow Matses, however, these relations are not characterized by conviviality, sharing and mutuality, but by the same balance of power that earlier belonged only to the world outside of Matses society. In step with the increasing dependency on external goods controlled by national society, relations that used to be internal, nurturing and sociable are thus moved into this new outside sphere. As a result, the Matses are left with fewer internal resources for the buildup of persons, mirrored by a new powerlessness in dealings with the outside world. Whereas Matses power with respect to nonhuman beings thus ideally increases throughout a properly growing person's lifespan, relations with national society are always shaped by a power deficit. Some of the insecurity that characterizes younger Matses' dealings with *mestizos* is to me likely to stem from this very concretely felt lack of buildup and personhood. Interestingly, however, the lack of capacity to deal with this new outside in complete contrast to before in fact increases as a person grows older and becomes less attractive to hire or less capable to produce enough surplus to sell. Just as older people as we have seen are the ones whose social position and prestige have decreased the most, it is also them that are surpassed in the new set of 'internal' relations. It is as if the old tops of Matses society have been cut off and put aside and the amputated lower halves of the pyramid simply have been tacked on to national society instead.

Because of the different agentive capacities associated with male and female personhood, this lack of power impacts men more than women. Today, there is for example as we have seen no one who has the degree of control over exchange and redistribution that longhouse leaders had, just as there is no one who has access to or controls enough of the resources deemed necessary to be as great a man. The position of women has changed less since they never depended as much on the production of surplus to be considered good women and always have depended on their men for the materials needed to practice most of their agentive capacities. As was shown above, however, some of their productive capacity and place in local exchange networks has been transferred to men since the products they used to make now are bought from national society instead.



## 12.4 New agentive capacities

Interestingly, this new powerlessness afflicts dealings with the world of the nonhuman too, but mostly because the Matses themselves have reformulated the human person in a way that does not value the agentive capacities needed to work there as much as earlier. I say mostly since settlement pattern and environmental degradation, which there is no room to discuss at length in this text, also impacts the environment in which the Matses live in a way that actually makes it harder to give proof of the same capacity for hunting and gardening as before. The ongoing reformulation of Matses personhood can for example be seen in the changing self-definition of the Matses, the changing ideas about life after death and the decreasing inclination to seek out the skills of older generations through the use of emetics. The ideal person today is not an ancestor or older person, but a younger one or even a *chotac*, although this definitely varies according to age and social position.

As we have seen, generally people also do not apply themselves to excel as hunters or workers in the same way as they did earlier, and even good hunters find less game and have less wives than before. Instead people find a balance between the different versions of the good human person and the agentive capacities needed to deal with the nonhuman or the national. Since success in the world of the *mestizos* is compromised by lack of access to resources and people do not become as skilled at hunting as they used to, and to some extent are compromised by scarcity of game, there is, however, an overall lack of capacity to deal with outsiders. All in all, the Matses person, especially the Matses man, is thus seen and experienced as smaller and less capable than before, not only because of changes that have led to a decreased capacity to act, but also because current notions of personhood impute the human adult with different agentive capacities than before.

One interesting aspect of the change in agentive capacities imputed to men can be seen in the discussion of initiation above, where I argued that there is a parallel between the earlier initiation by spirits and the current practice of working for *mestizos* before becoming a proper man. Before they acquire the agentive capacities of men, young men both earlier and today disappear from Matses society for some time, during which they in interaction with persons from the outside gain new skills needed to grow into men. The skills they come back with depend on which outside they have visited, the forest or the town. While spirits grow boys into men able to deal with the nonhuman, *mestizos* thus grow them into men able to deal with the national. For the analogy to be complete, the men should come back as prey and be reaffirmed as human beings when their female kin take them into the house and refuse to eat them. This very symbolic re-entry into Matses society does to my knowledge not exist today, although returning men are expected to reaffirm their status as kin by sharing the goods they bring back.

