

**‘WE ARE NOT THE TRUE PEOPLE’
NOTIONS OF IDENTITY AND OTHERNESS
AMONG THE ESE EJJA OF NORTHERN
BOLIVIA**

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Abstract

This thesis is based on eighteen months fieldwork in the Ese Ejja community of Portachuelo, on the lower Beni River, in northern Bolivia. The Ese Ejja are an indigenous Amazonian people of the Tacana linguistic family. The thesis analyses Ese Ejja ideas of alterity and demonstrates that such ideas are the basis for the construction of identity. Alterity must constantly be created and maintained, however, 'others' pose a constant threat and, therefore, difference must also be eliminated through conviviality and procreation. Drawing on socio-cosmological ideas, myth and everyday life experiences, the argument focuses on the Ese Ejja's ambivalent sentiments towards non-indigenous people, who are considered the epitome of otherness. These sentiments are characterised by both fear and avoidance, and, at the same time, by emulation. *Vis-à-vis* non-indigenous people, the Ese Ejja display a form of self-deprecation, expressed in the statement that they themselves are not 'the true people'. The thesis analyses the relationship between culturally shared and individually held ideas. Among the Ese Ejja, self-deprecation is the dominant discourse, but ideas vary from person to person and they transform over the course of people's lives. And it is through individual and collective transformations that dominant cultural constructs are refashioned and reproduced. Thus, the thesis stresses the importance of giving voice to the contrasting and contradicting ideas that exist in any social group. It concludes that Ese Ejja identity – constructed through alterity – is better understood as a contingent position rather than an absolute essence. Finally, it is suggested that the notion of not being 'the true people' is rooted in indigenous perceptions of history, viewed as a progressive *rapprochement* with the non-indigenous peoples.

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Notes on orthography and translation

At present there are two orthographies for the Ese Ejja language. The first is the one devised by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, adopted by the New Tribes Mission and employed in Bolivia. The second is the one in use in Peru, devised by the linguist Maria Chavarría (1996). The first follows broadly the Spanish phonetic system, the second the international one. In this thesis I adopt the former, which is the one used by my informants. In quotations I have retained the spelling used by the authors.

The most striking differences between the Bolivian and Peruvian orthographies are:

Phonemic symbol	Bolivian orthography	Peruvian orthography
/h/	j (cueijana)	h (kweihana)
/k/	qu (ecuiquia)	k (ecuikia)
/w/	hu (eshahua)	w (eshawa)
/x/	jj (Ese Ejja)	j (Ese Eja)

In Ese Ejja there are many composite words. In some cases, in order to highlight the components, words will be hyphenated. i.e. *uapapojiana*, non-affine, may appear as *uapa-pojiana* (Chapter 6).

Translations from Ese Ejja, Spanish, Portuguese and French are my own, while German texts were translated in collaboration with Tim Lau.

Abbreviations

ADN: Alianza Democrática Nacionalista

CEPIB: Central de los Pueblos Indígenas del Beni

CIDOB: Confederación Indígena del Oriente Boliviano, Chaco y Amazonía

CIPOAP: Central Indígena de los Pueblos Originarios de Pando

CIRABO: Central Indígena de la Region Amazonica de Bolivia

CSUTCB: Confederación Sindacal Única de Trabajadores y Campesinos de Bolivia

MACPIO: Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinos Pueblos Indígenas y Originarios

MIR: Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria

MUSEF: Museo de Etnografía y Folklor, La Paz

NTM: New Tribes Mission

SIL: Summer Institute of Linguistics

TCO: Tierras Comunitarias de Origen

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

VAIPO: Viceministerio de Asuntos Indígenas y Pueblos Originarios

1. Introduction

This is an ethnographic account of a little-known Amazonian people who call themselves Ese Ejja, 'we', 'our lot', also known as Chama in Bolivia, and Huarayos in Peru. Based on eighteen months participant observation among the Ese Ejja of northern Bolivia, this thesis analyses of the relationship between the Ese Ejja and different 'others'. Following a Dravidian kinship model, for the Ese Ejja, alterity begins with cross relatives. Cross relatives are at one end of the spectrum of otherness which includes distant Ese Ejja, other indigenous people, Bolivian nationals¹ and North American missionaries. At the other end, are the 'powerful beings'. These are often referred to as spirits and devils, but they constitute a very concrete presence in the Ese Ejja world and they embody absolute and irredeemable otherness.

The research presented here focuses on the ambivalent feelings of fear and awe that characterise their relationships with a particular group of others, the Bolivian nationals. In particular, I am concerned with the Ese Ejja self-deprecation when confronted with them. As I will show, this self-deprecation pervades Ese Ejja discourses and practices and it is epitomised in the statement that they are not the 'true people'. This statement contradicts those of the majority of Amazonian peoples described in the literature, who refer to themselves as 'the true ones'. In this thesis, I argue that, undoubtedly, the colonial and post-colonial rhetoric of savagery and civilisation and centuries of actual persecution played an important role in shaping the Ese Ejja attitude. However, these are not sufficient reasons, and the attribution of true humanity to the Bolivians can only be understood through the indigenous sense of history and socio-cosmological ideas. I argue that, over the last century, the Ese Ejja have undergone a transition in their relations with outsiders, from warfare to relatively peaceful coexistence and trade. This, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1976) pointed out, is a common pattern in the history of Amerindian peoples. The transition engendered a loss of self-esteem *vis-à-vis* Bolivians and the desire to become like them. However, the Ese Ejja remain ambivalent in their judgement of Bolivians, whom they emulate and yet consider dangerous and morally ambiguous.

¹ In lowland Bolivia, whites and mestizos, who do not claim a particular 'tribal' identity, are sometimes referred to as '*carayana*', but the Ese Ejja do not use this term. Therefore I adopted the term Bolivian 'nationals'.

But the analysis of the Ese Ejja attitude poses a broader problem. While there exists a general consensus on what it is to be an Ese Ejja and on what kind of beings the Bolivians are, not all agree at all times. Moreover, people's self-perception changes according to which others they are confronted with. These discrepancies bring forth the question of the relation between society and individual identity. The Ese Ejja case suggests that culture/society offers the individual a set of behavioural and ideological parameters that define what it is to be an Ese Ejja, but he or she maintains a degree of creativity and choice within those parameters. It is in this creative use of culture that culture itself is reproduced and transformed.

The Ese Ejja recognise themselves as a group with a distinct collective identity, expressed in their self-denomination, which, as is almost universal among Amerindian people, is a collective personal pronoun. As a group, they share language and certain customs, and they intermarry; they also share a common past and geographical locations. I am aware of the longstanding debates in anthropology concerning the individual and collective identity of the subjects of study – (c.f. Sökefeld 1999) of which more will be said below, but, in view of the indigenous statements, I feel entitled to speak of 'the Ese Ejja of Portachuelo', without essentialising them or denying their individuality.

The existing research

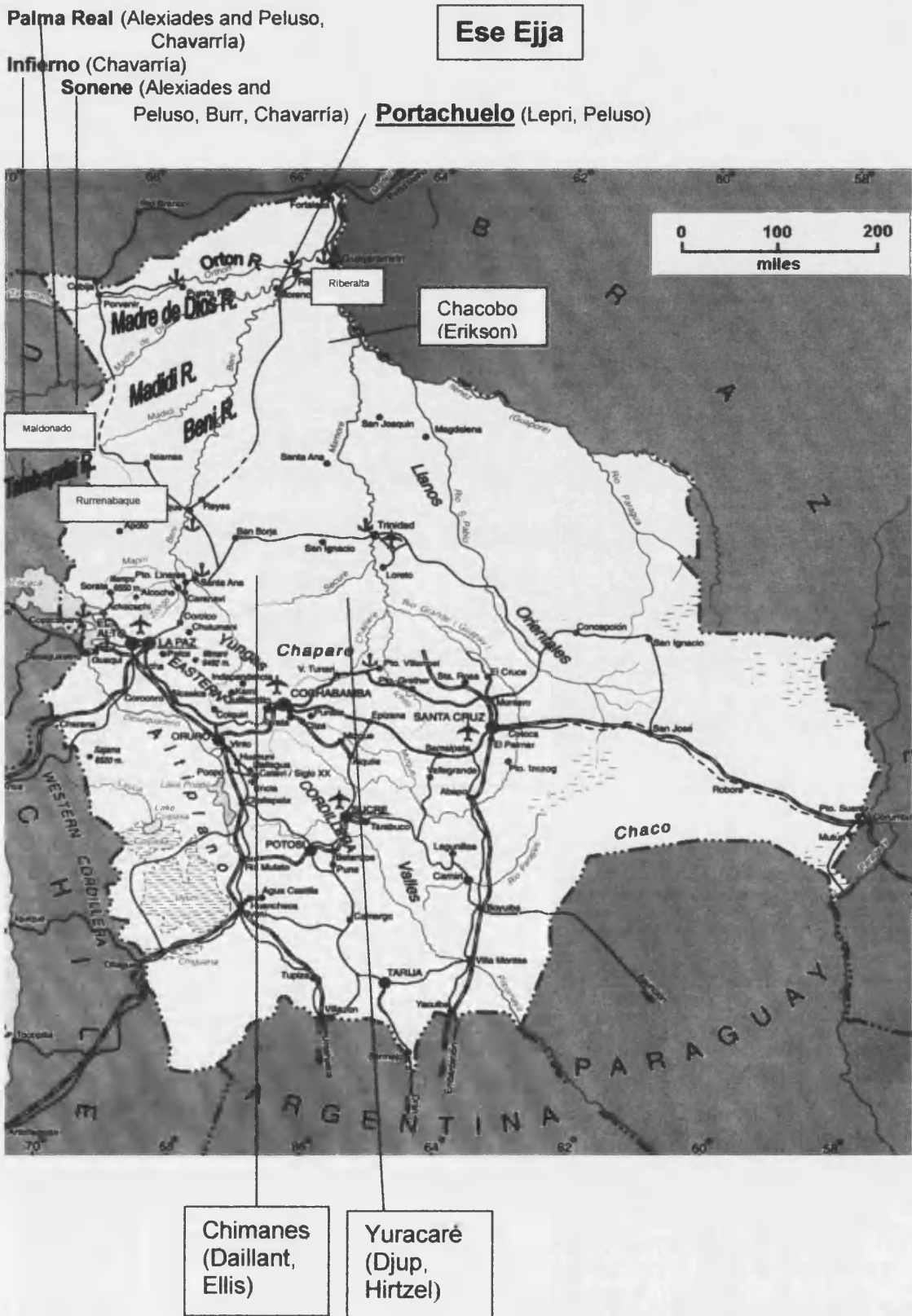
In the field of Amazonian studies, the Bolivian lowlands are extremely under-researched and the northern provinces have, until recently, remained little-known to ethnographers, with the exception of the pioneering work of the German ethnologists Karin Hissink and Albert Hahn (1988) in the early 1950s. About the Ese Ejja, a body of ethnographic data was collected by Dominican missionaries in Peru, and by the Evangelicals of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, henceforth SIL, in Bolivia. Unfortunately, while I was able to find the published notes of the Dominican Fathers Armentia (1976), Aza (1928; 1930) and Álvarez (1932; 1998a; 1998b), I had limited access to the SIL material. In this thesis, I refer to the historical reconstruction by Jack and Nola Shoemaker and Dean Arnold (1975) of the SIL and to the Shoemakers' unpublished *Culture Notes*, kindly lent to me by Cher Riepma of the New Tribes Mission, currently working with the Ese Ejja. I also refer to the historical data collected by Mnislav Zelený (1976) and to a report on the Bolivian Ese Ejja economy and material culture by Hideo Kimura (1980; 1981b). References to the Ese Ejja can also be

found in the *Handbook of South American Indians* (Métraux 1963), which are mostly quotations from the missionaries' accounts mentioned above. Some Ese Ejja myths were recorded in Bolivia by Kimura (1981a), Alexandra Verna (1986) and Homer Firestone (1991) and in Peru, by Maria Chavarría (1986; 1987; 1996), whose doctoral thesis offers a symbolic interpretation of the Ese Ejja 'oral tradition'.

The last decade has seen a growing number of anthropologists interested in lowland Bolivia (see Map 1). Isabelle Daillant (1994; 1995; 2000) has written on cosmology and kinship and Rebecca Ellis (1996; 1998), on space and sociality among the Chimanes (Tsimanes) of the Ballivián and Yacuma Provinces, and Philippe Erikson (1998; forthcoming) has conducted research among the Panoan Chacobo in the Vaca Diez Province. Moreover, current research on Yuracaré violence and aggression by Vincent Hirtzel (École des Hautes Études de Sciences Sociales, Paris) and on gender by Annica Djup (University of Göteborg), and on Ese Ejja kinship by Daniela Peluso promise a fruitful comparison. For the Ese Ejja, there also exists a growing body of work on the Peruvian communities, in the Madre de Dios Province, bordering with Bolivia, by Maria Chavarría (1984; 1986; 1987; 1996; n.d.) on linguistics and myth, by Gareth Burr (1997) on shamanism and by Michel Alexiades (1999) on ethnobotany. The growing ethnographic interest in the Bolivian lowlands was confirmed by a recent meeting hosted by the Laboratoire d'Etnologie et de Sociologie Comparative at the University of Paris X, in Nanterre, in which ten scholars engaged in the area, including myself, gathered to form an international working group on the region.

What follows is an overview of the most original and comprehensive work produced on the Ese Ejja. Chavarría's thesis offers a detailed account of Peruvian Ese Ejja cosmology and mythology. It is based on interviews with a single informant, Tadeo Mishaja Tii Hehua, collected in the Madidi community of Infierno. The aim of Chavarría's thesis is to produce a structuralist analysis of the indigenous oral tradition, while taking into account the 'opinions of the narrators, the audiences and social practices' (1996: 14). However, in the interpretation of the stories it isn't clear whether the symbolic exegesis belongs to the narrator or the author. For my current purpose, this work is interesting because it reveals notable discrepancies between the ideas of the Peruvian and the Bolivian Ese Ejja concerning cosmology and kinship – as I point out in Chapters 6 and 7 – and one of the most striking differences is to be found in their definitions of 'true people'.

Map 1. Location of indigenous groups currently under research in northern Bolivia



Chavarría maintains that the group's self-denomination, Ese Ejja, means *gente verdadera*, true people. She states that: 'Among the Ese Eja identity is highly ethnocentric' and that 'they recognise themselves as the true people and starting from this concept they establish a hierarchy from those who are "true people", those like them ... down to those who are not people, or are simply foreigners' (1996: 1, 46). This absolutely contradicts the situation I encountered in Portachuelo. The author recognises that the Ese Ejja refer to non-Indians as *dejja*, but does not question the fact that this term refers to adult male Ese Ejja as well. My impression is that the author is not concerned with interethnic relations and presents a picture of the Ese Ejja worldview within a closed system. My aim is to situate the Ese Ejja ethnography in the framework of relations with outsiders.

Like Chavarría, Alexiades (1999) and Peluso and Boster (2002) acknowledge that the word *dejja* refers to non-Ese Ejja people, but do not question the fact that it also means adult Ese Ejja man. However, Peluso and Boster report that *dejja* is translated in Spanish as *gente*, people, 'which conveys a sense of gentility or higher social status', (2002: 147) which is consistent with my hypothesis of self-debasement discussed in this thesis.

Daniela Peluso's work is concerned with kinship and the position of women in Ese Ejja society. Unfortunately, at the time of writing she had not completed her doctoral thesis. What appears from her available material is that there are profound differences in our findings. In an essay co-authored with James Boster, Peluso describes ideas that were never voiced to me in Portachuelo. In particular, the authors maintain that, for the Ese Ejja, 'a child is formed by the accumulation of *ema'i* (semen) from successive copulations' with the mother's husband but also with her lovers, who are seen as secondary fathers (2002: 140), a notion also endorsed by Alexiades (1999: 181) and indeed very widespread in Amazonia. The Ese Ejja never described this process to me, on the contrary, they were adamant that one copulation was sufficient to make a baby and, when pressed, denied that different men could have anything to do with the conception of one child. It may be that the authors' data derive mainly from the Peruvian Ese Ejja, which, as in Chavarría's case, show discrepancies with the Bolivian Ese Ejja. But the Ese Ejja travel frequently between distant communities and such radical difference is unlikely to be the result of separation alone. A significant factor maybe the recent influence of outsiders' knowledge on the Bolivian Ese Ejja. Most of

my data on the subject of conception comes from young women, who have had access to hospital treatment and technology such as antenatal scans and in conversation with me wanted to display their knowledge. Or it may reveal that, at the time of my research, the Ese Ejja were under a particularly intense pressure from outsiders, especially the missionaries, and were reluctant to share with me their traditional knowledge. However, this hypothesis crystallises 'traditional' and 'foreign' knowledges into separate, independent systems. This separation is unwarranted, since knowledge is always refashioned in the encounters between people and this refashioning has been taking place in the past as much as in the present.

Michel Alexiades' work is an 'ethnobotanical ethnography for the Ese Eja' (1999: 5). Based mostly on Peruvian communities, it examines the relations between people and the environment, especially plants, in a situation of progressive social and economic change, rejecting utilitarian perspectives. The author is concerned with human-plant interactions within their biological as well as cultural context and maintains that 'ethnobotanical interactions cannot be meaningfully understood outside the social and ecological context in which they are embedded' (Alexiades 1999: 25). His approach is relevant to my thesis because he describes outsiders, *dejja*, as one of the three cosmological actors in the Ese Ejja world, together with *eshahua* and *edosiquiana*, which I call 'powerful beings' and I discuss at length in Chapter 9. According to the author, like *eshahua* and *edosiquiana*, *dejja* are a positive force as long as one maintains good, peaceful relations with them. However, *dejja* are extremely dangerous, not unlike the powerful beings, when relations with them become hostile. This confirms my argument that relations with *dejja* are highly ambiguous. Furthermore, his study lends strong support to the idea of knowledge as the product on constant exchange and assimilation of foreign ideas.

Finally, Gareth Burr's thesis focuses on the mythopoeia of the Peruvian Ese Ejja. Mythopoeia is here understood as a 'mode of activity of consciousness critical for the structuring of experience of the world' (1997: i). This work offers interesting insights into the issue of cultural change in a situation of contact. The author focuses on shamanic practices and argues that Ese Ejja shamans have always been 'assimilating and absorbing knowledge and techniques from "outside"' (1997: ii) and therefore, change must be seen as an indigenous occurrence. He then proceeds to argue for the need to introduce psychoanalysis and phenomenology to explain mythic consciousness.

But although he claims that phenomenology is essential in order to counter the 'prevailing obsession of Western rules and "logics"' (1997: ii), one is left with the impression that his rich ethnographic data are used to support his philosophical position.

Apart from the works listed above, there is also a monograph entitled *Gente Ribereña*, river people, by Homer Firestone (1991). The book is not based on original field research, but relies on the SIL *Culture Notes* for its data. The result is a lengthy discussion on religiosity and culture, loosely based on the Ese Ejja material, which offers little insight on the Ese Ejja themselves. Worth mentioning is the work of Hideo Kimura, who did undertake some field research and compiled a catalogue of Ese Ejja material culture and the economy in Portachuelo and Villanueva in the late 1970s (1980; 1981b). Kimura also published a study of Ese Ejja mythology, in which he concluded that 'between men and *edosiquiana*, in other words, between humanity and nature, there exists an equilibrium, that is, men must use natural resources of the forest [which belong to *edosiquiana*] for their nourishment and they need the natural powers of the forest to cure illness', while '*edosiquiana* incorporates the souls of the dead' (1981a: 13). I am sceptical about the idea of reciprocity between the Ese Ejja and powerful beings because, as I point out in Chapter 9, they never spoke of *edosiquiana*'s cannibalism in such terms. Moreover, Kimura's article may be criticised for exaggerating the nature/society dichotomy – and imposing it on Ese Ejja thought. Nevertheless, it provides useful comparative material and, to an extent, it confirms my position in this thesis that the Ese Ejja are at pains to maintain harmonious and non-conflictive relations with the powerful beings and enemies in general, who are dangerous but necessary.

My work concurs with and complements that of Burr, Alexiades and Peluso, who consider the Ese Ejja in the context of contact with the national society, moving away from the more static pictures offered by Chavarría and Kimura.

Not real people

My ethnographic research was conducted in the village of Portachuelo, in the Department of Pando, in northern Bolivia, between October 1999 and April 2001. During my stay, I also visited the Peruvian settlement of Sonene, on the Heath River, on the border between Bolivia and Peru, 400 kilometres southwest of Portachuelo, where many of my closest informants originated. Other Ese Ejja groups live on the upper Beni

and on the Orton rivers, in Bolivia, and on the Madre de Dios and Tambopata rivers, in Peru. Whole Ese Ejja households periodically travel between these places, covering several hundreds of kilometres by canoe or by motorboat.

When I first arrived in Portachuelo, I was soon confronted with a puzzling statement. The Ese Ejja called the Bolivians 'true people' (Ese Ejja, '*dejja nei*', Spanish, '*gente verdadera*'). I found this rather shocking because, not only did it contradict all the statements I had encountered in Amazonian ethnographies, but also, it seemed impossible to me that a people could deny its own humanity *vis-à-vis* foreigners. At first, I found the statement offensive because I expected them to be proud indigenous people, who should consider themselves 'the true ones' and others as lesser humans or even as spirits. In other words, I wanted them to be exceptional, and to conform to what other – from my point of view – exceptional Amazonian peoples say. In a sense, I expected them not to be 'true people' like me, but something else. Instead, I learned how much we were the same, although we were very different. It took me a long time to come to this realisation, even if this is what they had been telling me all along, when they said that Ese Ejja, Bolivians and gringos, were *pia*, different, because they spoke a different language, but they had the same body and the same blood.