One should also not forget about the shamans, who no longer exist among the Matses. They were the human persons with the greatest capacity to act within the nonhuman sphere since they were accorded the agentive capacities of communicating freely and entering into sociable relationships with nonhuman persons. This ability does not exist within Matses society today. Looking at the other outside, however, etically

speaking the Matses have yet to gain a comparable personage there; one who is able to associate freely with nationals and be treated by them as an amiable equal. Some people come close, such as teachers, some more successful politicians and the elected chiefs the Matses have since a decade or so, but they still have to face the low opinion many nationals have of Indians. Although these people, mostly men, do play an increasingly important role in Matses society and like shamans are strangely poised between the inside and the outside world, they are probably more comparable to longhouse owners than to shamans. The simple explanation for this is the ambivalent status of national society, which is both inside and outside, a source of buildup and human personhood and a source of danger and potential loss of the same. These people are thus not only able to deal better with the outside, but also in a sense positioned closer to the center of the new inside, whereby they as we have seen in terms of for example wives or being able to trade money for work and produce are the only ones who approximate the role held by longhouse owners earlier.

## **12.5 Structure, personhood and social change**

As we have seen, Matses social reproduction today involves resources and transactions controlled by *mestizos* to a greater extent than it did earlier; something which has made it difficult to live up to old ideals of human personhood and placed the source of that which is needed to fully live up to new ones out of reach. If the social field in which personhood is practiced is an articulation of cultural specificities and social structure, as was discussed in chapter 4, what that argument actually amounts to is saying that the social structure through which old notions of personhood were acted out and sustained has changed so that the actions that signify proper Matses personhood have become difficult or impossible to carry out. Integration with national society has thus led to a structural reconfiguration of the social field so that people's capacity to act according to old definitions of Matses personhood has lessened. The same changes that have limited Matses' possibilities to live up to old ideals have, however, also opened up new possibilities for action and new ways to define the human person, meaning that there also is an ongoing cultural reconfiguration. As I argued in chapter 4, the structural and cultural changes should be seen as two aspects of the same process rather than be placed in a hierarchical or dialectical relationship to each other.

In terms of strategies of practice, which according to Friedman and Ekholm-Friedman stem from local notions of personhood (e.g. Friedman 1994: 25), I find it clear that the same type of diversification that Ekholm-Friedman describes in her study of social change in the Congo also is found among the Matses. Just as strategies of practice have diversified, the current situation also lacks the hegemonic and unitary definition of proper human personhood that she points to. Like she shows, integration into the global economy carries with it changes in local social structure that makes new ways of acting both possible and desirable. The way she puts it, there are two main sides to such a change; "the first has to do with the establishment of a new social world with new problems to solve and the other with the breakdown of authority structures in

society” (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 255). I find that I have ample evidence that this is clearly applicable to the situation of the Matses.

As we have seen, amongst the Matses this process contains both a shift in the authority structure where old people have lost their former positions of prominence and a redefinition of proper personhood largely propagated by the younger generations who no longer are as bound by the ideals and authority of their elders. The situation is thus not only characterized by breakdown, but by creativity. Apparent for example in changes in Matses self-identification, this redefinition also entails the redistribution of personhood and authority. Who is and who is not a proper man or woman is thus both different today than it was in the near past and approximated by different individuals than those who used to best live up to ideals of human personhood before.

As I argue in chapter 4, culture and structure interact to create the social field within which personhood is practiced. It also places different actors in different positions on it. What is considered appropriate and meaningful action for who and when and what possibility an individual has to actually fulfill the requirements for being a person to me depends on this articulation of structural position and cultural notions and distributions of personhood. As we have seen, for the Matses, the social field on which they act today is made up of a different cast of persons in different sets of relationships facing different problems to solve that what was the case only a few decades ago. The way I picture it, there has been an untying of central the central knot that kept society together and an intertwining of the resulting loose threads into a new network of relations that places the new knot of power outside of Matses society. Instead of kings and queens in their own world, the Matses are thus potentially on the road to becoming another assimilated and impoverished group on the fringes of the global economy.

## **12.6 A glance towards the future – retying the knot?**

The metaphorical untying of the relationships that used to constitute Matses society as well as the Matses person is, as we have seen, a process of intertwining cultural and structural change where cultural strategies of practice and structural conditions for action interact to constantly recreate the social field in which people move. The situation the Matses find themselves in today is as we have seen characterized by a reorientation and a metaphoric relocation of Matses society and the Matses person, where both to an increasing degree face outwards upwards and towards the national society to which Matses society is becoming a new periphery. We have also seen that this situation has redefined the proper Matses person and changed the capacity people have to live up to both old and new ideals of male and female personhood. Which agentive capacities it is that mark a proper Matses person is thus both changing and subject to disagreement. While older generations tend to favor old ways and the agentive capacities connected to *sinan*, younger place greater importance on money and similarity to nationals. There is, however, one aspect of this that has not been discussed yet, and that is the possibility of a redefinition of the very agentive capacities that signal possession of *sinan* and *dayac*.