What offended my ethical and aesthetic sense was that they should deny that they were proper humans. Soon, I began to suspect it was a matter of translation, and that the Ese Ejja were simply stating their difference, but once I learned that the word *dejja* also meant 'adult Ese Ejja man', I was again lead to think that they were accepting the inferior position in which white foreigners had placed them since the Conquest and the first encounters. Of course this could be dismissed as a semantic problem, to do with the meaning of '*dejja*', which gets muddled in its association with the Spanish word '*gente*'. It could be argued, for example, that *dejja* cannot mean 'people' since it excludes women and children, when referring to the Ese Ejja. Moreover, it could be added that we cannot take one word to have just one meaning, or to correspond to one concept, and that *dejja* can mean different things at different times, much in the same way as in English the word 'children' can mean 'offspring' as well as 'very young people'. The problem is that the inferiority of the Ese Ejja in relation to outsiders is not only expressed in this word, rather it is constantly stated by the people themselves. They say they are ignorant, backward, cowards, dirty and poor and they also display this sense of inferiority in their practices, in their embarrassment and silence when

confronted by Bolivians. When they leave the village and reach the town, their posture and body language changes, and one has the impression they are trying to disappear from view.

In this thesis, I consider the implications of this phenomenon: how outsiders regard the Ese Ejja as sub-human and treat them as such; how the Ese Ejja themselves received this message and appropriated it; how this way of relating to the other fits in traditional cosmological ideas and to what extent they see themselves as becoming *dejja*. If the Ese Ejja are stating their own inferiority and see themselves as being in the process of becoming like Bolivians, why is it so?

In the 1970s, the Shoemakers wrote: 'Sixty years ago, the Spanish merchants made contact with the Ese Ejja. They traded them guns and gave them clothes. Soldiers convinced them that the "real people" were to be obeyed' (1983: 105). This is one example of the kind of comments that can be heard today in the town of Riberalta, where people describe the Ese Ejja with adjectives generally used for animals such as *dañino*, harmful, that causes damage, and *arisco*, unfriendly, that hides. Undoubtedly, over centuries of abuse by, and flight from, non-indigenous people, the Ese Ejja have absorbed the colonial discourse, which happened to be phrased in terms of their being less than human or animal like. But I argue that, when the Ese Ejja say they are not the true people, they are saying something that only superficially coincides with what the Bolivians say, and does not necessarily have the same meaning. The Ese Ejja do not think they are animals, but they are aware that they are inferior, in many ways, to the Bolivians. Bolivian nationals are evidently wealthier and more powerful, and being like them could mean having access to desirable goods. This would be a sufficient reason for wanting to be like them. But this cannot be the whole explanation, since the comparison with regional ethnographies shows that other people who have experienced the same discourse do not react in the same way (Gow 1991; Gray 1996; Hugh-Jones 1979; McCallum 1997; Siskind 1973; Taylor forthcoming; Townsley 1987; Turner 1993; Viveiros de Castro 1992). Amazonian ethnographies show how the desire for the wealth and power of others does not necessarily lead to the desire to be like them. The Ese Ejja could wish to master the Bolivians' political and economic powers in their own terms, as is reported to be the case among the Cashinahua (McCallum 1997); or they could express their own identity in being better than them, as reported by Anne Christine Taylor (forthcoming) about the Achuar. This point brings to the fore the dangers of

lumping together Amazonian peoples, disregarding the differences between them that arise from idiosyncratic traits, from their own experiences of relations with nation-states and their politics. Striking similarities exist between very distant groups across Amazonia, but they cannot be assumed *a priori*, which confirms the need to frame the problem in terms of the indigenous view.

The Ese Ejja relations with Bolivians are characterised by the end of centuries of warfare. This relative peace is highly desirable for the Ese Ejja, as it represents the achievement of a state of tranquillity and well being, which will be described in Chapter 3 as the ideal of the 'tranquil life'. But with the end of warfare, the Ese Ejja have given up their claims to 'true humanity' because it is in war that important attributes of true humans, such as courage and strength, are displayed. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998a) argues that when Amazonian people speak of humanity, what they are referring to is a point of view, the position of the subject, 'I'. This is the position of the predator. The prey, on the other hand, is the object. In this light, the Ese Ejja desire to become like Bolivians – whom they see as strong and dangerous predators – can be seen as the desire to recover the subject position they lost in relinquishing aggression. I shall return to this point in Chapter 4. On a practical level, the Ese Ejja declarations of inferiority, worthlessness and ignorance are also part of a strategy to avoid permanent involvement in the national society, considered dangerous. This is consistent with other forms of avoidance of danger through self-debasement described in Chapter 4, and shows once more the ambivalence of the Ese Ejja feelings towards Bolivians.

The observation of Ese Ejja practices reveals their desire to be like their powerful neighbours, displayed in the adoption of their clothes, their foods, their weapons, their medicine, their sport, their houses and their music. This adoption is paralleled by the abandoning of some of the old ways, such as body painting, headhunting and initiation rituals. Older people say, in respect of younger ones, that they are almost people, in contrast with *etiiquiana*, the ancient ones. Sometimes it is difficult to hear this discourse as an endogenous one, rather than simply as the acceptance of outsiders' ideology of civilisation and savagery, especially when the Ese Ejja talk about their ancestors using Spanish words such as *barbaro*, barbarian and *salvaje*, savage. But here I think is where the hypersensitive ear of the European ethnographer fails to grasp the reality: it is a subtle difference, but we cannot expect these words to have the same ring to us and to an Amazonian Indian. For the Ese Ejja it is not desirable to be considered a *barbaro*,

because it means being poor and mistreated, and it is important to be almost *dejja* because *dejja* 'have things', something I often heard. *Dejja* own coveted goods and it is desirable to be respected by them – although this is more a fantasy than a reality, so it is important to dress like them and speak like them.

However, this discourse finds some resistance. Older people, especially women, keep the interaction with *dejja* to a minimum, as is apparent in the relations with the neighbouring Tacana, who, by virtue of speaking Spanish and of having long established relationships with non-indigenous people, are often considered *dejja*. Moreover, when an Ese Ejja tries too hard to be like *dejja*, people sneer and call him or her *dejja-nisho*, quasi-*dejja*, which is considered an insult. While it may be desirable to master *dejjaness*, many maintain that Bolivians are bad people, that they are stingy and unreliable, and that they are not desirable marriage partners. This is a clear example of contradictory ideas that coexist and can be upheld in different circumstances.

Words and practices: individual and society

The phenomenon of self-debasement expressed in the ascription of *dejjaness* to the Bolivians raises a series of immediate problems. So far, I have reported what the Ese Ejja say about themselves and about the Bolivians nationals, but what are we to make of statements? One could rightly object to my enterprise on the grounds that we cannot assume that what people say, especially in the presence of an anthropologist, necessarily reflects what they think. Secondly, one should question the assumption that individual members of a society share a set of views about the world, which they passively absorb from society itself, in other words, that people receive culture rather than actively participating in its production. In my discussion of Ese Ejja ideas of alterity, I show that cultural ideas, ideas that seem to be shared by the group, are not fixed and imposed on its members, rather, they are always contested and re-elaborated. Although the conditions of the elaboration are those given by the culture, culture is in itself re-created by its members. Thirdly, it could be argued that what people say at certain times, they may not hold to at all times. In the next section, I address these questions and consider possible answers.

As far as the value of statements as sources of information is concerned, I believe it is important to listen to what informants say and take it seriously, however outlandish the statements might seem, in order to understand what it means to them. The statements I

collected were not recorded out of context, but as part of a long period of participant observation, in which I had the chance of recording people's attitudes manifested in their practices as well as in their words and to relate them to what they said. Therefore, in Chapters 3 and 4, I describe everyday activities, which offer a less mediated access to how people feel about themselves and others, unmediated, that is, by the *post hoc* rationalisations which may occur when an informant is asked to give a description of what it is that he or she does. I will focus on how ideas are expressed, reproduced and transformed through the practices of cooking, eating, dressing and playing.

The anthropological turn to practice has been one of the most significant theoretical advances in the twentieth century and I shall not attempt to review it here, but undoubtedly, my own work is influenced by it, in particular, by Pierre Bourdieu's notions of 'practical knowledge', 'field', and of 'habitus' as a 'generative structure' (Bourdieu 1977; 1990a; McNay 2000). Nonetheless, for the purpose of my work, it could be argued that Bourdieu leaves unresolved the issue of social change as the product of individual creativity rather than, simply, of the change in the conditions of construction of habitus. Indeed the author considers the problem as non-existent or 'fictitious', in his own words, and maintains that:

it is the structure (the tensions, the oppositions, the relations of power which constitute the structure of a specific field or of the social field as a totality at a given point in time) which constitutes the principles of the strategies aimed at preserving or transforming the structure (1990b: 118).

Anthony Giddens' (1984: 5) 'stratification model' could be read as a way of acknowledging individual creativity in the production of change, bringing agency into interaction, but his account of the self-reflective agent is generic, rather than individual. And, although in a latter publication (Giddens 1991) the author shows how structures do not exist in a vacuum, but only as manifested in practices, stressing the dialectical relationship between ordering principles and action, the emphasis is still on society as an entity to which the individual self must constantly adjust.

In an informative article, Martin Sökefeld (1999) traces the history of the concept of 'identity' from Descartes' *Meditationes*, to the psychological and sociological norm of 'selfsameness', of the individual or of a group ('ethnic identity'), through to the

poststructuralist deconstruction and emphasis on difference as the condition for the existence of any identity. He argues that: 'The emphasis on difference calls into question anthropologists' conventional assumption of shared identity and demands attention to a personal or individual identity that is ... called the *self*' (1999: 148). In his call for more attention to the self, Sökefeld echoes Anthony Cohen's argument for the self as a basic human condition, understood as the individual's capacity to reflect on his or her own behaviour (1994). Neither author envisages an ethnography centred on the individual, but they stress the importance of recovering the role of the individual and its multiple identities and views in the construction of society. The focus on individual capacity for constant re-interpretation lends support to my effort in making sense of what at first seemed to me a number of incongruences, which turned out to be personal opinions.

Cohen's and Sökefeld's insights are stimulating and necessary to the development of an anthropology that accounts for individuality, but neither author attempts to answer the question of how coherent cultural systems arise from or survive individual processes of interpretation. Among Amazonianists, the question of the relationship between the individual self and the society he or she is part of is addressed by Anne Christine Taylor (1996). The author analyses contrasting ideas about death held by the Jiavaroan people of Ecuador, but stops short of accounting for the active role of selves, relegating the formation of cultural ideas to anonymous mental models. Taylor maintains that subjectivity, 'one's inner landscape', is a matter of refraction, and that it is 'shaped by the understanding one has of others' perceptions of oneself' and it is therefore very unstable (1996: 206-7). However, having acknowledged the existence of the self, she does not account for its creative input into culture. She recognises the tendency of ethnographers to 'assume that culture is a system of language and thought shared ... by all' (Taylor 1996: 210), and to counter this, she posits the existence of anonymous semantic premises, or mental models, which are shared by people in any given culture. In the article, it is not explained where these premises come from nor the role of individuals in elaborating them, since it is these 'self-evident, discursively unelaborated conceptual clumps which ... must refer back to each other, and it is ... from this circular process of mutual referral that they gain their quality of obviousness' (Taylor 1996: 203).

The most satisfactory attempt to deal with the relationship between the individual and society to date, in my opinion, is the one made by Christina Toren in her discussion of humans as 'autopoietic systems' (1999a: 6 and ff.), in which she argues that although humans are 'biologically social', others cannot predetermine the process by which an individual gets to be who he or she is. By stressing the autonomy of human beings in the process of their own formation, the author rescues individuality from the straightjacket of structure, without making an argument for radical individualism.

Others structure the conditions of one's existence, but each individual refashions culture through his or her engagement with it. This is illustrated poignantly with the description of the ontogenetic process through which Fijian children acquire kinship categories and the appropriate behaviour expected of them within those categories. In this process, kinship is not received, but constituted anew (Toren 1999b). The notion of persons as autopoietic beings, constantly refashioning their culture allows for the possibility of conflicting discourses as constitutive of culture.

Finally, to end this review of useful analytical tools, I wish to turn to the notion of multiple, competing discourses as used by Henrietta Moore (1994). This is where I believe, the study of identity/alterity in Amazonia can benefit from the insights of gender studies. The cross-cultural study of gender identity is always problematic because, as Cecilia McCallum demonstrates, indigenous conceptions of masculinity and femininity run counter to post-modern post-structuralist notions (2001). On the other hand, the idea of a multiple self, evolving and negotiable, fits the Amazonian notion of the processual nature of the person, which is made through the intervention of other persons, of spirits and through life experiences. Moreover, the existence of multiple discourses, or discursive practices, within an individual and a group, is consistent with the notion that culture does not impose itself onto the individual through socialisation, and that every individual has to renegotiate the terms of his or her culture anew.

I became aware of the significance of multiple discourses when I returned from the field and began to make sense of my data, trying to make generalisations, reading the Ese Ejja material in relation to other Amazonian studies. What I found was that my writing became more and more abstract, as I was trying to render a homogeneous Ese Ejja worldview, and I began not to recognise the Ese Ejja I had painstakingly got to know during many months of fieldwork. When faced with the task of accounting for the Ese Ejja social structure and for their cosmological ideas, my field notes seemed filled with

incongruous, nonsensical and chaotic data, that, when forced into the conventional categories of anthropological writing, lost most of the connections with the lived reality of Portachuelo. Instead of the coherent system which I was trying to evince from my notes, I was confronted with a multitude of conflicting ideas.

In Amazonian studies, the tendency to essentialise and generalise about the people concerned is still very strong. This is largely due to the positive effort to reveal the existence of an Amazonian philosophy and sociology, independent of Euro-American thinking, and an original history that does not derive from the contact with invaders, but is the product of the continuous transformation of a system. This is a crucial endeavour, to break the pattern of acculturation claims that reduce indigenous people to passive victims of the inexorable march of foreign modernity and capitalism – one would think such claims have been abandoned, but they are still very present, at least in the non-academic perception of Amazonian people. Yet, in the process of affirmation, one risks losing sight of individuals, of their motives, desires and aspirations. This creates a gap between the theorising of the anthropologist and his or her lived ethnographic experience. It is very well to abstract tendencies, but it is the interaction of individuals that gives substance to systems of thinking. As I have said, Amazonian ethnography has shown a great consistency in the ways Amerindians relate to the world, but this does not justify losing sight of the multiplicity of discourses in favour of grand narratives: this is especially relevant for the study of identity formation and transformation, with which this thesis is concerned. But having identified a problem does not solve it and the question remains. How is it possible that individuals, capable of self-reflection and of independent reasoning, ultimately reproduce the dominant views of their culture?

Clearly, this problem resonates with the one raised by feminist anthropology about the reproduction of gender roles. Moore argues that individuals are ‘multiply constituted subjects’ who can take up different subject positions amongst those offered by the discourses and discursive practices available to them through their culture (1994: 55). This argument is particularly salient for my ethnography and the problems raised so far because it offers an answer as to how it is possible that members of a society can uphold contrasting views from each other and within themselves. How can an Ese Ejja consider Bolivians both as dangerous and as desirable partners, or see him or herself both as ‘savage’ and as ‘civilised’? Moore posits that the post-structuralist subject is ‘composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradicting positionings and subjectivities’

(1994: 55). This definition of the subject fits the reality described in my ethnography and it helps to understand the behaviour of my informants in positive terms of multiplicity rather than in the negative terms of contradiction and ambiguity. Moreover, this author adopts Wendy Holloway's notion of 'engagement and investment' to offer a strong answer to the question of how dominant discourses are reproduced by individuals (Moore 1994: 64). Engagement and investment constitute a sub/conscious emotional commitment to, or vested interest in, a subject position, said to derive from the 'satisfaction, reward or payoff' associated with that position. A very similar argument can be made for the Ese Ejja choices in relation to kinds of knowledge available to them.

The Ese Ejja have different attitudes towards the ancient people's knowledge, contrasted to that of the school and the message of the missionaries. What is clear is that, at different times, they choose to deny or to espouse either of these types. Signs of contestation are most evident in attitudes towards kinship and especially marriage practices, towards intra-village relations and interethnic ones, and in the ideas of illness, of death, of the afterlife and of the cosmos, where Christian images of heaven and hell compete with those of the land of the dead and of the powerful beings of the ancient people. A striking example of this is the coexistence of avoidance and emulation of Bolivians. In Chapter 6, I show how variations are generational, because people's ideas change as they go through different stages of life, as changing attitudes towards marriage demonstrate, but they are also gendered, as becomes apparent when the Ese Ejja travel to the town (Chapter 4). Yet, it would be misleading to think that all old people think alike and all men think differently from women. As I stated, attitudes towards outsiders vary from person to person, according to life experiences and may change over the course of their lives.

Having said all this, the fact remains that a distinctive Ese Ejja culture exists and it is shared by those who are brought up as Ese Ejja. Although there is space for dissent, undoubtedly there exists a general consensus about certain facts of life and one of these is alterity.

Alterity

In a review of Amazonianist studies, Viveiros de Castro identifies three analytical styles. The first he calls 'the political economy of control', associated with the names of

Terence Turner and Peter Rivière, in which communal institutions are attributed ‘the function of mediating between the domestic and the public’ (1996: 189). The second style under review is ‘the moral economy of intimacy’ at the heart of the work of Joanna Overing and her students, which focuses on Amazonian social philosophy and everyday sociability. The third and last style reviewed is that of ‘the symbolic economy of alterity’, exponents of which are associated with the French and Brazilian Schools, heavily influenced by Lévi-Strauss. The work in this style is centred on the analysis of ‘processes of symbolic exchange (war and cannibalism, hunting, shamanism, funerary rites) that cross socio-political, cosmological and ontological boundaries’ (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 190). Although Viveiros de Castro’s classification in terms of ‘schools’ is accurate, it may be misleading insofar as it obscures the similarities that emerge in the work of the scholars, especially of the last two groups. Indeed my work has been profoundly influenced by members of both and for the interpretation of the socio-cosmological dimension of alterity I am equally indebted to the Brazilian school, in the work of Viveiros de Castro (1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1996; 1998a; 1998b), Aparecida Vilaça (1992; 1997) and Sylvia Caiuby Novaes (1997) as to Joanna Overing’s school, in particular to Peter Gow (1989; 1991; 2000; 2001; n.d.a; n.d.b) and Cecilia McCallum (1989; 1990; 1994; 1996; 1997), as well as Overing herself (1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1986; 1992; 2000; Overing Kaplan 1975; 1977a; 1977b; 1981). All the authors above recognise alterity to be a fundamental aspect of sociality in Amazonian societies, where, by and large, kinship and affinity, predation, funerary rituals and warfare are predicated upon otherness. Viveiros de Castro has shown how among the Araweté of eastern Brazil, identity rests on the imperative of becoming other, in one’s own terms (1992); Overing argues that there exists a common trait in the philosophy of social existence among all Amazonian societies, that is the notion that ‘society can exist only insofar as there is contact and proper mixing among forces that are different from one another’. (1984a: 433) Difference implies danger, which is nevertheless necessary for existence. Philippe Erikson maintains that otherness and violence are ‘a fundamental cornerstone of Panoan people’s ontology expressed by their categorisation of social groups’ (1986: 185).

In this thesis, I argue that Ese Ejja ideas about otherness, and their strategies to deal with it, occupy a central place in their quotidian experience. Alterity is dangerous but essential for reproduction and must be constructed within the closest kin group, where siblings of the opposite sex constitute the root of the distinction between marriageable

and non-marriageable people. Moreover, through sharing and procreation, different beings are made into the same, as identity is seen partly as a process and partly as a given. In this process, even the distant Bolivians can be made into 'one of us' and Ese Ejja can become Bolivians. This is consistent with the processual character of identity encountered throughout Amazonia (Belaunde 2000; Belaunde Olschewsky 1992; Conklin 1995; Gow 1991; McCallum 1989; 1997; 2001; Vilaça 1995) and arguably, throughout the world.

Change

At the beginning of my research, I was looking for clues as to how, in spite of heavy influence from outsiders, Ese Ejja culture had survived and how external influences had been incorporated in the indigenous conceptual system. At times, during fieldwork, I surrendered to the idea that a century of contact and, in particular, forty years of Evangelical missionisation had destroyed the culture of the Ese Ejja, rendering them undistinguishable from other neighbouring Bolivians. (This assumption also reveals my ignorance of those neighbours). However, by the end of my stay, I learned that this was not the case, and that the Ese Ejja had many distinctive traits that rendered them very different from their neighbours, but these traits were not survivals of a preserved past. Ese Ejja distinctiveness grows out of a past from which it has evolved, in an ongoing process of change. I reject the view of an untouched indigenous world which is suddenly and inexorably transformed by the encounter with the modern world of capitalist exploitation. Instead, I take the Ese Ejja to have always been changing and this change is not solely affected by so-called Western culture, but it is largely determined by an existing conceptual framework. By conceptual framework, following Graham Townsley's discussion of the transformation in Yaminahua kinship, I mean a 'system which actively attempts to interpret and make sense of both their society and the world that surrounds it' (1987).

Change is very important for the Ese Ejja at the discursive level because it characterises the way in which many describe their destiny as that of becoming something else, specifically, becoming like Bolivians. Biumajja, the village nurse, often lamented that many Ese Ejja refused to better themselves and opposed progress, and his complaints were often echoed by young people, especially men. I interpreted these observations as signs that the imperative to improve one's condition existed, although it was not shared by all. Another sign of this were reoccurring comments people made about their

ancestors, the ancient people, who were described as savages (Spanish, *salvaje*, Ese Ejja, *daqui-má*, without clothes), recalling the time the Ese Ejja had been 'civilised' by Bolivian soldiers and by missionaries. Moreover, some elders referred to young people as 'these new ones' and 'well civilised'. As I will discuss, in general, the Ese Ejja see themselves as almost *civilizados*, civilised, some more than others, but not completely. And while they see themselves as inferior to Bolivians, in terms of prestige, power and knowledge, they also distance themselves from the absolute savagery they attribute to their ancestors and to some foreign Indians who, they say, live deep in the forest, are naked, eat raw food and ignore salt. This characterisation of savage Indians is far from unique in the region. A Bolivian Government report on territorial claims describes how the Chacobo, who live 200 kilometres south of Portachuelo, speak of an area at the centre of their Territorial Demand, where there are settlements inhabited by people resembling their ancestors, who eat without salt and wear bark cloth or live completely naked. These beings are seen as hostile to them, who are *gente civilisada*, civilised people, and constantly threaten to carry them away, particularly the ones who adventure deep in the forest (Maydana 1998).