Today, everybody agrees that no one has as much *sinan* as old big men used to have. Some older women, however, are still reputed to have *dayac* comparable to the good women of times past. This is consistent with the other changes described in this thesis, where men's ability to live up to old ideals has been affected to a greater degree than women's. What people do not agree on, however, is who else may have *sinan*. While old men and women adamantly maintain that a non-Indian cannot have *sinan* or *dayac* since they cannot hunt with bow and arrow or grind corn to make drinks, younger people are thus for example more likely to say that someone who studies very hard and efficiently indeed has *dayac* while a man who can kill with a shotgun or, crucially, has plenty of money also has *sinan*. Young people thus tend to be much more liberal concerning the actions and things they consider a sign of a person's possession of either substance. To me, this looks like the definite start of a redefinition of *sinan* and *dayac* to suit new ideals where different agentic capacities are considered central for being a proper human man or woman.

The way I see it, this development can go two ways. The Matses may redefine *sinan* and *dayac* to better suit new ideals without regaining control over the means and relationships needed to be a proper human person. This would lead to a continuing material dependency on national society. It would also mean that old ideas of the transfer of skill and capacity changed in a way that reinforced the already existing tendency to in cosmological terms place the Matses in the same type of dependency on a source of power outside of their control. The central knot of Matses society and culture would thus be retied, but further away from the Matses themselves and the direct relationships between people through which personhood and society still largely are constituted today. The other option is that the Matses regain a measure of control over the means and relationships of social reproduction. In this case, the redefinition of *sinan* and *dayac* could mean that the relationships of buildup and safeguarding that used to be internal and sociable but now are external and precarious once again became internal. If young people today grow into persons who actually have the capacities and resources needed to deal with both outside worlds, this would mean that the knot was retied on the inside of Matses society, whereby the Matses themselves remain at the center of their own cosmology and retained the power over their own lives.

Whereas the first alternative effectively amounts to Matses society turning into another periphery within the global economy, the other could lead to the existence of a more autonomous and viable society under the control of the Matses themselves. As Ekholm-Friedman says, the immediate outcome of the encounter is, after all, dependent on the control of sources of power (Ekholm-Friedman 1991: 255). One can think what one will about the preservation of Amerindian cultures, but to me, most alternatives are better than being a powerless human person in the absolute periphery of global capitalist economy.

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# Appendix 1: Literature review

The Matses are not a very well documented group, especially concerning the confusion in how earlier material uses the term Mayoruna to refer to several and varying groups in the region where the Matses live. Despite this, this review of literature is, admittedly, not complete and should rather be considered an overview and first orientation in the written material on the Matses published over the last fifty years. Since I only read Portuguese with some difficulty I have also less familiar with Brazilian material than Peruvian and have read none of the authors that for example Fleck (2003) point to as examples of Brazilian ethnographies on the Matses (Borja 1981, Melatti 1981, Cavuscens and Neves 1986). For more complete bibliographies both in terms of scope and historical depth, I refer to Erikson (2000) and Matlock (2002).

The most comprehensive descriptions of Matses culture can be found in Steven Romanoff's (1984) dissertation, focusing on subsistence patterns, James Matlock's (2002) dissertation of Matses history and contemporary changes in Matses culture and Philippe Erikson's (1994) general discussion of what he calls the Mayoruna subgroup of the Panoan family. In addition, David Fleck's dissertation in the field of linguistics also contains a good portion of ethnographic and ethnographically relevant material (Fleck 2003). All of these publications provide good points of entry to earlier material of relevance, such as mission reports. I have not had access to such material firsthand and do not use it in my thesis, whereby I have decided to refer the interested reader to the above works instead.