In the analysis of their self-deprecation, I argue that the Ese Ejja have experienced a radical loss of prestige in the encounter with the Spanish-speaking society. This loss is epitomised in the shift of the use of the word *dejja*, meaning adult male Ese Ejja, which has come to be used for Bolivian nationals and non-Ese Ejja. This loss of prestige is the result of centuries of persecution and stigmatisation, as well as of the penetration of the rhetoric of civilisation and assimilation. However, I also argue that this process cannot be understood as the passive assimilation of a foreign discourse, because, when the Ese Ejja say they are almost *dejja*, they are describing a process of change, which is characteristic of the Amazonian philosophy of other-becoming and of a protean conception of identity (Chapter 4). Moreover, this sense of inferiority is only expressed when the Ese Ejja are confronted with Bolivian nationals, but appears to be absent when they are amongst themselves, when instead they say they are civilised in comparison with other Indians or the ancestors. This suggests that what is taking place is what Sylvia Caiuby Novaes describes as a 'play of mirrors' (1997). As I discuss in Chapter 4, the author maintains that social groups construct a self-image for themselves when they come into contact with other social groups. Her writing is influenced by that of Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, who in turn follows Fredrik Barth and argues that ethnic identity arises from contrast and that 'it is asserted by denying the other identity' (cited in

Caiuby Novaes 1997: 6). But Caiuby Novaes takes the argument further. In the metaphor of the play of mirrors, the contrastive nature of group identity is only the starting point of a dynamic process. Self-image is not rigid and permanent, but it transforms, as different groups meet and project back to each other different images as if in a play of reflections. Moreover, these new images allow for new possibilities of action, which produce new images, and so on. The notion of new possibilities of action is consistent with the argument that culture is not fixed but constantly reshaped by people who take up different subject positions discussed above. In Chapter 4, I show how this analysis fits the experience of the Ese Ejja. In the encounter with missionaries, with Bolivian schoolteachers, with neighbouring Tacana and with the anthropologist, they are perceived and treated differently and they react in discrete ways, reinforcing stereotypes or transforming the others' perception.

Over the last century, some aspects of Ese Ejja traditional culture have disappeared, such as ceremonial life, communal living and head hunting, described by Hissink and Hahn (1988), referred to in Chapter 8. These disappearances have coincided with settlement and with the establishment of stable relations with outsiders, with the arrival of missionaries and, later, of Bolivian schoolteachers. This phenomenon could be interpreted as a loss, resulting from the unstoppable march of the West, modernity, capitalism, rationalism, globalisation or however else we want to label a variety of forces often lumped together. I reject this view which is by far too one-sided and ignores indigenous agency; moreover, it is the traditional stance of theorists of acculturation (see for example Murphy 1960; Steward & Murphy 1977 (1956)), which has long been proven to be inadequate. I argue that it is not only Western culture which colonises the indigenous one, but that the Ese Ejja welcome change. Therefore, the changes which occur in the Ese Ejja lived world are better understood as the manifestation of an attraction for all things foreign which is widespread across Amazonia and has been described in depth by Hugh-Jones (1992). This attraction accounts for the Panará desire to copy Upper Xingú rituals, as well as the rituals of other people in general, such as football and night dancing to Forró music (Elizabeth Ewart, personal communication). For the same reason, the Kayapo take their ritual objects from foreigners (Turner 1993: 62) and the Chimanes adopt Tacana curing rituals (Rebecca Ellis, personal communication), which resemble the ones performed by the Ese Ejja in Peru, and to which the people in Portachuelo turn in the absence of their own shamans. Borrowings take place all the time and have done so for centuries,

independently of white people, but whatever the motive, traditional knowledge is constantly being replaced. Foreign observers have often interpreted this as a sign of acculturation and of the loss of irreplaceable knowledge, but this may well derive from our own obsession with preserving indigenous cultures, as an attempt to put right the historical injustice our ancestors have dealt to theirs by almost wiping them off the face of the earth. The Ese Ejja have no desire to live like their ancestors, and they welcome foreign goods and manners.² However, the projection onto their enemies of their notion of prestige associated with the strength and maturity of adult men, expressed in the word 'dejja', and their aspiration to become like them suggest the presence of a desire to recover the qualities of the ancient people that were lost in the situation of contact. This is another sign of the co-existence of a multiplicity of identities, which are constantly renegotiated.

Methodology

My first encounter with Bolivia took place in December 1998, when I undertook a preliminary trip to the country and became interested in the northern regions, about which so little was known. The downside of this situation was that I lacked any contact there, and the literature was scarce. Fortunately, just before my departure, Mark Jamieson – I am forever grateful to him – put me in contact with Rebecca Ellis, who was living in La Paz at the time and had done so for several years. With her precious help, I was able to contact the authorities who dealt with indigenous affairs, to consult the library of the Vice-Ministry for Indigenous Affairs (VAIPO) and of the national Museum of Ethnography (MUSEF) and made my way to the lowlands to find my prospective hosts. In the town of Riberalta, in the north of the Beni Department, I was introduced to indigenous leaders of the Chacobo group, who expressed themselves favourably towards my research among their people. Thus, a year later, having secured my scholarship from the ESRC, I returned to the region ready to start. In the Chacobo community of Alto Ivon I was to suffer a great disappointment: the people who had seemed very friendly the previous year, and who Philippe Erikson assured me would be very willing to cooperate, turned out to be extremely hostile. Unable to understand this radical transformation, after some time, I returned to Riberalta, to buy some provisions and gather my thoughts. There, I became aware of a very serious incident that had taken place in Alto Ivon a few weeks prior to my arrival, which explained the Chacobo refusal

² Ironically, recent developments in Bolivian state policies, including the school reform and the allocation of land titles are informed by the notion that Indians should be 'traditional'.

of my presence. An old man, a foreigner who had been living in the community for many years, had been accused of killing his companion, and her children demanded he should be punished by being buried alive.

People in Riberalta described the scene in all its gory details – reported by a schoolteacher who witnessed it: how the accused had been dragged from his house and made to carry a cross all the way to the hole where he was then buried, and how he had been crying for his life as young Chacobo men hit him and covered him with earth. Local authorities intervened, with police and lawyers, and the life of the community was profoundly disrupted. Certainly townspeople distorted and exaggerated the story, but this was enough to explain the tense and hostile atmosphere I encountered on my first arrival. As anyone who has conducted research in an isolated Amazonian community knows, the prospect of fieldwork is daunting enough in itself, and given the choice, I decided to visit a different site before making any definitive decision. While I had been searching for Chacobo material, I had found an article about another group, called Ese Ejja or Chama. These were said to be peaceful river-people, who lived a very egalitarian life fishing and hunting along the Beni River, and who migrated to the river beaches during the dry season to dig for turtle eggs. The literature on the Ese Ejja seemed to be even scarcer than that on the Chacobo.

I remember as an undergraduate, Jonathan Parry telling me that the choice of field site was a matter of gut feelings, and this advice convinced me that I should take some time to find the right place for my fieldwork and not settle in the first place I found, so I decided to pay a visit to the Ese Ejja in Portachuelo. As soon as I emerged onto the bank of the Beni, after a long, solitary walk in the forest, and saw the expanse of water in front of me, I felt a great sense of relief and peace after the rather unsettling experience of the previous weeks. This first sensation gave me great hope, which was confirmed when a boat, the *Loquito*, miraculously materialised to take me downriver to Portachuelo. I assumed the community had been informed by radio of my arrival and they had sent someone to pick me up, but as it turned out, they knew nothing of me and they just stopped there by chance.

The boat took me to Portachuelo Bajo (downriver), where I was met by seemingly very friendly people. Although I had planned to stay for a week, in the end I stayed a fortnight and made up my mind to conduct my research among the Ese Ejja, starting

with a blank slate. By the end of the second week I had befriended a woman, who introduced herself as Maria, who was willing to take me to live in her house upon my return from Riberalta: thus I was introduced to the Monje family. The household was composed of the mother, Maria, or Ino Tahua – her Ese Ejja name – in her late thirties, and the father, Ernesto/Dejja Oshie, in his mid forties; Ino and Dejja had only two children: a boy, Javier/Sapa Ai, who turned eighteen during my stay, and a girl, Marcela/Quisaa, of sixteen. Having two children is rather unusual for an Ese Ejja woman, who is expected to have twelve, according to a common saying, half of which survive. But Ino told me she had an operation, paid for by the missionaries, after which she could no longer have children. For this reason, she explained, she was ‘given’ (she used the Spanish ‘*regalar*’) her brother’s daughter, Marcia/Cuocuo, now seven, ‘to keep Quisaa company’.

Within a month of me moving in with them, the Monje began to treat me like kin, calling me ‘younger sister’ (Ese Ejja, *shehue*). Throughout this thesis I unashamedly refer to them by kin terms, although in inverted commas.

The small size of the Monje household partly explains their willingness to take me on, as well as the prospect of my contributions to the household budget. Maria seldom accepted money, which was of little or no use in Portachuelo itself, but asked me to buy rice, sugar, salt and oil from the market on my monthly visits to Riberalta. Occasionally, she asked for a pair of flip-flops or some cotton or wool. But her willingness to have me in her house also stemmed from her greater familiarity with the non-Ese Ejja world, compared to many other women in the community, who, as I was to discover, never left the village for long periods of time and were very suspicious of outsiders. Ino instead, had spent several months in Riberalta as a teenager, working as a domestic servant and had become familiar with the ways of foreigners. She spoke Spanish more confidently than any other woman I met and felt she was able to cook ‘properly’ by Bolivian standards. As I describe in Chapter 4, cooking like *dejja* (Bolivians) was a very important part of Ino’s self-image.

I lived with the Monje for the first nine months, sleeping next to them, sharing their meals, their work and their conversations. I am very grateful to them because in those months, thanks to their help and example, I was able to learn to speak some Ese Ejja and to function in the village environment, to collect water, to make a fire, to cook, but



Plate 1. The *Loquito*

most importantly, I learned most of what I know about the Ese Ejja people, presented in this thesis. In particular, I am grateful for their openness, which I sometimes failed to appreciate at the time, which was great, especially when compared to the rest of the inhabitants of Portachuelo Bajo. As I mentioned, upon my arrival, people seemed friendly, by contrast with the Chacobo, but in time, I learned that their openness stopped at a very superficial level and I had to struggle to gain their confidence, especially that of women. Men, particularly the younger ones, were quite confident in speaking Spanish, they were more accustomed to dealing with foreigners and would often come and talk to me, asking me about the world outside, about my country and about my travels, although they tended to be evasive when questioned directly about many issues; women, on the other hand, couldn't or wouldn't speak Spanish and seemed to avoid any close interaction with me. For many months, I had to endure the fact that whenever I approached a group of women talking, sitting near the football pitch, after a few minutes, one by one they got up and left. It took me a while to understand that what I had interpreted as mistrust and even hostility was in fact embarrassment and shyness and eventually, many long months into my fieldwork things started to change. This was certainly a gradual and painful process and many factors contributed to it, but two choices on my part were crucial.

The first choice was to adopt the proper Ese Ejja dress code, according to which women never wear trousers. Wearing a skirt tested my ability to endure mosquito bites, but turned out to be essential in order to establish beyond doubt that I was a woman. The second and most important choice of all was learning to weave mats out of palm leaves, which, as I will describe, is considered to be a woman's activity *par excellence*. I spent many hours watching Ino weave, mesmerised, and what she was doing seemed to be impossible to master, but eventually and quite suddenly I could do it, and women I hardly knew took great pleasure in sitting next to me and showing me how to do it properly and helping me out when I lost myself in a tangle of leaves. In these instances words were exchanged and an intimacy established which surpassed our linguistic and cultural barriers. My new teachers started to ask about my family members, a very common topic of conversation, their names, their ages and their status: was my grandmother really eighty-nine? Was my brother married? They asked where my husband was and why I did not have children, and through these bits of personal information, a rapport was created.

But the greatest improvement took place when I moved from Portachuelo Bajo to a house of my own, borrowed from a friend, in Portachuelo Alto (upriver). My move played on the rivalry between the two sides of the community and Alto people became extra friendly, and, where Bajo people had been very secretive, they turned out to be forthcoming in answering my questions and in making me part of their community; moreover, living on my own made my relations with people more direct, by bypassing the screening of the Monje family. Undoubtedly, the greater willingness of Alto people to gossip with me and talk, especially about more traditional Ese Ejja ideas, which went against the teaching of the Evangelical missionaries, was affected by the fact that the latter lived and preached in Bajo and only came to Alto occasionally to run prayer and Bible reading sessions.

The first fifteen months of my fieldwork were dedicated to getting to know the Ese Ejja, absorbing information by living with them and writing about what was going on around me. From the very beginning, I endeavoured to learn as much as I could of the language. I tried to hire a teacher but it was only at the third attempt that I found one who had the patience to teach me, as the others soon got bored. Although there was no text on the Ese Ejja language, the missionaries were preparing an Ese Ejja-Spanish dictionary and I could rely on some of their grammar notes. A part from those, I had the hymnbooks and a number of books from the Bible, written entirely in Ese Ejja. The most fruitful exercises turned out to be the semi-random collection of words and long hours of silent listening to other people's conversations, painstakingly extracting scraps of meaning.

When I was not fishing or gathering fruit and palm leaves in the forest with Ino Tahua, I wandered around the village, looking for conversation; then I would carry a small notebook and as soon as the conversation was over, I would sit somewhere out of sight and write down what I had seen and heard. At the end of the day, I retired under my mosquito net and transferred my quick notes onto the journal.

Early on, I developed a friendly relationship with an old man called Peno/Pedro Machuqui, whom I recorded telling myths, but also bits of his personal history and facts about the Ese Ejja which he felt he should teach me: about the dead, about shamanism and curing, and about the habits of animals. As I describe in Chapter 7, at first, most people denied they knew the 'ancient people's stories' and I suspected Peno was an old

nostalgic, telling me things that had no relevance at all to the younger generations. In time, his chats proved essential, as they enabled me to test other people's knowledge and to discover that they knew a lot more than they were prepared to admit.

Six months into my research, I felt I knew enough about the Ese Ejja to be able to conduct a census with the objective not only of counting how many people lived in Portachuelo at the time, but also of establishing residence patterns, household structures, people's origins, their ages, if they knew them, and their level of schooling. As I was collecting these data, I visited people with whom I had had little contact, which suddenly broadened my knowledge of the community. Moreover, I discovered kinship patterns which I had not suspected until then, with a tendency for cross cousin marriage, the obligation to give the first child to the maternal grandparents and the existence of polygyny, though rare today, with preference for the marriage of sisters.

During the school months, from November until April, I often attended the morning assembly and occasionally I would sit in the classes. The observations in the school did not occupy as significant a place in my research as I initially thought, because as time went by, I realised that studying the school would have been a whole project in itself and that, as I sat in the classes, I was missing too much of what was going on outside, which interested me more. Moreover, I did not want to be identified with the teachers, whose authoritarian attitude is regarded with hostility by pupils and parents alike. My occasional visits instead consolidated my friendship with the children, and when I asked them, many came to my house to draw. As I discuss in Chapter 9, these drawings gave me important, if partial, insights into their attitudes towards the powerful beings, or devils.

After fifteen months, I returned to Europe for four weeks. In the period prior to this trip I felt I had become so immersed in the life of Portachuelo that I stopped taking note of things, busy getting on with life and feeling at home. The break in Europe was a catalyst because, on my return, I had lost the rose-tinted glasses I had fashioned for myself in order to survive and I felt once more like an alien in the village, having reminded myself that my life was in fact in Europe. This awareness allowed me the distance which I needed to be able to design semi-structured interviews, to confirm and strengthen my findings. I asked specific questions about cosmology and Christianity, about Bolivians and about their relations with Ese Ejja and about illness and death. I

wrote four sets of ten questions, one set for each of the topics above and recorded the answers. This exercise helped me systematise the scattered information I had collected piecemeal until then, but would have been impossible had I not spent fifteen months learning what questions to ask and how.

Eventually, the time came when my enquiry started to go around in circles, and I felt I needed to leave if I were to make sense of the information accumulated over a year and a half. It is only now, after almost two years since my return that I begin to understand where the research on the Ese Ejja people is leading.

Description of chapters

In Chapter 2, I present the existing historical data on the Ese Ejja and on the journey that took them to Portachuelo and I give a description of the settlement. In Chapter 3, I describe the ways in which the Ese Ejja classify different others and identify themselves. I also introduce Ese Ejja social philosophy and ethics as it is manifested in their everyday activities. Chapter 4 explores the issue of their self-deprecation *vis-à-vis* nationals. In it, I present the ethnographic evidence for the statement 'we are not *dejja*' and I describe how the desire to be like *dejja*/Bolivians is manifested in everyday practices, focusing on some of the quotidian rituals of becoming like *dejja*, through which they modify their self-image.

In Chapter 5, my focus moves from the community to the State which surrounds it and I make a connection between current Ese Ejja discourses and practices and the relations between the State and indigenous peoples over the last century. I show that the statement 'we are not the true people' has been heavily influenced by the sustained attempts by the State to teach the Indians to be free mestizo citizens, as the early Republican and Indigenist rhetoric would have it. I also describe how, over the last two or three decades, new Government policies, influenced by global political, social and ecological movements have been trying to reverse the process. But, once again, it is the case that foreign forces, be they liberal intellectuals or Development and Government agents are attempting to impose their view of Indianness on indigenous people, teaching aspiring mestizos how to be 'proper' Indians. This new ideology puts the Ese Ejja once again in a hostile position towards nationals and is rejected by them.

In Chapter 6, I return to the microcosm of the community and describe the Ese Ejja kinship system showing that the root of otherness is in the relations within the closest kin group, in which sameness and difference are created in the distinction between cross and parallel relatives, and are transformed through conviviality, especially the sharing of residence and of food. On an ideal level, the Ese Ejja kinship system appears conservative, with a preference for residential group endogamy, yet there are signs of openness towards different kinds of unions, suggested by a clear tendency to the merging of the categories of cross and parallel cousins and the desire of young people to marry out. In this opening, Bolivians as well as gringos may be considered as potential spouses.

The following three chapters focus on the Ese Ejja belief system and on the encounter between Ese Ejja cosmology and foreign knowledge, especially the Christian message of Evangelical missionaries. In Chapter 7, I introduce the 'ancient people's stories', as the Ese Ejja refer to mythical narratives; I describe the way in which I got to know them, the apparently contradictory attitudes people display towards them and the significance of these stories to their everyday lives. I argue that, although many deny any knowledge of these stories, as a reaction to foreign stigmatisation, attitudes are also a generational matter: while most people know some, only elders feel they can tell them well. Moreover, I describe the possible revival of these stories as a consequence of the reification of indigenous 'culture' characteristic of recent changes in state policies towards Indians. In a recent book, Gow (2001), following Lévi-Strauss, has experimented with the use of myth for the reconstruction of historical events, through the comparison of versions from different periods. It is a very complex and challenging task, which I do not take up in this thesis for reasons of space and focus, but it is based on a position which I share, which characterises my use of mythical stories, that is that myths are ways of making sense of reality and that they reflect the way in which people think about it. In this thesis, I use mythical narratives to illustrate contemporary Ese Ejja attitudes to the past, manifested in their reluctance to tell them, but also to make some hypotheses about the cosmological reasons for their attitudes towards Bolivians and for their acceptance of Christianity.

In Chapter 8, I describe the Ese Ejja reaction to Christianity and their enthusiastic reception of the missionaries, while pointing out that their conversion can only be understood in Ese Ejja terms, because from the missionaries' point of view, it often

appears inconstant and opportunistic. In this chapter, I describe how Ese Ejja moral principles, with their stress on preserving oneself and one's close kin, in the total absence of universal generosity or charity, often clash with those of the missionaries. This is why, in spite of decades of missionisation and regular attendance to church services, the missionaries feel that the Ese Ejja have not yet been converted. Chapter 9 explores the significance of the figure of the Devil in Ese Ejja ideas about the world, about life and death and about otherness and its constant presence in their everyday talk. Missionaries, first the Dominicans and subsequently the Evangelicals, introduced this figure by superimposing it to the powerful beings that appear in the Ese Ejja cosmology. Thus the Devil came to embody the absolute, irredeemable otherness that characterises these beings and the dangers of illness, cannibalism and death associated with it, which are central concerns for the Ese Ejja.

In Chapter 10, I reflect on the experience of fieldwork, on the relations with informants and on the nature of the ethnographic enterprise and summarise my findings.

2. Ese Ejja origins and settlement in Portachuelo

The Ese Ejja are referred to in the literature by a variety of names, which include those of Chama and Huarayos, mentioned above, but also Chunchos³, Bahujajas, Echojas, Tiatianaguas, Huacaraguas, Guarises, Carangues, Sumachuanas, Chunene and Guarayos. With the last name they are confused with another Bolivian indigenous group, of the Guaranian family, with whom they have no known connection. But, as early as 1930, the Dominican Father José Álvarez reported that: 'Eseja is the name with which the Huarayos identify themselves amongst themselves' (1932: 48).

The Ese Ejja belong to the Tacanan linguistic family, an isolated Amazonian group, which includes Tacana, Araona and Cavineño people, also living in northern Bolivia. According to Métraux:

The Tacanan tribes and subtribes occupy a continuous territory which includes the upper course of the Tahuamanú (Orton), Abuná, and Acre (Capechene) Rivers, the Madre de Dios River between long. 67° and 68° 35' W, its tributaries, the Tambopata and Heath Rivers, and the Beni River from lat. 12°-15° S and its tributaries, especially the Madidi and the Tuichi Rivers. Little known Tacanan dialects have been grouped into a single linguistic family by Créqui-Monfort (Créqui-Monfort and Rivet, 1921-22, 13:91-100) on the basis of available linguistic material. Later, Rivet (1924) proposed the inclusion of the Tacanan family within the Arawakan linguistic family as a subgroup (1963: 438-39).

Currently, the majority of the Ese Ejja reside in a number of communities along the upper and lower Beni (Eiyuquibo, Portachuelo and Villanueva) and the Orton rivers (Santa Amalia), in Bolivia, and along the Madre de Dios, Heath and Tambopata rivers in Peru. While some of these settlements have been established for several decades, group mobility suggests that some may be abandoned in time and new ones founded. According to Chavarría, in 1985, there were around 900 Ese Ejja living in Bolivia and 640 in Peru (1996: 3).

³ An Inca name for the Arawakan people of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian montaña according to Métraux Métraux, A. 1963. The tropical forest tribes. In *Handbook of South American Indians* (ed.) J.H. Steward. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.



Plate 2. Aerial view of Portachuelo Bajo, Medio and Alto

The settlement officially known as the Community of Portachuelo, where I conducted my research, is divided in three nuclei or villages: Portachuelo Alto (upper), Medio (middle) and Bajo (lower), according to their position in relation to the river. The Ese Ejja live in Alto and Bajo, while Portachuelo Medio is recognised as Tacana, although, in fact, its inhabitants are a mixture of monolingual Spanish-speaking Tacana and *campesinos*, peasant farmers of unspecified origin. Although they belong to the same linguistic family, Ese Ejja and Tacana do not acknowledge any relation other than longstanding warfare. Ironically, two ethnic groups with a long history of war and reciprocal accusations of cannibalism and sorcery have ended up living side by side and sharing a fairly small territory. Today, those who were once fierce enemies have to accept, and be thankful for, the recognition of their land entitlements by the Government, even if, as late as ten years ago, members of their groups were refusing to sit in the same room to discuss supposedly common problems, as the newly founded Central Indígena de la Region Amazonica de Bolivia, henceforth CIRABO, tried to make them do.⁴ But it would be misleading to say that Ese Ejja and Tacana were forced to live together. Instead, it seems the colonisation of the area now occupied by Portachuelo has been a gradual semi-spontaneous process.

The historical records

Mnislav Zelený (1976) maintains that Tacanan languages derive from an Arawakan root, but, from the point of view of their morphology, they are closer to Panoan languages. According to this author, the Huarayos/Ese Ejja would be descendants of the Proto-Arawakan peoples who moved up the Amazon River around 3000 B.C. and occupied the valleys of the Beni and Madre de Dios around 2000 B.C.

‘The Maipura, one of the seven most important families of the Arawakan languages, occupied the valley of the Madeira and probably that of the Madre de Dios in the last period of our era. Here, they were confronted by the migratory current of the Proto-Panoan groups that came from the south, from the Gran Chaco. The Proto-Panoan groups occupied the territory between the upper reaches of the Beni, Mamoré, Madre de Dios and especially the Ucayali and Yavari Rivers, divided by the Arawakan

⁴ CIRABO was founded in 1990. The previous year the Ese Ejja, Tacana, Chacobo and Cavineño people supposedly agreed on an ‘Act of interethnic reconciliation’.

migration on the Rivers Juruá and Purus and probably on the Madre de Dios' (1976: 30).

There the Tacanan languages would have emerged from the mixing of the two linguistic families. Zelený's argument is rather speculative and relies mainly on the comparison of features of material culture as evidence of genealogical proximity between ethnic groups, but his work is relevant to my research in so far as it adds another dimension to the history of the Ese Ejja, who belong to that category of peoples who are too often thought to have no history. I am grateful to the historical reconstruction made by this author because it introduces the relationship between the Chunchos/Guarayos and the Inca State. Missionary records collected by Zelený suggest that a relation of vassalage to the highland rulers would have been common among the indigenous people of the lowlands. In a letter dated 13th September 1677, cited by the author, the Franciscan friar Juan de Ojeda mentions the presence in the province of Carabaya in the Puno Department in Peru, of the Araona and Toromona – another indigenous group of the Tacanan linguistic family, who were tributary vassals of the Inca, 'to whom they gave tribute in gold, which they called "vío" and silver, which they called "çipiro", and feathers and other valuable things of this land' and he states that: 'The Toromona were at war with the Guarayos who are vassals of the Inca'. Furthermore, he describes the Guarayos as the 'garrison' of the Inca (in Zelený 1976: 25, 33). According to the 1677-78 report by Bishop Manuel de Mollinedo, the Guarayos were 'the people who guarded the [Inca's] land' (Zelený 1976: 33), they were at war with the Toromona and they killed the enemy elders and captured the young ones for the service of the Inca. These records refer to the time of the Inca expansion into the Bolivian region of Mojos to the southeast, which coincided with the first Spanish expedition to the Madre de Dios region, conducted by Juan Álvarez Maldonado. The data are fragmentary and the attributions of names ambiguous, as Zelený himself admits, but this information presents a very interesting picture of the geopolitical climate of this region over four centuries ago, shedding some light on the little known past of its indigenous peoples. Importantly, it pushes back by a very long way the era of the so-called contact, by revealing the existence of intense political and economic relations between very different peoples prior to the European conquest.

Throughout the historical records it appears that, before stable contact was initiated by the Dominican Missionaries in the Madre de Dios region, in the early twentieth century,

the Ese Ejja were perceived as an aggressive, barbaric and violent people, intent in raiding and killing each other and their neighbours (Armentia 1976). Yet, both Colonel Percy Fawcett and Erland Nordenskiöld, who encountered them in the 1910s, formed a different opinion, describing a people fleeing from the aggressions of slave raiders and soldiers, but otherwise friendly and hospitable (Fawcett 1953; Nordenskiöld 1924). In 1881-82, Father Nicolas Armentia navigated the Beni River from San Buenaventura, in the sub-Andean region of Rurrenabaque, to Cachuela Esperanza and the mouth of the Beni into the Madeira. His main goal was to contact the Araona and Pacaguara with the objective of 'testing their dispositions and see if it were possible to complete their conquest' (Armentia 1976: 18). In his diaries, he describes various encounters with indigenous people, to which he refers as '*barbaros*', barbarians. He approaches the Araona, the Tacana and the Cavina, with whom he entertains friendly relations, but throughout his trip, he is haunted by the ghostly presence of the 'savage Guarayos', who constantly threaten to attack his party, and have a reputation for raiding other, supposedly more peaceful, peoples. In the report of his travels on the Madre de Dios in 1887, Armentia mentions them again when he refers to the Madidi River, 'known as Masisi by the Guarayos, Araonas and Toromonas' (in Montaña Aragón 1989: 3) and confirms that they lived in the region at the foot of the Andes, between the Madre de Dios and the Madidi Rivers (in Shoemaker et al. 1975).

As was mentioned above, the name 'Guarayo' may lead to some confusion, given the existence in Bolivia of another group known by this name, who, as I mentioned, bear no known relation to the Ese Ejja. The people known today as 'Guarayos' are a Tupi-Guarani speaking group situated in the north of the Santa Cruz Department (Guerra Luna et al. 1996; MACPIO 2001), but Armentia's geography clearly shows it is not them he is referring to. He states: 'In the Madidi and Undumo, there is a tribe of this terrible race who never ceases its hostilities against the settlements of Isiamas and Cavinás' (1976: 23). Furthermore, 'there is, on the left bank of the Madre de Dios, another tribe of the same Guarayos, as fierce as the ones on the Madidi: they too are at war with all the neighbouring tribes' (Armentia 1976: 23). These references situate these people in the northwestern region of Bolivia, the area occupied by the Ese Ejja at the time. The association of the Ese Ejja with the Guarayos is also found in a statement by Nordenskiöld who, during a visit to the Chama Indians on the Madidi, was told by the Cavineño that their name was *not* Guarayo as they were often called (1924: 317). Further, he states that 'the Chama are a band from the same family the Tambopata-

Guarayo' whom he had visited in 1904, and adds that 'upriver on the Madidi and on the Heath live other bands of the same family' (Nordenskiöld 1924: 317).

In another reference, the Ese Ejja appear under the name 'Chunene', which resembles closely that of 'Sonene', the Ese Ejja name for the river Heath and now of an officially recognized Community (*Comunidad Nativa*). Talking about the Chunene, Mario Montaña (1989) declares that: 'Certainly they were *not* Guarayos, because of their character, and it is possible ... that they were exterminated without anyone noticing their presence at the beginning of the [twentieth] century' (1989: 2). He bases his doubts on the contrast between the seventeenth century testimony of the Franciscan Gregorio de Bolívar, who reported a barbarous people called the Guarayos living by the headwaters of the Madre de Dios, who occupied the region between this river and the Beni, and that of Father José Figueira who describes a group called the 'Sacabinos' as very peaceful and 'who never had war with anyone'. But it is unclear what leads Montaña to declare that the Chunene and the Sacabino were the same people and that they differed from the Guarayos. The language and the geography give strong support to the opinion that the Chunene were the same Guarayos, confirmed by Nordenskiöld and shared by the Shoemakers and Arnold (1975: 8).

These references seem to confuse rather than to clarify the matter, but when trying to reconstruct the recorded history of Amazonian peoples, one cannot be too selective. The data provide evidence for the existence of a fourth people, other than the Araona, Tacana and Cavineño, belonging to the Tacanan family, in the northwestern region of Bolivia. This group had not settled until the end of the nineteenth century and, until then was not recognized in the literature with a single name. But in all the authors cited above, one encounters the names of Guarayos and of Chunene, with clear resonance with the modern names of Huarayos and Sonene. Furthermore, the Chunene – reported by Montaña to have 'ceased to exist' or to 'have been reduced to the minimal expression' (1989: 1), spoke the language which is today spoken by the Ese Ejja, as shown by a wordlist published by Marius del Castillo in 1929, cited by the author (Montaña Aragón 1989: 6-7). The conviction that the Chunene were not Guarayos is based on the grounds of 'character', but it is not clear where Montaña finds evidence to support this. The oral history of the Ese Ejja, with the constant reference to war, against their relatives, other indigenous tribes and Whites, would support the hypothesis that the 'savage Guarayos' were indeed their bellicose ancestors. It seems very likely that the

variety of names by which the Ese Ejja are said to have been known, were used at different times to refer to separate more or less aggressive and bellicose groups.

More recently, references to the Ese Ejja are made by Fawcett (1953), who encountered members of this group in the years 1910-11. This is the first record of a friendly exchange with the 'barbarous people', who helped the explorer with food and accompanied him from the Heath River, across to the Tambopata (1953: 149-51).

Ironically, these friendly Indians were the same Guarayos against whom he had been repeatedly warned by the local military. They were said to be in their thousands on the Heath River and to attack with their deadly arrows whoever came into their sight, which they did on one occasion before becoming friendly with the Colonel (1953: 144-45).

Fawcett's encounter with the Echojja/Guarayos is instructive because it reveals the reciprocal fears of the Indians and the non-Indians, particularly of soldiers. On the one hand, it was the soldiers who declared that Fawcett would never be able to sail up the Heath, due to the Indians' attacks, on the other, the first question the Guarayos asked him once they ascertained that he did not have hostile feelings, was whether he and his companions were soldiers. As I have observed elsewhere, to this day, the Ese Ejja fear soldiers, and call them 'bad people' (Ese Ejja, *dejjamase*), and most avoid serving in the military. Descending the Tambopata River, Fawcett's party met more friendly Indians, which he called Chunchos, whose 'dialect' he said, was similar to that of the Guarayos (1953: 145).

In the twentieth century, references to the Ese Ejja became more consistent, particularly thanks to the Dominican Father Álvarez who, in 1923, set off from the Peruvian town of Puerto Maldonado to 'evangelise the savage Huarayos' (1998a: 81). Ten years before, members of this group had been educated at the mission of San Jacinto in Maldonado by the Father Aza, author of the Huarayo-Spanish dictionary (1928). Between 1923 and 1926, Álvarez organised thirteen expeditions to visit the Ese Ejja and was apparently repeatedly asked by the natives to settle with them. Moreover, in the 1930s, he met and was visited by the Ese Ejja of the Madidi River. In 1926, he wrote:

The forests inhabited by savage Huarayos are those which extend between the Inambari River (Peru) and the Beni in Bolivia ... Regarding this last river, the Beni, I only have uncertain information and it is impossible for me to establish, even approximately, the number of those

who inhabit it. The savages of the Heath (Sonene) call it Kueyay, because it resembles the Madre de Dios in the flow of its waters; and they tell me that the Huarayos of that place, are very similar to the Peruvians for the “beauty” of their clothes, weapons, utensils, etc., whence I infer that they are the same that once belonged to the Franciscan Fathers’ mission in the Alto Beni, or that have become civilised in the contact with the Bolivian rubber-tappers that live on that river (1998a: 143).

The expeditions made to the Huarayos from April 1923 until now have been about thirteen, two accomplished by Friar Manuel and the rest by myself. Except for the third accomplished by the brother [the friar], when he was murdered, in all we have been received with affection ... (Álvarez Fernández 1998a: 145).

In 1933, Álvarez reports of several clashes between Ese Ejja groups, with raids and looting, stealing of women and killings. He mentions ‘the savages from the Madidi in Bolivia, whom [he] had the pleasure to meet in September and who came to visit [him] in November’ had attacked the people living on the Heath (1998a: 257, 264).

Álvarez was a missionary in the southeastern Peruvian region of Madre de Dios for almost fifty years. He saw his mission as that of freeing indigenous people from the isolation forced upon them by the rubber boom and of bringing them the word of his god. His was a double task: that of ‘liberating the Indians from the grip of Satan and the misery of paganism’ and ‘to incorporate them in the Kingdom of God’ by introducing them to the requirements of modern life (1998a; 1998b *passim*). He believed that the state of isolation in which he found the Huarayos was the result of historical circumstances and that by putting an end to this isolation, they would be free to live a new life. In the new life, he thought they would be able to revive those original customs which they had to abandon when fleeing the slavery of the rubber plantations, customs which, according to the theory of prefiguration, he assumed to have been closer to Christianity, because they were inspired by God. Álvarez’s goal was to endow the ‘poor savages’ with the ‘incalculable benefits of the Christian civilisation’ (1998a: 365). He went to the Indians with presents of clothing and metal tools as well as medicine, and tried to convince them to settle in mission posts, first in Maldonado and then in Lago

Valencia, but the settlements were temporary and eventually people returned to live on the river.

As late as the 1940s, the Ese Ejja were still not recognised in the literature as one group, but Alfred Métraux (1963), compiling a list based on the nomenclature of early missionary accounts, acknowledged that ‘the *Guacanagua* on the upper Madidi and Undumo, the *Chama* and the *Tiatinagua*’ may have been subgroups of the same tribe, which he called ‘*Tiatinagua*’, and that ‘the *Chama* visited by Nordenskiöld on the left side of the Madidi are a subtribe of the *Guacanagua*’ (1963: 439). Métraux’s list of names is the most complete I have found and it includes, as subgroups of the *Tiatinagua*, the Tambopata-Guarayo, the Huanayo, the Baguaja (Bahujaja), the Bagujairi – note that -eri is the neighbouring Arakmbut’s suffix for ‘people’ (Gray 1996) – Quinaqui, Mohino, Chuncho and Echoja (Eseejja).

In the limited description given by the author, one can recognise aspects of Ese Ejja present and past life. He reports the collection of turtle eggs, and the capture of fish with bare hands at the end of the rainy season; he describes the lack of pottery and the practice of cooking food directly on the fire or in green bamboo tubes, the latter being today displaced by the use of metal pans, but often talked about. The shelters he describes as flimsy vaulted structures made of stalks of bamboo and covered with leaves and branches are the same as those used today in beach camps. He also mentions the shell nose-ornaments, today disused but which figure prominently in the story of Sloth (see Chapter 7), who recognises her lover’s twin brother by the ornament he is wearing. This shiny shell is called *bejo*, and its name has come to be used for money. Métraux also states that the *Tiatinagua* wear wooden plugs in each corner of the mouth, but I have never seen or heard about them; nor have I ever heard of the boards that the *Tiatinagua* would have used to flatten their babies’ heads. (I have only ever observed women manipulating newborn babies’ noses and ears to shape them properly).

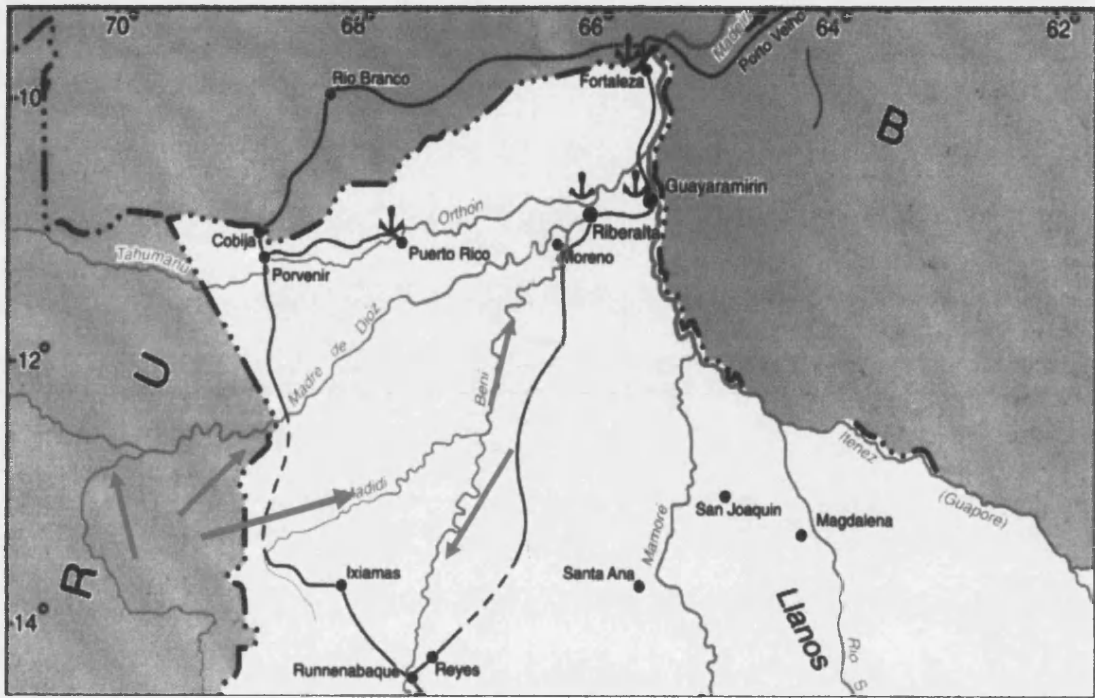
Métraux’s description of *Tiatinagua* bows and arrows also corresponds to the ones made by the Ese Ejja. They used to be six to six and a half feet long, made of black palm wood called *mae* – the one I was given was half that size and caused much mirth in people who said it was a toy bow. The arrows had light shafts made of a reed which was dried before fitting the arrowhead. The heads varied according to whether the arrow was used for fishing, in which case they were made of *mae*, with sharp indentation on one or

either sides, or for hunting, then they were made of hard bamboo and had an elongated shape, tapering at each end. The heads were tied to the end of the shaft with cotton thread smeared with wax. This description correspond to that by Hideo Kimura (1980; 1981b).

Beginnings aside, historical records suggest that the Ese Ejja-speaking people once inhabited the region of the headwaters of the Tambopata and Madidi rivers (Álvarez Fernández 1998a; 1998b; Armentia 1976; Kimura 1981b; Métraux 1963; Shoemaker et al. 1983; Zelený 1976) and they occupied the region of the headwaters of the Tambopata, Heath and Madidi rivers, across the Bolivian-Peruvian border. Their recent history has been largely determined by river travel. From the foothills of the Andes, some groups would have travelled down the Madidi to the Beni; some of them would have navigated down this river towards Riberalta, arriving at the present location of Portachuelo and the neighbouring Villanueva (see Map 2). Today, the inhabitants of Portachuelo say they were attracted by the proximity of the market, where they could have access to foodstuff such as rice, oil and sugar, as well as to clothes and utensils. This may have happened at the end of 1930s, according to Canono Callaú, one of my oldest informants, who says he is around sixty-years-old. It is suggested that, around this time, the first encounter with Evangelical missionaries may have taken place, when Richard and Lucile Wynna of the New Tribes Mission moved to Portachuelo (Castro Mantilla 1997:176). However, there is no trace of this in the oral accounts I recorded, in which the first missionaries to take up residence with the Ese Ejja are said to have been Jack and Nola Shoemaker of the Summer Institute of Linguistics in the early 1960s.

Another group to descend the Madidi would have moved up the Beni, to Rurrenabaque, to the south. A third would have travelled from the headwaters down the Tambopata and Heath rivers towards the Peruvian town of Puerto Maldonado on the Madre de Dios River, which flows into Bolivia, eventually to found the Peruvian Ese Ejja communities of Infierno, on the Tambopata, Palma Real, on the Madre de Dios and Sonene, on the Heath, the latter only officially established in 1990. Much of this is highly speculative, but what is certain is that, today, the Ese Ejja keep following the circuit formed by these rivers in their seasonal or occasional migrations.

The Tacana also came from the foothills of the Andes, from the region of Ixiamas, and a large Tacana population can be found to the north of La Paz. From census, I gathered



Map 2. Ese Ejja migrations

that many Tacana had been involved in the extraction of rubber and they arrived in Portachuelo during the 1950s, after the final collapse of the industry, following its brief revival during World War Two. The Tacana settlement pattern is much more scattered than the Ese Ejja and they are far fewer in numbers. This may also be due to the flux of young people towards Riberalta, something unknown among their Ese Ejja contemporaries.

In the mid 1950s, an Ese Ejja group led by Peno Machuqui left Peru, following the killing of a Peruvian man. They sailed up the Heath/Sonene River, crossed to the Madidi and settled for a time in Barracon, a rubber-tapping establishment at the confluence of the Madidi and the Beni rivers. In 1968, they were contacted by Jack Shoemaker, who promised Peno land and a house. Eventually, in 1969, Peno's group arrived in Portachuelo, where the SIL missionaries had purchased a parcel of land for the newcomers to settle on and Alto was founded.