Of the above mentioned authors, three have done fieldwork with the Matses. Of these, Romanoff was the first, coming to the Matses only a few years after they made peaceful contact with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Romanoff's dissertation is as I mentioned concerned with subsistence patterns, including ritual cycles, exchange patterns and division of labor. He also provides plenty of surrounding information on marriage, kinship and general population statistics. His main focus is how the social environment of the Matses has provided pressure and incentive for change within these areas (Romanoff 1984). Apart from his dissertation, Romanoff has only published one article on Matses women as hunters (Romanoff 1983), one on Matses land use (Romanoff 1976) and, more recently, co-authored a book written in collaboration with the Matses as well as Fleck, containing much ethnographic material and many of his photographs from his time with the Matses in the seventies (Fleck et. al. 2007). Although very informative, this book is mainly targeted towards the Matses themselves in an effort to preserve and create interest for older ways of life.

Matlock spent some apparently troubled times with the Matses in the second half of the nineties and has with the help of Gidden's structuration theory written about historical and current social changes within Matses society. His take on history is very comprehensive and well worth reading. Sadly, I have only had access to the first half of his thesis and can therefore not say much about his conclusions. Although his focus

despite the slightly similar aim seemingly has been very different from mine, his work appears to point in the same direction as mine, towards impending assimilation (Matlock 2002). Matlock (1998) has also published one article detailing the ongoing nucleification and dispersion of Matses settlement patterns.

Fleck is apart from the Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries the outsider who has spent the most time with the Matses, coming for the first time in 1994 and remaining there today. His published material includes subjects as different as ethnobiology, linguistic analyses and material clarifying the historical roots of the Matses and other Panoans (Fleck 2001, 2002, 2007, Fleck and Voss 2006). Fleck has also compiled a very extensive and annotated Matses-Spanish-English dictionary which yet has to be published.

Erikson has in addition to his publications on Panoan history and commonalities written several works on the closely related Matis in Brazil, where he carried out fieldwork in the eighties (e.g Erikson 1992, 1994, 1999). Although the latter does not treat the Matses, the similarities between Matses and Matis are so great that a reading of his monograph is very interesting for those interested in the Matses. Erikson has as I noted above also compiled and published a bibliography of historic and ethnographic materials about all groups included in the Mayoruna category, i.e. the Matses, Matis, Korubo, Maya and Kulina-Pano (Eriksson 2000). Also helpful in this respect is Wise (1986), who lists all the SIL works produced up until 1986. The SIL missionaries (Harriet L. Fields and Harriet Kneeland) who periodically lived with the Matses between 1969 and 2003 have described Matses language and culture as well as put together a collection of transcribed myths. Much of this material, however, is either unpublished or accessible only in the form of microfiches from SIL offices in Lima and Dallas. Their two accessible works on Matses ethnography are Fields and Merrifield (1980), on kinship, and Kneeland (1994), on values and cultural change. The SIL writings that I have read provide interesting material but sometimes tend to be a little biased. The text by Kneeland just mentioned, for example, to me portray the Matses as more lost, misguided and promiscuous than they seem to me.

A Peruvian anthropologist, Luis Calixto Méndez has also been working with the Matses for many years. Although he initially did some ethnographic research, his activities are since long mainly restricted to administrative work for the NGO CEDIA. Calixto Méndez has published one article concerning the impact of sedentarization relocation to larger rivers on Matses hunting and agricultural practices (1986). The rest of his production is hard to access and to an extent summed up in Erikson (1994).

Although most ethnographies provide some detail on exchange networks and relations to national society, which has been of great use to me, there is not much information to be had in the published material when it comes to personhood and cosmology. That which most frequently is mentioned that has been of central importance to me is the use of emetics to transfer skill and energy. Romanoff also includes interesting information on medicines. For the greatest part, however, I have relied on material from other Amazonian groups, with special weight accorded to other Panoans, for clues for how to best approach and analyze notions of personhood, humanity and humanity's place in the world.

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## Appendix 2: Map



Map showing the location of all Matses villages inhabited in 2002 (14 in Loreto, Peru; 3 in Amazonas, Brazil), and nearby non-tribal towns and cities. This map also shows the areas where uncontacted Matses are believed to exist. There is today as far as I know one more community on Choba creek, where Estiron, the village where most of the material presented in this thesis was collected, also is situated.