To this day, the members of Peno's group describe themselves as Peruvians and say that downriver people are Bolivians. This use reveals the polysemic value of the word Bolivian, which assumes a very different meaning in the context of interethnic relations, since as was mentioned, the Ese Ejja refer to non-indigenous, Spanish-speaking peoples as '*bolivianos*', Bolivians. In the vernacular, national boundaries are ignored and group identity is tied to the landscape. The people who settled in the region of Rurrenabaque on the upper Beni are referred to by other Ese Ejja as Pahua Tehue *cuiñajji* (inhabitants of the Black Slope); those who settled in Peru, on the banks of the Sonene (Heath), Madre de Dios and Tambopata Rivers are known respectively as Sonene, Da Ai (Palma Real) and Bahuajja *cuiñajji*. Those who travelled down the Madidi and subsequently down the Beni, towards Riberalta, and now live in Portachuelo and Villanueva, became known as the Cui Ai *cuiñajji* (inhabitants of the Big River, the Beni). According to Kimura, the latter group was formed by the fusion of the Na Huo'o (Red Water), or Na Tahua (Blue/Green Water) and Equijati (Mouth of the river) *cuiñajji*. (1981b: 11) According to the Shoemakers and Arnold (1975), the main divisions of the Ese Ejja people at the time of their migration – they seem to think that this was one single movement – were three, which correspond to the three different rivers along which they live: the Bahuajja on the Tambopata, the Sonene on the Heath and the Ese Ejja on the Beni (1975: 8). This division corresponds to three broad linguistic groups, whose dialects are characterised by the sounds 't', 'k' and 'p'

respectively. But as Kimura (1981b) shows, more groups existed at different times. My suggestion is that there have always existed a large number of names referring to groups that at different times settled in different areas, with which they became identified, and that those described by the Shoemakers and Arnold as clans correspond to broad distinctions existing at the time of his writing, which have remained more or less unchanged until now.

The identification of groups as clans is confusing because it suggests the existence of lineages among the Ese Ejja. As I will show in Chapter 6, the Ese Ejja put little emphasis on descent beyond the oldest living generation, and the names of the groups correspond to geographical areas of current or recent residence. The relevant units among the Ese Ejja are in fact residential groups, because it is shared life and residence which most importantly of all determine identity. 'My people' in Ese Ejja is expressed as '*enije-jaajji*', meaning 'those who live/sleep with me'. This limit in the Shoemakers' and Arnold's classification is confirmed by Kimura, who notes: 'Among the Ese Ejja, the most important factor in the classification of groups is residence, that is, the place of birth and residence and the affiliation to a group is not determined by genealogy' (1981b: 18).

Language differences and the importance attributed to them reveal the efforts made by the Ese Ejja to distinguish themselves from other Ese Ejja, on the basis of their area of residence. In the next chapter I will describe how the Ese Ejja identify themselves in discourse and practice, but first I must introduce the site of my research.

Portachuelo

The village of Portachuelo stands on the left bank of the lower Beni, about forty miles, between six and twelve hours by boat, from the market town of Riberalta (11.0° S 66.1° W), and from the junction with the Madre de Dios River. The region, which lies 200 meters above sea level, has a wet, tropical climate. The year is divided between the rainy season, from November until April-May, with daily downpours, when water levels rise and the forest is flooded, and a dry one, during which rains become more sporadic and temperatures may drop dramatically from around 35° to 10° Celsius, for up to a week, when a strong southern wind blows, called '*e-eno*' in Ese Ejja ('*sur*' in local Spanish). Due to its climate and vegetation, northern Bolivia remained largely uninhabited by white settlers until the explosion of the rubber industry at the end of the nineteenth

century. When, in 1906, Colonel Fawcett was employed by the Bolivian Government to demarcate the frontier between Bolivia, Brazil and Peru, 'Riberalta' he wrote 'was almost a town for the palm huts were arranged in blocks, a few roofs were covered with rusty *calamina* ('Corrugated iron'), and there was even one building of *adobe* ('Mud-like clay...'), head quarters of Suarez Hermanos, the principal rubber firm' (Fawcett 1953:52, italics and translations in the text). Today, in Riberalta there is a post-office and there are public telephones; the town also has an airport, where, in spite of the mud runway, small jets can land, making it possible for people to leave in the rainy season, when, otherwise, they may be stranded, as the main road connecting the region to the rest of the country is often flooded and becomes unviable. The relative proximity to the market town plays an important role in the existence of the Ese Ejja, as I will discuss.

The vegetation in the region is that of tropical riverine rainforest. Areas of evergreen, thick-boled trees of great stature, on which many kind of vines thrive, alternate with disturbed forest areas, characterised by thin-boled, fast-growing trees and broad-leaved palm trees forming a dense tangle. In the territory occupied by the Ese Ejja, the forest is poor in precious timbers and Brazil nut and palm hearts are scarce. The exploitation of the vegetation is mainly for building materials for houses and canoes and for the collection of fruit and of palm leaf, for weaving. This ecosystem is also known as *varzea*, that is, 'floodplain forest that lines rivers rich in Andean [soil rich] sediment' (Kricher 1997: 17). Due to the sediment, the river is cloudy, and I suspect this affects in an important way Ese Ejja ideas about *ená-edosiquiana*, the beings that control the water world, who are believed to live in dry villages below the water. This region supports a great variety of animals such as deer, armadillos, peccaries, capybaras, various kinds of monkeys and rodents, river and land-turtles, caymans, snakes, jaguars, and an impressive variety of fish and birds. All, with few exceptions, are hunted and eaten by the Ese Ejja and all figure prominently in myth. Jaguars, snakes and vultures are not eaten, but the first two are killed in self-defence.

When I conducted a census in June 2000, in the Community of Portachuelo as a whole, I counted around 520 people, 390 Ese Ejja and 130 Tacana. Of the Ese Ejja, around one hundred were under the age of four; 210 were between the ages of five and thirty and eighty were over thirty-years-old. On average, the male to female ratio was balanced. I collected the census at the beginning of the dry season, when people started moving to



Plate 3. Houses in the village



Plate 4. Houses in the village 2

the beaches to fish, and although I recorded information on those who had already left, this figure should be taken as indicative. Elders ignore their exact age and therefore life expectancy is hard to gauge; and in the absence of comparative data, it is impossible to establish demographic trends. However, during eighteen months of observation, three infants died of intestinal infection, a woman in her fifties died of tuberculosis, and two men died of old age. They both had great-grandchildren.

The terms 'community' and 'village' are used loosely and different people say different things under different circumstances. The three nuclei are perceived as separate by the people who live in them, as is shown by the fact that they each elect a President to represent them. However, officially, that is, in the government records, they are all presided by the *Capitán*, the paramount chief of the Ese Ejja, who presently belongs to Bajo. This creates a problem for the Ese Ejja of Alto who consider him an outsider and, more so, for the Tacana of Medio, who see the Ese Ejja as savages, who have nothing in common with them. As a result, each section of the community tends to act independently, while the *Capitán* sits in the local council, in the District Capital, Gonzalo Moreno, where he has little or no say in the politics of the region. In the next chapter, I discuss Ese Ejja perceptions of authority and it will become clear how awkward this new role is for the young man, who constantly has to struggle against the attitudes of the community members, which range from indifference to hostility.

In spite of the relative proximity, by regional standards, to the town of Riberalta, Portachuelo is a fairly isolated village. There is no road access to it and communication with the town is by river or by radio. There is also an airstrip used by the missionaries.

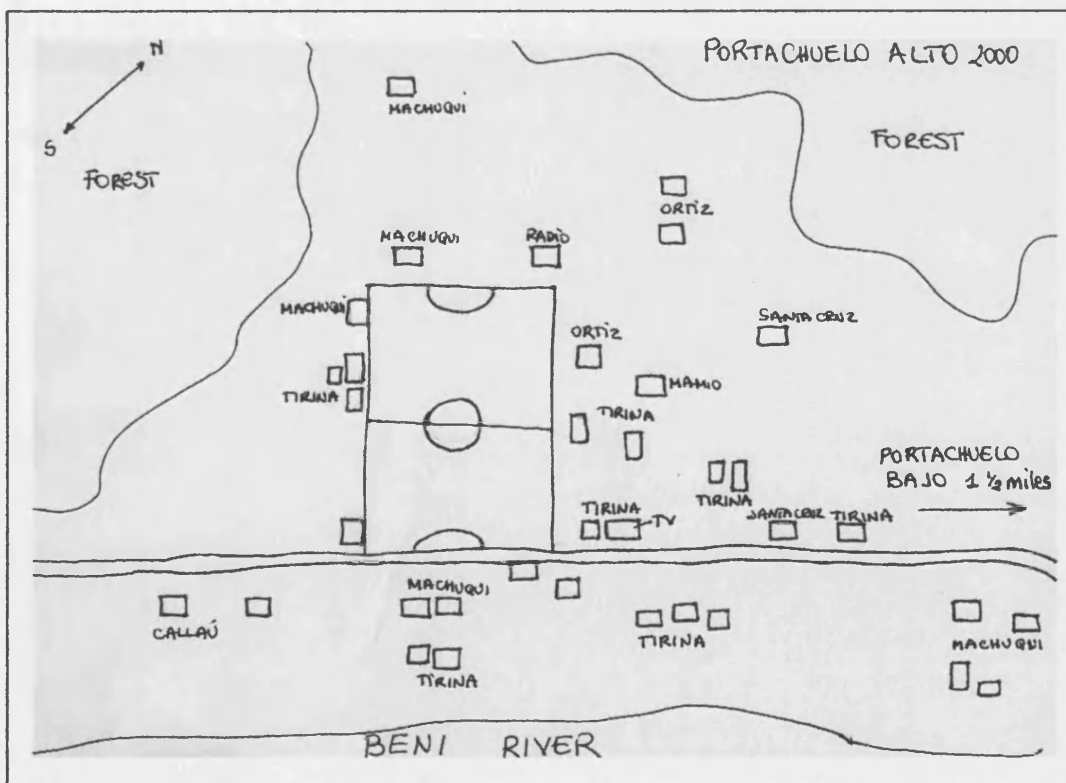
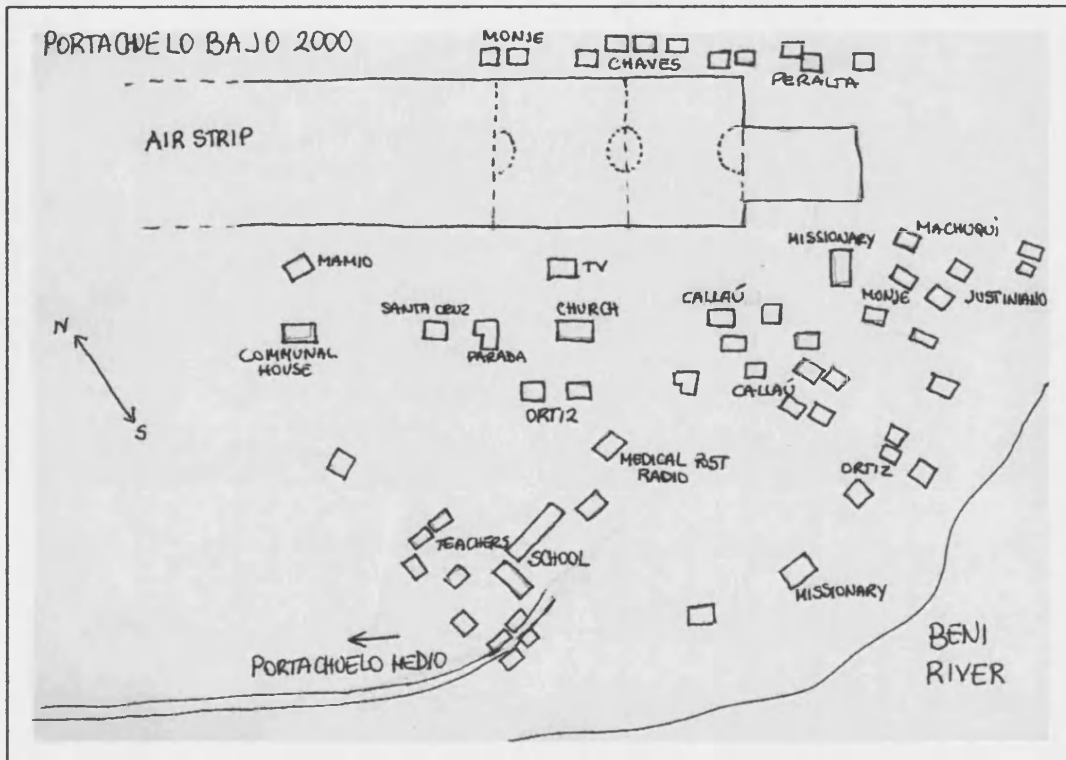
Until March 2001, when I left, there was no running water, although a drinking water project was supposed to be concluded a few days after my departure. The only electricity available was provided by a solar panel which powered the two-way radio, and, occasionally, by a generator for the television, donated by local politicians just before the 1998 elections.

There are forty-four houses in Portachuelo Bajo and twenty-four in Alto. In the early 1950s, Hissink and Hahn (1988) noted that, formerly, the Ese Ejja used to live in isolated communal houses that hosted six or seven families. 'Originally each Chama [Ese Ejja] local group had a large communal house, built by the river and near the main

plantations. Formerly these buildings were erected at a great distance from each other; whereas nowadays they tend to live together in small settlements' (1988: 119). Over the last fifty years, the Ese Ejja have adopted the type of house shared by their Bolivian neighbours. They have bamboo walls and thatched roofs of palm leaves and host extended families. Some households have separate buildings for cooking, while in others the hearth is on the floor, in a corner of the house, and the sleeping room is separated from the cooking area by a bamboo partition. The Ese Ejja sleep on platforms made of bamboo or of the hard bark of a palm tree, supported by wooden poles, two or three feet high, or laid on the horizontal beams of the roof. Women also sit on the sleeping platforms to weave palm mats. Whatever possessions people have, such as unfinished mats, clothes, tools, bits of paper, combs, hymnbooks, Bibles, baskets and bags, as well as precious foodstuffs such as rice, oil tins and bags of sugar, are bundled in corners or, in the case of rifles, mirrors and radios, they hang from the tips of the bamboo poles of the walls. The floors are of hard mud and they are kept clean by daily sweeping, but the Ese Ejja never sit on them, preferring mats, logs, benches or tarpaulin. Most houses are built around the football pitches, which are the physical as well as the social centres of each village, because both men and women play everyday, and many hours are spent sitting and chatting on the benches (see Map 3).

As I discuss at length in Chapter 6, households generally consist of a couple, their unmarried children and their married daughters with their husbands. Uxorilocal residence generally ends with the birth of the second child: then, the daughter and her husband move to a house of their own and leave, or rather, 'give' (Spanish, *regalar*), the first born to its grandparents. Due to this custom, another common type of household is that of grandparents, or indeed a single grandparent, and one or two grandchildren who become and are treated in all like their children and refer to them as 'mother' and 'father'.

As I describe further in the next chapter, those who live, eat and sleep together, must look after each other and share their possessions. Houses are deeply associated with their inhabitants and when a member of a household dies, the building may be destroyed and another built elsewhere. In some cases, it is abandoned for several months, as its occupants move temporarily to another community. Houses are built in close proximity and privacy is minimal. What goes on inside them is shared by those outside, and from



Map 3. Portachuelo Bajo and Alto in 2000

within one has a constant view of the activities in the surrounding area. As a person walks along the path, in the middle of the village, someone will call him or her from within a house and people look into each other's houses, through the gaps in the bamboo walls, to check if someone is in and what they are doing. This contributes to the impression that life is lived in common; and indeed most of the time is spent outside the confines of the house, in the company of others. However, solid houses are important symbols of 'civilisation'. As I have mentioned above, when the Ese Ejja talk about wild Indians, they say they do not have houses, that they live in holes in the ground or in trees, 'like animals'.

Like many of their neighbours in this part of Amazonia, the Ese Ejja have a mixed economy based on hunting, fishing and gathering and some swidden agriculture. Most mature households, those containing three generations, have gardens from which the newly formed households also benefit, although not without much complaining on the part of fathers-in-law against their lazy sons-in-law. Plantain gardens are planted on the lower lying ground, near the river, called *bajío* in Spanish, which are subject to occasional flooding. Rice, manioc and, rarely, maize are sowed on the higher grounds, or *alturas*. During the rainy season, some households move to the *centros*, temporary settlements in the interior of the forest where they collect Brazil nuts, but this is not a very common activity, and those who engage in it one season tend to not go again the following year.

The women also weave palm mats for their own use, to cover the floor or the walls of the houses, and for sale in the market in Riberalta. The mats and the small surplus from the plantain gardens are the main sources of cash, which is never used within the community but serves to obtain goods such as medicines, sugar, salt, oil and rice as well as metal tools, bullets and the odd bit of clothing. Another source of cash are the animals reared in the vicinity of the house. These are chickens and pigs. Chickens are frequently used to buy tinned food, oil and sugar, but pigs are sold only on very special occasions.

When I first arrived in Portachuelo in November 1999, the Ese Ejja relied on a boat belonging to the Tacana community of Medio, the *Loquito*, to transport their produce to the town. This was a thirty-foot, flat-bottomed wooden barge, powered by a small engine, of the type most common on these rivers. However, ten months later, following



Plate 5. Ino Tahua weaving a mat

the 2000 elections, a local politician from the Alianza Democrática Nacionalista party, henceforth ADN, delivered a new boat for the sole use of the Ese Ejja. Each month, the responsibility of the boat passed from Alto to Bajo or vice versa and this caused many complaints and animosity as both accused the other of mistreating it.

In Portachuelo there is a school, where pupils are divided in seven age groups, from Nursery to the first Intermediary level. Those who wish to study further must leave the community and go to a larger centre. However, the Ese Ejja seldom complete the cycle available in the village and the few who do tend to stay on and attend the highest grade available over and over. Until 1999, the majority of teachers were Spanish-speakers from Riberalta, and out of the four bilingual Ese Ejja teachers, trained by the Summer Institute of Linguistic in the 1960s and 70s, only one had an officially recognised title. In the school, language is a problem because Ese Ejja children of pre-schooling age do not speak Spanish, and they begin to understand it on average at around the age of eight, presumably because they go to school, and this hinders their performance considerably, compared to that of their Spanish speaking Tacana peers. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, most men in Portachuelo understand Spanish, but many speak it with difficulty. Women, with few exceptions, dislike speaking anything but their own language, even if they understand more than they are prepared to show. In December 1999, six Ese Ejja men obtained teaching diplomas from a government-funded course designed specifically for indigenous teachers (*Bachillerato Pedagógico*), but ironically, this created more problems than it solved, by creating wealth inequality, unsustainable under the levelling mechanisms which characterise Ese Ejja society (see next chapter).

The community benefits from a medicine dispensary supported by the resident Evangelical missionaries and run by an Ese Ejja nurse. The missionaries provide twenty-four hour a day medical support and have monopolised the treatment of illness, which is one of the Ese Ejja's major concerns in life. The price of this service is the setting aside – some would say the disappearance, of indigenous medicine based on the use of plants, of hallucinogens and on a form of spirit-mediumship in which shamans call upon the dead, *emanocuana*, to help them detect the origin of an illness.

The missionaries hold church services on Sundays and on Wednesdays, in Portachuelo Bajo. The church is a large wooden structure, with concrete floor and corrugated iron roof, and it was recently renovated (see Chapter 8). It stands alongside the football

pitch, in the centre of the village. Next to it, the old church, very similar in shape, only more derelict, is now used for the children's Sunday School, for community meetings and it houses the television set. In Alto there is no church as such and people walk to Bajo every Sunday morning, but there is a small newly-built house where weekly Bible classes are held.

On the whole, the village has a rather chaotic appearance, and the way people talk about it, of the buildings, their distribution and their construction, is revealing as to their attitude towards change, which will be explored in Chapter 4. As I mentioned, the lack of houses is used to characterise the life of the ancient people and of 'savage Indians'. Moreover, it is not uncommon, for young men especially, to complain that the villages are 'messy', that the houses are built randomly, here and there, and some fantasise of a village where all the houses are 'nicely aligned', with streets and lampposts. But this does not seem to go past the stage of fantasy, as people continue to build their homes where it suits them and no one has the authority of imposing any form of planning. The absence of coercive power is one of the characteristics of the Ese Ejja social philosophy, to which I turn in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the available historical data on the Ese Ejja, through which it is possible to trace their movements at least over the last three centuries, although I have shown that their presence in the sub-Andean region was recorded as early as the sixteenth century. In Chapter 5, I return to the issue of history, with an account of the relations between indigenous people and the Bolivian State, which will allow me to explore the indigenous historical sense. In this chapter I have also presented the current state of Portachuelo, the material condition of its inhabitants, their residence patterns and their resources. In the next chapter I describe how their sense of identity is constructed and manifested in their classification of distant others, in their social philosophy and their everyday practices within and around the village.

3. Alterity, sociality and everyday life

In this chapter, I turn to the issue of identity and I consider the ways in which the Ese Ejja identify themselves in opposition to others. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that alterity begins in the relationship between siblings of the opposite sex, whose children are *uapa*, different, from each other, and therefore marriageable: this issue will be explored in Chapter 6. Here I consider the Ese Ejja notions of alterity in relation to more distant others and how they classify the peoples that inhabit their world. The categories according to which they divide others are not rigid and, as I will show in later chapters, they can be modified through practice. This transformability, which underlies the possibility of becoming ‘Bolivians’, discussed in Chapter 4, is also to be found in the Ese Ejja use of names, which can be manipulated according to circumstances. Furthermore, I present those aspect of the Ese Ejja mode of life that they perceive as making them different from others. I describe their everyday activities and their ideas about the ‘tranquil life’, about living together under the constant threat of divisive feelings and forces, and the levelling mechanisms that keep these forces at bay.

Different kinds of people

For the Ese Ejja, one of the practices that most strongly marks alterity is language, closely followed by residence. The differentiation on the basis of language and residence is apparent in the relationship between the different Ese Ejja groups introduced in the previous chapter.

Today, the Bolivian Ese Ejja (in Portachuelo Bajo, Villanueva and Rurrenabaque), the Peruvians of Portachuelo Alto, Sonene and Palma Real and those of the so called Bahaujja group on the Tambopata River, consider themselves to be different in so far as they speak different languages – although to an outsider they seem very similar – and live in different places. Alto people in particular feel very strongly about this difference and insisted to me that they laboured to understand the language of their neighbours. ‘Dogs we call: *iñahuéhua*. Do you know what *they* call them? *Iñáéhua!*’ This statement was uttered with disbelief and scorn and I heard it many times, from adults and children. Another common example was: ‘They say “*apuá*”, “done”, “finished”; we say “*acuá*”. Their language is totally different.’ My old friend Penó in particular found the language of the Tambopata amusing and laughed when he explained to me that they called ‘father’ ‘*tata*’ instead of ‘*caca*’ and said ‘*poticue*’ instead of ‘*poquicue*’, ‘go!’ Although these differences may not seem not such as to hinder mutual understanding at all, they

are very significant for the Ese Ejja, in the process of creating difference and maintaining identity. This suggests that the establishment of alterity is the necessary condition for one's identity and, therefore, it must be created and maintained. This is consistent with the logic underlying the distinction between parallel and cross relatives, explored in Chapter 6, whereby one must create otherness among close kin (*uapapojiana*), to make marriage possible.

Vis-à-vis non-Ese Ejja, all Ese Ejja speakers consider themselves related and they use the Spanish words *pariente*, relative, and *paisano*, fellow countryman, or simply *ese ejja*, to refer to one another, thus reproducing the same-other opposition on the global level, outside the Ese Ejja world. When *paisano* is used by non-Ese Ejja it is considered a derogatory term, but not when used within the group. According to my 'father' Dejjja Oshie, *pariente* meant friend, 'of the same tribe' (he used the Spanish word *tribu*, which is very rarely used, but which he probably picked up in Riberalta when he worked for CIRABO for a few months).

Other indigenous people are referred to by their officially recognised names such as Chacobo, Cavineño, Tacana and Araona and they are considered *pia dejja*, other people, where *pia* means different (much in the same way as *uapa*, in fact sometimes they are used interchangeably). Peluso reports that in Peru 'the term Ese Eja can also refer to indigenous people in general' and be 'modified to specify members of the linguistic group: *Ese Eja nei* (true Ese Eja)' (Peluso & Boster 2002: 147). I have never heard this in Portachuelo where, however, the Spanish word *indígena*, indigenous person, is often used and shows that the Ese Ejja recognise a similarity with other Indians *vis-à-vis* the national society. Bolivian nationals, white and mestizo, are referred to as *dejja nei*, true men/people (see Chapter 4). White foreigners are called *ninco*, (derived from gringo), or, according to Peluso, *ichaji oshie*, white capuchin monkey, and *dejja oshie*, white *dejja* (2002: 147). Black people are *brasineno tehue tehue*, black black Brazilian, and the Japanese are *chino*. All these names refer to beings who share some bodily characteristics. In the words of my informants, they have the same bodies, the same blood, the same internal organs, yet they are different, because they speak differently, they eat different things, they wear different clothes and they look different. Other indigenous peoples and Bolivians are historical enemies, but the possibility of turning them into allies is not excluded. The Ese Ejja trade and play football with them and they even consider marriage, although not without fear. Gringos are seen as benevolent

although potentially dangerous (and cannibal) and some people say they would like to see gringos marrying Ese Ejja, although, to my knowledge, this has never happened. The little experience they have of *chino* derives mainly from the large Japanese colony in Riberalta and from television. Brazilians, or rather, black people, are associated with *ecuiquia*, the black cannibal ‘zombie’ that roams in the forest (see Chapter 9). The Ese Ejja have little direct experience of black people, apart from the odd encounter with Brazilian traders who can be occasionally seen selling hammocks in the streets of Riberalta.

As I discuss in Chapter 6, among the Ese Ejja, identity is partly given and partly made through interaction, shared residence and commensality, therefore the categories of difference are not rigid, and can be manipulated. I became aware of this possibility early in my fieldwork, during a conversation with a man in his mid twenties called Jena. I asked him if a non-Ese Ejja could ever become Ese Ejja. At first, he said one could and he went on to explain how there were two or three Tacana men who had married Ese Ejja women and had learned to speak the language very well – he stressed this fact – and lived with their fathers-in-law. ‘People from outside think they are Ese Ejja’ he commented. When I asked him whether they carried on being Tacana, he replied they did: ‘You can change the language, but you cannot change the body’. ‘So’ I asked, ‘even if I learn to speak very well, I can’t become Ese Ejja, can I?’ ‘No, you can only translate.’ He gave me the example of Michael, one of the missionaries. He told me how he had been in Portachuelo for seventeen years and had learned to speak like the Ese Ejja, but he spoke a different ‘dialect’. So what of the performative character of identity?

The missionaries have lived in Portachuelo for many years, but they do not live with the people. They keep to their well built houses, with electricity, refrigerators and gas cookers; they do not go fishing or hunting, apart from rare occasions, they do not eat with the Ese Ejja nor do they gossip, and most important of all, they do not marry them, which, as I show in Chapter 6, is the mode *par excellence* of turning outsiders into ‘one of us’, into *familia*, as they say using Spanish. People are aware of this and talk about it explicitly. Inevitably, the Ese Ejja made comparisons between the missionaries and me and once, Biujajja, the nurse, told me how pleased the people were with me, because I went fishing and gathering wood with the women and I had learned to weave, unlike the missionary women who were always sitting at their desks, ‘nice and clean’, and never

went out. This is certainly not a criticism on my part of the missionaries, who have lived in Portachuelo for such a long time and have had to make choices as to how much they wanted to become like the natives, but Biumajja's comment was instructive, regarding the 'degrees of otherness' discussed in this thesis. It seems that, on the Ese Ejja scale of sameness and difference, there is even room for a *gringa*, as long as she behaves like an Ese Ejja. The conversation with Jena mentioned above took place only a few weeks after my arrival and he probably assumed I would live like the missionaries, like many others who were surprised by the fact that I did not eat with the gringos. But in time, I became incorporated in the Monje family, and they began to say I was 'like *familia*', where perhaps the 'like' still left scope for otherness. And after a year, when I lived on my own and I had established myself as a member of the community, Basi, the wife of my 'father's' brother, started joking about how I was going to marry her son.

Another sign of the mutable character of identity is in the Ese Ejja use of names to which I turn in the next section.

Names

In this section, I introduce Ese Ejja onomastics and the manipulation of names. The Ese Ejja have adopted Spanish names, which they use when they interact with non Ese Ejja. Only when a degree of intimacy is established, do people disclose their Ese Ejja names, but they are reluctant to explain how these names are given. Children are named some time after birth, in some cases as late as a year after. Common names reflect physical attributes: a baby boy who was particularly light-skinned would be called Dejjja Oshie, white man; a baby's arm looked green at birth and so she was called Aa Tahua, blue/green arm. Other examples include: Hui Copo, round nose, Qui Copo, round buttocks, Cojja Tehue, black eyes, Qui Ihui, smelly buttocks, and so on. Some babies are named after an animal or a plant eaten or dreamt by the parents at the time or after birth, such as Sehua, shad, Se'Ao, paca, Cuocuo, a little bird, Piqui Shacui, a kind of turtle, Socuai, firefly, Samao, fox, Hueshessie, a small banana, Shihuijaja, Brazil nut, Ejjahui Oshie, white plantain. In Peru, I was told that dreaming was a condition for naming and a child would be without a name until someone close to him or her had a dream. In Portachuelo, the emphasis is more on significant events, which determine the decision. When my 'sister' Marcela/Quisaa gave birth, the little boy was not named for several days and was given a Spanish name, Ricky. When I went to see him, I used to speak to him in Italian calling him *piccolino*, little one, and sure enough, after a few

weeks when I asked if he had a name, I was told he was called Piccolino. But, in general, people remained quite secretive about their onomastics, often declaring that the name of a person was the Spanish one and the Ese Ejja was a nickname. In the everyday use, people distinguish between proper Ese Ejja names and nicknames. The latter are the object of many jokes, which cause great hilarity, they are often discussed and changed to suit the circumstances. My friend Cojja Tehue, for example, was called Elicotero, helicopter, because of her noisy farts. Whenever I called her Elicotero, people burst out laughing. After three years of marriage, Bajjima had still not had a baby and she was called Capon due to her presumed infertility. Her friends called her Capon to her face and she did not seem to mind, but perhaps this was because she knew she was pregnant, as I discovered a few months later.

One interesting use of naming is that according to which names become mnemonic weapons and parents retaliate for insults received during pregnancy.⁵ The idea is that, throughout the child's life, the insulting person will be reminded of the insult they made and will feel ashamed. A little boy was called Bo'bi, food, because his parents had gone to the SIL mission-base to attend literacy courses and everyone said they only went for the food they received. A young man was named Bicho, shame, because someone said his mother had no shame and flirted with all the men when she was pregnant. A widow called her newborn baby Enemiga, she enemy, in Spanish, because her in-laws accused her of witchcraft and threatened to harm her.

In Bolivia, the Ese Ejja were given Spanish surnames by state officials and teachers, while in Peru, surnames are patronymics. Spanish surnames have come to define cognatic groups which people refer to by the Spanish *familias*, and I call families. According to the Bolivian custom, families are, in principle, patrilineal descent groups characterised by a surname transmitted through male members, but each person is identified by both the paternal and maternal names and parents and children should never have the same combination of names. The Ese Ejja have more or less adopted this system but they use it creatively which, sometimes, makes it impossible to establish kinship relations. Adoption being very common, some children inherit their adoptive parents surnames; others take their adoptive father's surname as their second. This can

⁵ According to Peluso this phenomenon is restricted to Portachuelo. Peluso, D.M. in press. Variabilidad y cambio en los nombres personales en una sociedad indígena amazónica.

make it arduous to establish who the biological parents are, given that adoptive parents are considered to be parents as much as the biological ones.

Often people change their surnames to suit their actual conditions and changing one's name is a very convenient way of making people forget awkward relationships. Dejja Oshie, for example, calls himself Monje Rocua, the latter being his adoptive father's surname, because, if he used his mother's name Cejas, it would be immediately obvious that he married too closely, because Ino Tahua is called Santa Cruz Cejas. His wife's mother is his sister (MZD), and he is his wife's MB. Although, traditionally, one's MB was a potential spouse, today people say that he is too close to marry; these unions are not prohibited, but people are ashamed of them, as was the case of Huisene (Tirina Sonia) and Peta (Torres Zapata). Huisene calls herself Tirina Sonia, but she is the daughter of Eliza Torres Zapata, Peta's sister. As a baby, Huisene was given to a woman called Maesa in exchange for some blankets and a mosquito net. Maesa brought her up and still lives with her, and Huisene did not learn Eliza was her mother until she was an adult. Of Huisene and Peta people say that they are always ashamed (*Ese Ejja, queabicho*), but this is only partly due to their quasi-incest, and more because Peta left his first wife Pona Bisó, who is Huisene's FZ. In general, people prefer not to have the same surnames as their children: Sihua, son of Peta and Pona Bisó, would be called Torres Tirina, but he married Tadjahuahua, his MBD, whose name is Tirina Sonia. Their children would be called Torres Tirina, like their father, but Sihua calls himself Torres Zapata, like his own father. Given that many people still marry their cross cousins, it could be that this practice has been criticised by outsiders, teachers and government officials (since the missionaries never spoke to me against *Ese Ejja* marriage practices, not even polygyny, although they condemned the omnipresent adultery), and people felt compelled to answer my questions as they did when they were issued identity cards – when they also had to invent dates and places of birth.

Clearly, the *Ese Ejja* seem to follow the Bolivian surname system, but they do so in a rather loose fashion, especially when other factors intervene that are more salient to a person's identification. Sometimes, if the father is dead, the children take on just their mother's name, as is the case of Iino Callaú. I knew her to be the daughter of a Lauriano Jacinto, but when I asked her, she said she had no father, he was dead, and she would go no further. Moreover, some people, especially those in the generation of grandparents, who have not been to school and have had little involvement with the national society,

ignore their surnames, and others changed their minds as to theirs. From the discussion above, it should be clear that Spanish surnames are not the best means of identifying degrees of relatedness among the Ese Ejja, but they are powerful tools for people themselves to define and to make relations.

In Portachuelo Bajo, the largest families in the 1999-2001 period were the Callaú, the Ortiz and the Mamio, although the Mamio are also associated with the village of Villanueva, upriver. In Alto, they were the Tirina and the Machuqui, who came from Peru in the late 1960s. These families consider themselves to have a privileged relation to the place, on the grounds that they have lived there a long time (three generations) and they belong to the place, while others are seen as newcomers. Given the absence of a formal power structure, the importance of these groups seems to be above all a matter of strength in numbers. This is consistent with the desirability of being surrounded by one's kin, who lend support to each other, hence the attempts to keep family members, male and female, together which will be described in Chapter 6. Indeed, people are much more likely to voice the beauty of living near their kin than the special relation to the land, and often they travel hundreds of miles to be reunited with them.

Families are not just lineage-based territorial distributions, but they also depend on marriage histories, because, when a man moves to his wife's territory, unless he moves back once the brideservice period is over, his children become associated with that territory. This was the case for Be'o/Melicio Callaú, which is why his sons Choco and Sehua, although Callaú, are considered to be from Alto. So, unless a group of brothers manages to stay together, as the Tirina have done in Alto, the boundaries shift very quickly. Which perhaps explains the preference for marriages within the territorial unit or with women coming from far away.

Identity in practice

In the next section, I describe the Ese Ejja way of life, which is considered by the people themselves a sign of Ese Ejjaness and then I turn to their moral beliefs.

The connection with any particular location described above is transitory and many Ese Ejja retain a semi-nomadic attitude, noticeable in their ideas about property and work, and in the sense of impermanence that characterises their life choices. Every year, during the dry season, most families, or at least some of their members, move to the

river beaches, where they set up camps and stay for up to four months. Some reside there for the whole period of the dry season, others periodically return to the village. On the beach, they dig for turtle eggs, which they consider a great delicacy; they fish and they clear new gardens, further away from the village. If the camp is not too far from the village, on Sundays they go to Portachuelo for the church service and for the unmissable football match. Moreover, if the distance allows it, children go to school in the morning and come back in the evening, but many in this season simply stop attending, which creates great friction with the Bolivian schoolteachers who can not understand why the Ese Ejja will not abandon this barbarous way of living 'like turtles', as I have often heard them say.

In spite of their progressive sedentarisation, the Ese Ejja are always on the move, or at least some of them are. Sometimes people went to Riberalta, jumping on the boat at the last minute, just to accompany a relative, and when asked why they did so, they replied they went for a ride (Spanish, '*a pasear*', lit. to go for a stroll). To 'walk around' is a very important activity in the life of an Ese Ejja, because it is associated with visiting kin. Some people went to 'walk around' 400 kilometres upriver, to Rurrenabaque or Peru. On several occasions, my family members recounted their last trip to Rurrenabaque, a few years earlier: how they had gone by land, on the coach, which takes between three and four days, and they had returned by canoe, paddling downstream for a month, stopping and hunting every so often, gorging themselves with the meat of fat monkeys and turtle eggs. Yet, at the same time, people see themselves as becoming more settled and talk of long travels as a thing of the past. Travel belongs to both the collective and the individual past. On the one hand, people always talk of the ancient people travelling down river, on the other, they associate it with their youth. For example, Ino Tahua often told me how she no longer travelled, because now she had chickens to look after. Similarly, Ejapa, a man in his fifties, who came from Peru during the 1960s migration, told me how he no longer wanted to move because he now had several gardens to take care of.

According to the SIL missionaries, in the past, one of the causes of the impermanent nature of Ese Ejja living arrangements was the frequency of deaths.

Sickness is so common; a family death is always a possibility. The possibility of having to abandon their houses causes them to build more



Plate 6. Beach house

temporary-type housing, without too much effort to finishing them off. Also the deceased person's property – boat, dog, animals, gun – will be killed or discarded. This is a hindrance to large community projects (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 197).

I witnessed the destruction of the house of an old man called Chonono, although it seems more common for people to move away upon the death of a family member, even if only for a few months. People were adamant that moving away helped them forget the deceased, but they were ambivalent about the destruction of possessions. Some said the burial of objects, and especially clothes, utensils or weapons with the deceased was a waste of useful things. On one occasion, I heard of a young man who was buried with his brand new rifle, but a few months later, his relatives retrieved the weapon. On the whole, the reasons why the Ese Ejja move are other than those put forward by the missionaries. Today, the incidence of death is relatively low, yet movement is still an important feature of Ese Ejja life, either as seasonal migration, for fishing or for wage labour, or as semi-permanent relocation, to resolve hostilities.

In the next section, I turn to a description of the daily activities of the village. Some of these activities are described by the people themselves as being typically Ese Ejja, and thus play an important part in the construction of their self-image. In the next chapter, I describe how the daily lives of the Ese Ejja are affected by the proximity of the national society, in the interaction with non-indigenous people, as they engage in non-Ese Ejja practices.

Everyday life

In Portachuelo, days tend to pass rather slowly – and, for an outsider, rather boringly, because a lot of the time people seem to do nothing. This fact, and the profound unease and frustration it can engender in the unsuspecting European ethnographer, with his or her need to be constantly doing something, is not exceptional, and has been observed by many anthropologists working in Amazonia. Peter Gow goes as far as to suggest that 'doing nothing' may be the counterpart of 'living well', where inaction, or a declaration of inaction, is really an 'invitation to interact', the precondition for sociability (2000: 60). In this light, what at first appeared to me like 'doing nothing' is in fact a very active condition and the sense of idleness which I perceived was due to my received distinction between productive use of time and leisure time. In Portachuelo, men and

women spend a large part of the day sitting, chatting, grooming each other, playing football and, importantly, gossiping, and in this time, they forge or strengthen friendships, they discuss marriages, they display care or hostility, they pass information and chastise those who are guilty of overstepping the boundaries of appropriate behaviour. What contributes to the impression of idleness is the fact that activities such as hunting, fishing, garden clearing or house building are seldom undertaken collectively, instead individuals engage in them in small groups of close kin. So, at any one time, someone may be out in the forest or in the garden, while the others sit around the football pitch.

The image of the lazy Indian, who never does any work, is old and widespread in this region. It is certainly mistaken, but, to a certain degree, it forms part of the indigenous discourse as well, especially among the elders complaining about youths. The Ese Ejja can work very hard, but they do so in fits and starts, only when the need arises. On the whole, women take the largest share of the work. Young women partake of their mothers' chores, but young men are not expected to do any work at all until they marry and set up their own houses. Until then, they spend most of their time playing football or marbles, sleeping and hanging around with their peers, only occasionally going to the forest to hunt or fish, and elders constantly complain about their laziness. Laziness is tolerated in young men, but it is deplored in adults, who are expected to work hard; and those who are *quea-ueia*, lazy/tired, are often the object of gossip. When I went to gather firewood with my friend Basi, she proudly declared that she was *ueia-ama*, not lazy, as she wielded her heavy axe and chopped the hardest trunks, and women who found me weaving early in the morning, commented on it approvingly, saying: 'Miquiea-ueia-ama, Issa!', 'you are not lazy!'.

Weaving well is considered a skill to be proud of and women laugh at lazy, clumsy and ugly mats. In the region, the Ese Ejja are renowned for their rectangular and round mats, for which they use dried yellow palm leaves, interwoven with dark green or brown ones, to create a criss-crossing design. They also make fans and baskets. This is the feminine activity *par excellence* – men cannot and will not weave – and all mature Ese Ejja women in Portachuelo are expected to know how to do it.⁶ Girls learn to weave around the age of six, but weaving remains a game, until they marry. Quisaa insisted

⁶ In Sonene and Palma Real, in Peru, in the absence of the round-leafed palm, women and men weave baskets, fans, brooms and hats from a vine called '*picheme*', but not mats.

that she did not know how to weave, until she became pregnant, while her little sister made little toy mats. Mat weaving (Ese Ejja, '*yoquise-sipiji*') is both a marker of womanhood and of being Ese Ejja. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, learning to weave marked a crucial moment in my fieldwork, especially in the relations with women, because, finally, not only was I considered a woman myself, but also, one of them. When I sat in my house weaving, women came and looked at me in amazement and remarked that I was *Ese Ejja nei nei*, truly Ese Ejja. Moreover, Ino often repeated that: '*dejjaja quea-sapa-caa*', 'Bolivians have a hard head', and they could not learn to weave. Mat weaving is considered a marker of Ese Ejjaness by both Ese Ejja and outsiders. When I asked Damari, a young Tacana girl, daughter of an Ese Ejja woman, whether she could weave, she replied that she couldn't: only the 'little Indian women know how to do it'. She used the derogatory/patronising Spanish expression: '*paisanitas*'. Damari's mother, Nancy, was a typical example of an Ese Ejja who was lost to her group through marriage with an outsider, as described in the Chapter 6. She lived in Portachuelo Medio, less than one hundred yards from the first houses of Bajo, but her children did not speak Ese Ejja, they seldom visited their grandparents and they spoke of themselves and of their father as *gente buena*, good, respectable people, while treating the Ese Ejja with pity or disdain. Damari always spoke about the Ese Ejja in the third person, and told me how, when her father arrived in Portachuelo, 'they used to eat people'.

Ese Ejja women look after the houses, they see to the preparation of food, from the cutting of firewood to cooking, they care for children, wash clothes and weave palm mats, fans and baskets. They also collect fruit in the forest and from the gardens, and they fish. Men hunt, fish, build canoes and clear gardens. Together, husbands and wives build houses, they work in the gardens and hunt and fish. For eight months of the year, children are supposed to go to school, but the attendance is very irregular, especially during the dry season, when as I mentioned, people move to the beaches. In principle, children are free to do more or less what they like and they are seldom scolded or ordered around. Indeed, it is considered that if a child under the age of four is scolded or even worse, hit, it will die. At the same time, children as young as five or six may be seen helping their mothers with childcare and with other tasks in and around the house. This is because children who want to work are not restrained from doing so on the basis of their age and it isn't uncommon to see a small child, little more than a toddler, handling a sharp machete or carrying around a smaller sibling.

Men hunt and fish with their sons or with in-laws; alternatively, husband and wife do so together, alone or with some of their children. The men carry rifles, machetes and harpoons, the women bags, fishing nets and machetes or knives. Fishing with harpoons is considered an Ese Ejja technique and people say other Indians and Bolivians cannot do it. Women hunt smaller animals such as armadillo and paca: they scare them out of their hiding places with the help of dogs and kill them with their machetes, but they never handle rifles, nor, I was told, did they ever use to use bows and arrows. While men use nets, women improvise small fishing rods.

Occasionally, fishing was a collective activity involving a large party of women, a group of children and youths or even the whole village. In any case, when many people participated, the enterprise became a special event, surrounded by an air of festivity and general excitement. In the dry season, a party of twenty or more people set out on foot looking for the pools of water left by the retreating floods. In the forest, they formed a long line and shouts, laughter and a great deal of banter were heard from one end to the other. At the same time, this was yet another opportunity for gossiping and passing on information quietly. Women and girls brought baskets, which they carried on their backs, with a bark-strap across their heads, or wove one on the spot with palm leaves; men carried harpoons and rifles, in the unlikely event of an animal not being frightened away by the noise of the excited party. Little boys and dogs ran up and down the file. When a pool was found, everyone settled down to their activity. Women tucked their skirts in, they entered the mud and began feeling under the floating, rotting vegetation, oblivious of the multitude of spiders and insects crawling on the surface, and skilfully grabbed the fish swimming in the mud. *Nahuoo-iña*, to grab fish, is also considered a very Ese Ejja technique. Meanwhile, men stabbed the mud with their harpoons and children imitated adults or looked after their younger siblings. Eventually, someone decided to find another spot and moved on. Within the party, there was strong competition and at any time, one could expect to be asked how many fish one had caught or how many eggs found. People prided themselves on big catches but it was not unusual for a skilled or more successful person to give some of his or her catch to one who was less so. During the rainy season, fishing was done by canoe and fishing parties varied in size, from two or three people to several canoes; on those occasions, men also fished with nets (*nahuoo-shajja*, to fish with net).



Plate 7. Couple fishing



Plate 8. Diana fishing for *cosi* eggs



Plate 9. Girls collecting fish in the mud

These expeditions reproduced and reinforced a sense of community, of shared task and purpose. But fishing, whether in the dry or the rainy season, was also one of the contexts in which the difference and the hostility between upriver and downriver people were highlighted. It was highly unlikely that someone from Alto should join a fishing party of Bajo, because an unspoken rule stopped either from using the areas habitually used by the other. Breaking this rule caused much frowning and criticism, and a party may try and discourage the other by saying that in their area there was no fish.

Sometimes, women went to the forest without men, but never alone, always at least in pairs, and preferably with two or more companions. Typically, a large crowd of girls of different ages went to collect fruit or to fish at a mud pond. They walked in single file, mostly bare foot or with flip-flops, brandishing machetes and with baskets hanging from their heads. This apparently casual activity was regulated by a strict unspoken rule: the order in which the party set off must be respected until the party reached its destination and if one speeded up, she must go back to the place where she had started, but no one ever explained why. In the forest, the girls and women joked and shouted from one end to the other of the line, partly because they were having a good time and they were excited in the anticipation of the fruit or the fish they were going to find, but partly also, to scare away dangerous animals and demons. I was never told this explicitly, but I suspect this is one of the practices that did not reach the discursive level, partly because everybody knew that spirits only attacked people who were alone and partly because these beliefs were condemned by the missionaries.

In the early hours of the afternoon, little happened, until the time came to go and wash, around two or three o'clock. During these hours, people visited each other, or sat outside in the shade, in small groups and talked, delousing each other and breast-feeding. Most of the talk revolved around absent ones. Very common topics were quarrels between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law and adulterous affairs. If a man who was supposed to be a Christian, got drunk at a party, people commented profusely on how he was not a good Christian anyway, that he had been seen drunk in Riberalta before and he cheated on his wife. If news came that someone was ill, speculations began as to the causes of the illness, the person's enemies, the possibility of witchcraft and how the family was going to take revenge. But most of the time the news turned out to be false, because there was a strong tendency to exaggerate and if someone had a fever, by the time the news reached the other end of the village, he or she may already

be declared dead. Eventually, one woman would get up saying she was going to wash, others followed and slowly the group dispersed.

Washing, at the *pauro* (a local Spanish term indicating a place where water collects and is used for this purpose) or in the river, is a very important moment in a woman's day. Ese Ejja women wash an enormous amount of clothes every day and the task occupies a couple of hours, but although it is a burden, it is also an important moment of social interaction. Women meet, talk and exchange information about the latest gossip; they also play and laugh. Friends wash together. Because they wash in groups of two or three, the exchanges are more intimate than in the larger gossip sessions on the village bench. Girls of seven or eight contribute to the task especially if the mothers are busy with an infant or heavily pregnant or ill. Washing is said to be a woman's task. Ino told me men couldn't do it because 'their hands are too hard' ('*queamee-cao*'), however, on several occasions, I saw young men washing their football strips, as well as bathing their small children.

After washing, women returned home and went and sat once more on the bench or on the grass near the football pitch, joining the ongoing gossip. By this time, a football match was usually underway, either with the team from the opposite village or simply among the members of the village team. At this time more people would gather around the football pitch, watching the game and talking, checking who came back from hunting or fishing and what they had killed.

Before dark, the women lit fires in their kitchens and started cooking, while men returned from fishing or hunting or from the gardens and went to wash. If a man brought back a large quantity of game or fish, his wife distributed pieces among her kin who come and ask for it or she sent her children to them.⁷ The change from dusk to night is very swift at that latitude, and suddenly people retired to their homes, except for a few youths who lingered on the football benches, talking and laughing. Households gathered around their fires and ate their evening meal. If the moon was full and the night clear, some sat outside, chatting and smoking, for as long as the mosquitoes allowed it. Normally, that was the end of a day and people retired and got ready to sleep: husbands and wives on their platform, which they shared with at least one of their

⁷ When I lived on my own, I sometime gave bullets to friends who went hunting and at dusk I would receive a visit from their children or younger siblings, bringing me a piece of meat.



Plate 10. Nona on the bench

children, and the other children in pairs or in groups of three. Silence descended on the village. Some young men stayed up and talked, sitting on the bench, joking, and loud explosions of laughter could be heard; some, young and old, went to a house to drink sugarcane alcohol, but at the time I was in Portachuelo, drinking was done as discreetly as possible, to avoid the anger of the missionaries. Occasionally, as they got drunk, men became rowdy or angry, but generally they just stumbled home or fell asleep at the party. But on some nights, the silence was suddenly broken by the roar of the generator, the signal that the television was going to be on. Children rushed out of bed screaming: 'Tele! Tele!' They ran towards the house where the television was kept and sat on mats on the floor and on benches, very excited. Slowly, adults and elders too emerged from their sleep and gathered at the house, sitting outside talking, more interested in the event than in the actual programme. Depending on the availability of petrol, the generator could be on for several hours; eventually it was turned off and people retired for the night (reactions to television programmes are discussed in Chapter 7).

Tranquil life

So far I have described the practices by which the Ese Ejja positively distinguish themselves from others; on another level, they do so through their ethics and especially through the voiced ideal of tranquillity, which characterises the village as opposed to the world outside.

Amerindian societies are often described as egalitarian (c.f. Overing & Passes 2000). The Ese Ejja are not egalitarian in the sense of having a distinct ideology of equality, but one of their greatest concerns is disparity. In an important sense, disparity is related to death. Disparity causes envy, which sparks ugly talk or gossip and can lead to sorcery. Sorcery causes disease, thinness and death, which engender sadness as well as ill feelings and the possibility of more violence in revenge. This explains why happiness is closely associated with tranquillity. These concerns are strongly reminiscent of a phenomenon that has been recorded throughout Amazonia, and has become one of the most important paradigms for the understanding of indigenous sociality. This phenomenon has been described as the indigenous concern for the 'good life' and 'living well'. Discussing Amazonian morality, Joanna Overing and Alan Passes (2000) point out that 'Amazonian people adhere to a "virtue-centred ethics" that is primarily centred upon the quality of "the good life" which is engendered through the artful practices and skill of those who personally and intimately interact in everyday life'

(2000: 4). This is true for the Piro people, who place enormous value on the principle of *gwasata*, or living well, which 'refers to the day-to-day tranquillity of village life, where no grievances, sadness or dissatisfaction leads a person to seek to move elsewhere' (Gow 2000: 52). Similarly, according to Carlos Londoño-Sulkin, the Colombian Muinane rate highly peaceful co-residence with kin and describe the 'combination of generalised good health, proper social relationship with members of a community and an abundance of food and ritual substance' as '*vivir sabroso*', which he translates as 'to live well' or 'to live pleasurably' (2000: 170). A reoccurring concern in these characterisations of good life is the control and the suppression of anger. This is particularly evident in the ethnography of the Peruvian Airo-Pai for whom 'achieving a highly desirable state of communal well-being, which they describe as "living well", is only possible if men and women learn to fear both their own and other people's anger' (Belaunde 2000: 209). Fernando Santos-Granero describes how the Yanéscha ideal of 'good social life' is expressed by antithesis in a myth describing a 'brutal, pre-social age' characterised by 'isolationism, individualism, greediness, war, feuding and murder' (2000: 268).

These are but few examples of an important move towards the understanding of Amazonian sociality by anthropologists. As Santos-Granero observes, the attention given to Amazonian strategies for the maintenance of peaceful living, characterised by Viveiros de Castro as the 'moral economy of intimacy' (1996: 190) quoted in Chapter 1, has been criticised for exaggerating the importance of consanguinity, sharing and the local, over affinity, exchange and the inter-local, and of idealising Amerindian communal life. Instead, Viveiros de Castro's 'symbolic economy of alterity', or the 'hawks', as Santos-Granero labels its exponents (1999; 2000: 269), focuses on predation and conflict as the universal modes of sociality in Amazonia. Santos-Granero proposes an approach that takes into account both harmony and conflict as different stages in the construction and destruction of conviviality (2000). This is not a pure attempt to reconcile a theoretical debate through acknowledging that both camps are right in some respects; instead it is a subtle analysis of the tension that emerges when a strong ideal of sharing and conviviality is present, which cannot always be met and therefore contains in itself the seeds of its own destruction. This is apparent in the ambivalence I have observed among the Ese Ejja who, on the one hand praise the good tranquil life, but on the other, constantly complain and accuse each other of gossiping, of jealousy, sorcery and of fighting. In one's community one lives happily: in Ese Ejja they say *queabihui*,

which defines a state opposite to *queayeno*, sad, or sadness; in Spanish though, they use the expression *tranquilo*, tranquil, peaceful, rather than *feliz* or *alegre*, suggesting that happiness is associated with the absence of worry. However, on more than one occasion someone told me: 'Yes, we the Ese Ejja are all like this, we are jealous' or 'we always talk ugly.'

Because ultimately violence results in death, the ideal life is a peaceful life, free from physical or verbal violence. Moreover, tranquillity, the lack of concern and fear, derives from company and loneliness is deprecated, hence the deprecation of the condition of lone children, children, that is, who do not have a sibling of the same sex described in Chapter 6. Moreover, a lonely person is at risk from enemy attacks, whether human, animal or supernatural and safety is in numbers. Sleeping alone, for example, is considered very dangerous, because 'if devils find an empty space they come into your bed', as Quisaa told me. But the company of kin is also the precondition for the satisfaction of hunger, since the production and preparation of food requires the contribution of different people.⁸ The greatest tranquillity is found in the close kin group, those who live together, who look after each other and provide for each other's needs. Close kin supposedly do not gossip about one another and they have no reason to be envious because they are expected to share their possessions. As I discuss in Chapter 6, the obligation to share extends to in-laws, who may not live together, but among them gossip is common, especially between mothers and daughters-in-law. Mothers-in-law resent daughters-in-law for taking away their sons, who, due to uxorilocal residence must leave their natal home.

Company demands the absence of disparity, because disparity generates envy and jealousy. Equality ensures the absence of violence, but, no matter how desirable this condition, the aspiration to improve one's condition and the objective inequality in skill and ability constantly allows for the possibility of envy to develop and thus gossip is rife. Although I did not come across any explicit statements about all Ese Ejja being equal, I have observed strong levelling mechanisms implemented through ruthless gossip against those who seem to want to distinguish themselves. Especially targeted are the bilingual schoolteachers and the nurse, as well as the young *Capitán*, who earn

⁸ On food production and consumption and the satisfaction of desires as building blocks of society see Gow Gow, P. 1989. The perverse child. Desire in a native Amazonian subsistence economy. *Man* 24, 567-82.

wages and can afford to buy goods. People are envious and criticise them. One day my 'sister' Quisaa was offered a lift on the missionaries' plane to go to Riberalta, but she declined because, as she later explained: 'People talk. They say: "She goes to waste money". They say: "She goes by plane because she is a *profesora*"', a teacher. Quisaa is in a delicate position because her brother is a bilingual teacher. Another time, I was witnessing the departure of the little plane, which always caused a crowd to gather, when I heard a woman hiss: 'He just goes to waste money.' I asked if she meant Elico, an Ese Ejja man who had just taken a seat. 'No, Elico has no money to waste' she replied, and I realised she had referred to Sapa Ai, Quisaa's brother. The pressure not to appear superior is so strong that people will hide what they have, to avoid criticism and gossip. I knew a woman who owned a jumper but would not wear it, even when the chilly southern wind blew, lest people should 'talk ugly'. This attitude explains the difficulties encountered by outsiders who try to impose some kind of hierarchical structure to the administration of the community. The same desire for equality can be observed during football matches, where, in spite of the determination of players to win, equal scores are more desirable insofar as they reduce the scope for resentments and fights following matches (which, however, does not detract from the enthusiasm of the players and their competitive spirit).

The disapproval of accumulation goes hand in hand with a very relaxed attitude towards theft, which is not seriously condemned, and is often regarded as 'borrowing', on the assumption that one can always steal back what was lost. No one would say: 'They have *stolen* my canoe', instead they would complain that their canoe was lost. In some cases, the offended person may decide to approach the thief and demand his or her goods to be returned but people will refrain from doing so if they see the chance for a conflict to arise. Cacujehua, a bilingual teacher, explained to me how someone had stolen a long piece of cable from his house. He told me how there were no rules among the Ese Ejja and how he could at most go to the thief's house and take the cable back, but he had refrained from doing so because he did not want to enter into a fight. So, in many cases, the offended parties just ignore the offence. However, if a death occurs, the reaction is different. Dejja Oshie explained that when someone dies, one must think of that person's enemies, those with whom they had had arguments and one must listen to gossip. Then the culprit must be punished. He referred approvingly to the recent incident among the Chacobo, reported in Chapter 1, when a man had been buried alive accused of killing his wife by sorcery. Alternatively, Dejja suggested, 'you can throw

them in deep water with a stone tied to them.’ According to him, it was the duty of the relatives to find the sorcerer responsible for a death. Dejjia Oshie also thought that the whole family could be punished for the misbehaviour of a member. Peno Machuqui said that, in the past, thieves were killed when they were found out, however, throughout my stay thankfully no killing took place and I never witnessed any form of punishment for any other offence. The harshest punishment I observed was a form of ostracism which affected adulterers and especially those who ‘stole’ spouses. If someone left their spouse to go and live with someone else, the new couple moved away from the village and built a house somewhere else, at least for a few months. The ostracism was performed through pernicious gossip and looks that were too heavy to bear.

The ideal of company and of avoiding loneliness is one of the reasons put forward for the desirability of having children and why parents demand from their married daughters, and sometimes from their sons, that they give them one of their offspring who is supposed to fill the void left by the parent. This is also consistent with the notion that close kin must care for each other. As Dejjia Oshie explained to me, children are given to grandparents who otherwise would be alone, to keep them company, to look after them, so that, if they die, ‘they are not left there until the next day.’ A young man called Choco told me that he opposed this practice, because grandparents did not know how to educate children properly, and he himself had refused to give away any of his offspring. Choco is a schoolteacher and a devout Christian, and I thought he represented the opinion of the new generation, but as I got to know more people, I realised that many of his peers had given away their first children. Moreover, Choco’s wife, Tepe Ai, had an older sister, Ino Huo’o, who had already given her first child, Epojja, to the parents, so it is likely that they would have not made strong claims towards Choco. Children and siblings are expected to give their offspring for free, but less closely related people might demand something in return, like a hammock, or a mosquito net, or blankets. In some cases, people bring up somebody else’s children, when the parents are unable or unwilling to do so, as was the case of Basi who adopted a child whose parents were going to let die because of his deformity (he had a harelip and cleft palate); or Qui Bene, who is childless and brings up the child of her niece who died giving birth.

Loneliness is also deplored in death, when the deceased make their way to the land of the dead and are subject to the attacks of enemy spirits. Therefore, Alecio – a man in his thirties – told me, in the past, when a man died, a child was also killed to accompany

him. This practice is no longer in use and most people are reluctant to talk about it, saying they do not know.

The condemnation of disparity and differentiation is clearly visible in relation to authority. Before becoming settled, the Ese Ejja had no permanent chiefs. They had leaders, but these were neither elected nor chosen by birth and their authority derived from personal qualities and from seniority. They were referred to as *etii*, elders, and thanks to their charisma and reputation, they lead migrations and war parties which involved two or three extended families. According to Hissink and Hahn (1988), they also acted as healers and mediators between the human and the spirit world. Writing about Chama/Ese Ejja groups encountered on the Madidi River between 1952 and 1954 they explain:

Because of their subsistence economy, the Chama live in small groups that are easy to provide for, numbering six families at the most. The leader of such a community also acts as shaman and represents the highest religious authority. His office is not inherited, but is given by the group after the extraordinary abilities of the candidates are judged (1988: 125).

As contact with Bolivian nationals intensified, the Ese Ejja were pressurised into electing representatives who could maintain relations with them. First, according to Canono, a man in his sixties, it was the merchants sailing up the river who chose Ese Ejja chiefs; later, in the early 1990s, with the foundation of the CIRABO, the local indigenous organisation, the authority structure was formalised, and the people were encouraged to elect a representative as well as his deputies and various other officials. However, because of the reluctance to distinguish themselves among the others, for fear of gossip on the one hand, and because of the fear and suspicion towards the Bolivians on the other, people are not willing to take charge. Antenor, a *Capitán* who dealt with the local political authorities quite successfully, obtaining some recognition for the community, was soon criticised for his management and accused of stealing the money that should have been spent for the village. He resigned in favour of his son, Maquini, who was also accused of stealing. A few years later Antenor left Portachuelo taking his wife, his two sons and their wives and children, two of his daughters and their husbands and children to fund the community of Santa Amalia on the Orton River. When I was in

Portachuelo, the *Capitán* was a young man who offered to take a role no one else wanted and had virtually no power over the people.

Today, the Ese Ejja do not wage wars or raids and the authority of elders can be judged by their capacity to initiate migratory movements. That was the case of Antenor, who abandoned the village with his closest kin, and in doing so, reproduced the traditional form of leadership. This did not occur to me until his son-in-law described him as a 'real leader'. His children were under no obligation to remain in the new community of Santa Amalia, and indeed one of his daughters-in-law, Ema, decided to return to her paternal house in Portachuelo Alto, after she suffered from leishmaniasis – an infectious skin disease. But the others remained in the new settlement, and several families from Portachuelo began moving there during the Brazil nut season, spending the collection months there, from November until February, then making their way back to the Beni. Antenor is not an isolated case, although his departure was made more dramatic by the fact that it followed a conflict and that it resulted in a permanent resettlement. But it is not uncommon for small kin groups to migrate for periods which vary between a few months and a year to other regions inhabited by Ese Ejja or simply to the river beaches during the dry seasons. Any segment of a named family consisting of two or three generations, may become an independent, autonomous unit.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I described the geographical and ecological context of my research and I outlined the history of the Ese Ejja as far as it can be reconstructed from the existing archival data, through which one can see how they gradually became identified by outsiders as a single ethnic group. In this chapter, I described how the Ese Ejja classify other peoples and the criteria according to which they identify themselves through language, residence and everyday practices. Through my own experience, I have introduced the indigenous notion that identity is amenable to transformation. This transformability is apparent in the use of personal names, which depend on personal and family histories and on individual situations and experiences. As a further distinguishing feature, I have outlined the basis of Ese Ejja ethics, stressing their dislike for coercion and their tendency to avoid conflict. Linked to this ideal is the disapproval of accumulation and of social distinction, both seen as potential causes of conflict. Such disapproval produces a powerful levelling mechanism which maintains the tranquil life. In an important sense, being Ese Ejja is determined by certain activities, in agreement

with a performative view of identity, and the corollary of this is that one can modify one's self-image through actions. In the next chapter, I discuss a set of practices through which the Ese Ejja see themselves as becoming more like Bolivians.

4. Why are the Ese Ejja not ‘the true people’?

In the previous chapter, I described how the Ese Ejja of Portachuelo identify themselves focusing on daily activities that characterise the life of the village and which define in an important sense what it means to be Ese Ejja. In this chapter, I discuss how, in relation Bolivian nationals, the Ese Ejja debase themselves and how this relation is reproduced and transformed through some of their practices. I argue that the Ese Ejja want to be like Bolivian nationals, *dejja*, and behave in what they perceive to be *dejja* ways, but they can only do so in the safety of the village. When confronted with the Bolivians, as in the school environment or when they travel to Riberalta, they become once more ‘savage Indians’. In what follows, I describe how being *dejja* is played out in everyday activities and how attitudes shift when the Ese Ejja are in town. I argue that while their self-deprecation is partly a historical fact, due to the absorption of the Bolivians’ discourse about Indians, it is also a strategy on the part of the indigenous people to avoid involvement in the national society. Furthermore, I suggest that there is a sense in which the Ese Ejja see becoming *dejja* as their destiny, as when older people refer to younger ones as almost *dejja*. This is consistent with Ese Ejja socio-cosmological and historical ideas.

In my discussion I adopt the notion of identity as self-image, described by Sylvia Caiuby Novaes as a ‘relational concept, determined by very specific concrete relationships that a society or a group establishes with others’ (1997: xiii). This notion derives from Barth’s formulation of ethnicity as the overstatement of difference which arises from intense social interaction between different groups. But the self-image described by Caiuby Novaes is not rigid, on the contrary, it is constantly open to change. This author discusses identity among the Bororo people of Central Brazil through the metaphor of the play of mirrors, to describe how self-image is determined by the way a group or an individual perceives itself as being perceived by an other. Because there are a multiplicity of ‘others’ one sees oneself reflected in, both in space and time, the self-image is not unique or rigid, but it is constantly transforming. This definition allows for the apparent contradictions in the discourses of the Ese Ejja about themselves when confronted with different others and fits the Amazonian principle of the processual nature of identity, widely identified in the literature. Caiuby Novaes’ definition of identity is also consistent with the notion of the self as a multiple entity, and with Henrietta Moore’s argument (1994) that people are not constrained by a single identity but take up different subject positions, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Real humans

The starting point of my discussion is the often-heard assertion that indigenous peoples of lowland South America call themselves 'true people'. According to Lévi-Strauss:

Mankind stops at the frontiers of the tribe, of the linguistic group, and sometimes even of the village, to the extent that great many of the peoples called primitives call themselves by a name which means 'men', or sometimes ... the 'good ones', the 'excellent ones', the 'complete ones', thus implying that the other tribes, groups, and villages have no part in human virtues or even human nature, but are at most, made up of 'bad people', 'nasty people', 'land monkeys', or 'lice eggs' (1977: 329).

Statements of this kind have been recorded throughout Amazonia and examples include Panoan people such as the Sharanahua, the Cashinahua, and the Yaminahua, who call themselves *oni koi*,⁹ *huni kuin* and *odi koi* respectively, which Siskind (1973), McCallum (1997) and Townsley (1987) translate as true people. Stephen Hugh-Jones (1978) explains how the Vaupés Indians refer to themselves as *bāsa*, true people or people like us, a category from which foreign Indians and white people are excluded. Gow (1991) reports how the Piro call themselves *gente*, persons/people, in opposition to wild Indians and gringos, who do not know how to live properly. According to Andrew Gray (1996), the Arakmbut word closest to human is *arakmbut*. Terence Turner maintains that 'the society of the Kayapo is conceived as coinciding with the category of the fully human' and 'non-Gê Indians and Brazilians ... are not conceived as belonging in the same level of humanity as that of the Kayapo' (1993: 58). The Tupi-Guarani Araweté, according to Viveiros de Castro (1992), do not denominate themselves by any descriptive ethnonym, using instead the form *bide*, human beings/we/ people. Anne Christine Taylor (forthcoming) states that the Jivaroans refer to themselves as *shuar*, or persons. While examples of this kind abound in the literature, I wish to point out that the use of the terms 'human' and 'people' to translate indigenous self-designations is problematic for two reasons. First of all, it assumes a correspondence between the indigenous concept of humanity and that of the

⁹ This term is used in opposition to '*nawa*', beings who are not considered human, but more often the Sharanahua use '*noko kaifo*', 'our people'. Siskind, J. 1973. *To hunt in the morning*. New York: Oxford University Press. See also Erikson. Erikson, P. 1986. Altérité, tatouage et antropophagie chez les Pano: la belliqueuse quête de soi. *Journal de la Société des Americanistes* 72, 185-209.

anthropologist, and Viveiros de Castro's discussion of humanity as a subject position in the perspectivist philosophy of Amazonian peoples puts this correspondence in serious doubt. As he rightly points out, 'the Amerindian words which are usually translated as "human being" ... function (pragmatically when not syntactically) less as nouns than as pronouns', we/us rather than 'people', which accounts for the variability of indigenous categories of identity (1998a: 473). Secondly, the use of the word 'human', loaded with essentialist connotations, is especially misleading because most of the authors referred to above explain, without necessarily referring to perspectivism, that the condition to which it refers is better understood in terms of behaviour than of essence. As was mentioned, throughout Amazonia, identity is thought to be to a great extent performative, and this also applies to humanity: to be *huni kuin*, *bide* or Piro is tied in an important sense to behaviour. Consequently, anyone can, in time, and through his or her actions, become a proper Piro, Cashinahua and so forth. Once it is clear that what is at stake is not humanity as an essential property but proper behaviour, indigenous assertions appear for what they are, that is, repudiations of customs that differ from their own, and do not exclude in absolute sense other people. Caiuby Novaes describes how the Bororo self-denomination *boe* 'can be translated as person, human being' and adds that 'in this sense all non-*boe* are left out of this category' (1997: 51). Nevertheless, she stresses that although the Bororo may be ethnocentric at the level of their values, this does not stop them from appreciating the 'achievements and failures' of other population segments and from treating them as human (1997: 51). These assessments produce an adjustment in their self-image, which they see reflected in the mirror that are the others. Caiuby Novaes' discussion supports my suggestion that these statements should not be understood as definitive exclusions but as relational and mutable. It also reminds us that identity as self-image is always relational, not just in Amazonia, and is transformed by relationships with any other which projects back a different image to the original subject. Bearing in mind that identity is established in this play of mirrors, I now turn to the puzzle of Ese Ejja statements.

The almost universal fact that Amazonian people consider themselves as the models of proper behaviour does not seem to apply to the Ese Ejja. At first, I found this very disconcerting and difficult to accept, which is probably why I felt the need to investigate the matter further.

The Ese Ejja are not people

I had only been in the village of Portachuelo for a month or so when, one morning, standing by the river, I saw a canoe coming down stream in the distance; I turned to an Ese Ejja girl who was standing next to me and, showing off my newly acquired vocabulary, I said: 'Ese Ejja bisheje yecaje', 'Ese Ejja is/are coming down river by canoe.' The girl turned to me and, in Spanish, replied: 'No es Ese Ejja, es gente!' which I understood to mean: 'It isn't Ese Ejja, it is people.' Needless to say, I was slightly taken aback by that declaration. Soon I learned that the Ese Ejja refer to the Spanish-speaking Bolivians, as *dejja*, or *dejja nei*, which they translate in Spanish as *gente*, people, or rather, as I was to discover, good, proper people. In Ese Ejja, *nei* means very, as in very beautiful, very cold, but also true, proper. When I asked Peno, my oldest informant, what the difference was between Ese Ejja and *dejja*, he replied that, unlike *dejja*, Ese Ejja did not eat stewed or boiled food, they just roasted it; nor did they eat rice, or manioc, or tomatoes. When I pointed out that they did eat these things he replied: 'Yes, they do eat rice, but only these new ones, the young ones who are well civilised already. But before, they did not know rice, nor onions, nothing.' 'But now,' I went on somewhat pedantically, 'now, they do, don't they?' 'Of course, now they know everything, but before, no, and therefore they say that Ese Ejja don't eat onion, don't eat chilli, can't eat cumin, all that is spicy. On the other hand, *dejja* live well, they eat well, well prepared, and that is why they say it is not like Ese Ejja. That's how it is.' This discourse is repeated by young people, who distance themselves from the ancient ones, saying they did not wear clothes and they did not know proper food: they did not use salt. At the same time, some young men depicted the ancient people in a heroic light, as when Sehua, who was twenty-six, a Christian and a school teacher, told me the ancient ones were strong and big, because they did not eat salt: 'Salt makes you small.'

When I asked if an Ese Ejja could become *dejja*, Peno said: 'Of course. He can indeed. Learning everything well. One has to be like *gente*. And then *gente* don't say he is *chama* – the derogatory term by which the Bolivians refer to the Ese Ejja. These young men who have been in the army, they are *gente*. They are no longer like those before. That is how it is.' I asked whether young people were *gente* and he replied they were. He also told me how, nowadays, some young *dejja* girls want to marry the *paisanitos*, the little Indians. 'But before, no, it was not like this. They thought *chama* were like animals, but not anymore.' However, in spite of the recognition of the transformative power of behaviour, there is also a sense in which one is born *dejja* or Ese Ejja and my

informants were very clear about this. They were adamant that the child of a *dejja* man and of an Ese Ejja woman was *dejja*, but the son of an Ese Ejja man, was definitely Ese Ejja. In Chapter 6, I describe how for the Ese Ejja identity is both inherited and processual, which is consistent with the notion that although *dejja* are *dejja* and Ese Ejja are Ese Ejja, the latter can in time become like the former.

At first, I was shocked to discover that the Ese Ejja should say of themselves that they were not 'the true people' but, on second thoughts, I realised that it may simply have been a statement of difference: '*Dejja* are what we are not', 'they are *pia*', different. As a man called Santo told me: '*Dejja nei* are those who live in Riberalta, the mixed ones. Those are *dejja nei*. *Dejja nei* is like Bolivian.' Another man, Elico, said *dejja nei* were *campesinos*, peasants, they did not speak two languages, they did not have their own proper language.¹⁰ These statements suggest that the Ese Ejja see nationals as other, the nationals tell them they are not people, that they are *chama*, and on their part, the Ese Ejja appropriate the word as simply meaning what they are not. To themselves they remain the real 'we', 'Ese Ejja', and no self-debasement is implied, no doubt about their own respectability, and certainly none about their humanity. I should also add that, for the Bolivians, to say that Indians are not *gente*, does not necessarily mean they are not human, because in South American Spanish, *gente* does not always correspond exactly to the English people/humans/persons, but can convey a quality of being respectable, proper, good people, closer to the root of the English 'gentility' or 'gentry'.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that historically, indigenous people have been treated and represented as non- or sub-human.

I was reassured by the possibility of it being only a statement of difference. However, when I began to learn about the meaning of the word *dejja*, I had to reconsider the issue. *Dejja* also means man, or, more precisely, adult male Ese Ejja. More commonly, the words used for man are *cui-iji*, which literally means 'with penis', and *yahue*, which also means husband; these do not refer just to male Ese Ejja, but also to animals and spirits while *dejja* refers exclusively to humans. It is very commonly used in male personal names in conjunction with adjectives, as in: *Dejja Oshie* (White Man), *Dejja Ai* (Big Man), *Dejja O'o* (Tall Man); and, although other names, such as those taken

¹⁰ Alexiades reports that : 'Above all, the term *deja* or *deja nei* is used by the Ese Eja to describe all non-Ese Eja ... The category *dejja* appears to exist along a continuum ranging from *deja nisho* ['fake *deja*'] to *deja nei* ['real *deja*']. Alexiades, M.N. 1999. Ethnobotany of the Ese Eja: plants, health and change in an Amazonian society. Doctoral Thesis: City University of New York.

from animals, can be used for both sexes, a woman would *never* be called Dejja. Furthermore, it is used in expression describing men, such as *quea-dejja-tai*, ‘he is a stingy man’ – whereas a woman would be *quea-nishoui* – and *quea-dejja-tii*, ‘he is an old man’. Male children are not referred to as *dejja*, but sometimes as *dejja-shoi*, where *(e)shoi* is the generic term for children. Furthermore, the missionaries told me that the name Ese Ejja was a contraction of the expression ‘*ese (we) dejja (the men)*’. According to them, this was a clear sign that the Ese Ejja considered themselves a people of men and valued men more than women, but this struck me more of Christian fundamentalism than of indigenous ideology and I decided not to give too much weight to their explanation. Even if the etymology were correct, the value judgement attached to it is certainly misplaced. McCallum (1990) has described a very similar discourse among the Cashinahua, manifested in the expression *juni kuin*. Starting from the Cashinahua notion of human agency (of the gendered nature of inside and outside) and of the complementarity of men and women, she argues that *juni*, person, man, *kuin*, real, is better translated as ‘real people’, including men and women, because: ‘*Juni kuin* are male when seen from the outside, but amongst themselves they are men and women, true people all’ (1990: 418). The Ese Ejja do not voice the association of females with the inside and males with the outside, but nor do they attribute higher status to men than to women. Men and women do different things and both are equally necessary and valued.

The meanings of the word *dejja* confirmed beyond doubt my initial impression that the Ese Ejja were indeed denying themselves something: if not humanity, at least something to do with qualities associated with adult males such as strength and bravery. They appeared to be saying: ‘We are *dejja*, but they are very *dejja*’, to the point of denying that they were *dejja* at all. *Dejja* does not mean just what they are not; instead, it refers to some aspect of who they are. As I mentioned, there are historical reasons why they should be saying so, but these cannot be taken as the ultimate causes of this idea. As I have described, many other indigenous Amazonian peoples with similar histories have not developed the same discourse. In the next section, I show how the Ese Ejja behave like, and therefore become, *dejja* when they are amongst themselves and how they become ‘savages’ when confronted by Bolivians. This observation suggests that the issue of being ‘real people’ is a matter of perspective, rather than an absolute statement.

Being dejja

People often told me how, in the past, they used to kill Bolivians, but now they were afraid of them; they were embarrassed in their presence, they felt inferior, ignorant, poor, dirty and backward. At the same time, they emulated them. Over the last one hundred years, the Ese Ejja have gradually adopted their houses, their clothes, their weapons, their food and their sport, and the elders see the young ones as almost *dejja*, because they know how to live well. As I describe in Chapter 6, many people oppose marriages with *dejja*, however young ones express themselves in favour of such unions, and some adults claim that *dejja* are hard working and make good sons-in-law, while young Ese Ejja are lazy, and are only interested in playing football.

My description begins with the members of the household in which I lived in Portachuelo Bajo for the first nine months of my fieldwork, the Monje family, introduced in Chapter 1, but it extends to other individuals and families from both Bajo and Alto. Moreover, I, as anthropologist and as apprentice Ese Ejja, am included in many of the descriptions, because my presence was often a catalyst for some of the choices people made around me. On some occasions, their reactions to me, as other *par excellence*, gave me insights into general ideas about identity and otherness. Inevitably, my descriptions are biased towards women, whose activities I shared and with whom I had more intimate relationships.

My family are a perfect example of the desire to be like *dejja*, and I have no doubt that the long residence with them affected my understanding of the Ese Ejja in this respect, but they are not an exception, because other households, especially those of bilingual schoolteachers, showed similar behaviour. In my description, I focus on their everyday rituals of being like *dejja*, particularly in the preparation and the consumption of food. These descriptions are significant in view of the performative notion of identity I found among the Ese Ejja. This significance was brought to my attention in a footnote of Michel Alexiades' thesis where he observes that *dejja* is a 'marker of a particular form of social alterity' but 'other indigenous groups are not considered *deja*... unless they have incorporated the ways of *deja*, such as the manner of speech, consumption habits and values' (1999: 174).

The Monje ate three times a day. They sat on benches, around a wooden table, and everyone had a plate, made of tin, plastic or glass, a metal spoon and a tin or plastic

mug. When I became acquainted with other families, I realised that many Ese Ejja did not use tables; they filled their plates and sat near the fire on a log or a bench. The first time I ate at my friend Qui Jehua's, her husband Chini showed some concern about the fact that there was no table and told his eldest son to bring me a bench so I could put my plate on it. In many houses the consumption of food was much less regimented than in ours; people did not have regular meals, but only after a successful hunting or fishing expedition; otherwise, the women just baked plantains or boiled rice, and family members helped themselves and went to eat outside, chatting to neighbours or passers by. But even in the absence of meat or fish, Ino endeavoured to produce elaborate dishes. In such cases, she would toast and cook noodles, *dejja* food, bought in the market, or from the missionaries or the schoolteachers, which she considered a substitute for meat. When there was only rice or plantains, even just for a day, she became sad and, one evening, after two days without meat or fish, she gave up cooking all together and we went to bed and ate baked plantains lying under our mosquito nets.

The morning meal consisted of fried, boiled or baked plantains and boiled rice, if there was any. Rice came from the market, although some people grew their own in the forest clearings. Sometimes, Ino or Quisaa boiled or fried green plantains and pounded them in the mortar, adding vegetable oil, to make a thick paste called *masaco*. Some people simply pounded baked plantains with a stone on a flat surface, flattening them into a kind of cakes, but the members of my family preferred the more elaborate, 'civilised' ways of preparing food. Their favourite way of cooking plantains was to slice and fry them, which depended on the availability of oil. Occasionally, when Dejjja Oshie or Sapa Ai went to Riberalta and bought flour and oil, Ino made small thick fried pancakes. Sometimes, she made a sweet rice soup, adding sugar and chocolate powder to it.

In Ino's kitchen, I had the strongest sense of her desire to be like *dejja*. When I first moved in with the Monje, at the beginning of November, the hearth was on the floor, like in all other Ese Ejja houses, but in January, when I returned from a trip to the capital, I found Dejjja Oshie had built a raised hearth and a tablecloth had appeared on the table. I felt this was done for my benefit, and rather than being touched, I felt frustrated, sensing that I was contributing to a process of change which I thought was forced upon them from the outside. This, of course, was the product of the widespread prejudice according to which unnecessary and harmful Western goods and practices are

forced upon indigenous people. As Hugh-Jones (1992) pointed out, this notion is based on the romantic idea that Indians are uninterested in, or even opposed to, economic and social change. My experience taught me otherwise, and the very fact that Ino had stepped forward and offered to take me in her house when I arrived was a sign of her desire for novelty.

When I went to Riberalta, she made a point of asking me to buy cheese, when many Ese Ejja found this white, smelly substance rather disgusting, and whenever she made a stew or a soup, she always added a salty condiment called '*Aji no moto*', also bought in the market, which unfortunately made all foods, whether catfish, or venison, or monkey, or cayman, taste the same, and left one terribly thirsty. In her cooking, she used onions and cumin, and she prepared salads with tomatoes and cucumber, which Dejja had started growing in his new garden, both of which were unusual food choices among the majority of the Ese Ejja, who never seemed to eat vegetables.¹¹ By the same logic, some foods were considered strong markers of Ese Ejja identity in opposition to *dejjaness*. Plantains, in particular baked ones, were associated with being Ese Ejja, in contrast with rice. They were consumed daily in any possible way, baked, boiled, fried, mashed, grated, green or ripe, and a drink was also made with them called *epohui*. Fermented *epohui*, *epohui sese*, sour, also called *eshashapohui*, was used by the shaman when calling the spirits of animals and of the dead. If someone did not eat many plantains and preferred rice, he or she was said to be almost *dejja*, as was the case of Alecio. His wife Noonina proudly told me how she ate four or five plantains at each meal, while she felt a bit sorry for her husband who only ate rice, 'like *dejja*'. The eggs of *cosi*, the armoured catfish were also considered to be an Ese Ejja dish, which other people did not eat. When Dejja Oshie saw me eating them and realised I actually liked them, he was surprised and told me that *dejja* and the gringos, the missionaries, never ate them.

At lunchtime, Ino insisted that we eat at 'twelve o'clock', even though she only had a vague idea of the time. This too was part of her being like a Bolivian. Most Ese Ejja did not have watches, and some of those who did, couldn't read them, but liked wearing them. When they told the time, it was generally with an approximation of between half an hour before and half an hour after the actual time, which in Portachuelo made very

¹¹ Unlike vegetables, fruit was consumed in large quantities, especially papaya, mango, guava, cherimoya, oranges and grapefruits. These were all cultivated in and around the village and in the gardens. Other fruit, collected in the forest included: chocolate, genipapo, physalis, *naja*, a pod with brown seeds covered by a white edible fur, and *lucuma*, among others.

little difference. But Ino often asked me what the time was and if it was near twelve she would say: 'It is time to eat' or 'It is time I had cooked lunch.' While I was there, a local politician distributed clocks bearing the symbol of his party among the villagers, and most people hung them in their houses, regardless of the fact that they couldn't read the time, and when the batteries ran out, most of the clocks remained motionless on the walls. More than a practical function, they had a symbolic and aesthetic one. They were a sign of 'civilisation', they contained in themselves the prestige associated to *dejja* and they were considered beautiful to look at. Each of these actions, sitting around the table, seasoning food, eating cheese and salads, eating regular meals at more or less specified times, repeated every day, created the impression of being more like *dejja*.

Another activity which marked the adoption of *dejja* ways and in which people engaged regularly was the visit to the medical dispensary, where Biumajja, the Ese Ejja nurse, administered remedies provided by the missionaries. The visitors were mostly young mothers with babies, who often suffered from fever and diarrhoea caused by parasites, but in many cases, the children were said to be weak from inadequate nutrition. This at least was the nurse's and the missionaries' diagnosis. The Ese Ejja nutrition and medicine are a delicate issue: they are the areas of their culture that are undergoing the deepest changes and I sometimes felt that they were stranded in between the old system of knowledge from which they were turning away, while they had not fully entered the new, because they could not afford it and because it did not always work, as when witchcraft was involved, in which cases they reverted to the old ways. With hindsight I realise that the old-new opposition is too rigid, but the fact remains that illness and the possibility of death were a central concern and the activities of the nurse attracted attention of both the sick and the healthy, and there was always someone standing by the dispensary, looking in through the mesh of the windows. Moreover, the two-way radio was kept in the dispensary. The radio was switched on three times a day, when CIRABO transmitted information to the communities and people from different villages could communicate. This being the only means of communication with the outside world, crowds formed every time someone was talking, and the half heard and half understood news went to fuel the daily gossip.

Among the *dejja* customs adopted by the Ese Ejja, a privileged place is occupied by sport. Over twenty or thirty years, the Ese Ejja in Portachuelo became very passionate football players and during my stay, informal games were played every day, by both

men and women, in preparation for the formal ones which were a weekly occurrence. Formal matches between Alto and Bajo were highly ritualised events, which began with a written invitation from the President of the football organisation of either to its opposite equivalent. The letters, written in Spanish, were very formal in tone and they set the date, the time and the place for the encounter; they were delivered several days in advance and required an oral or written reply. The teams wore strips, generally provided by local politicians in search of votes. These matches often ended up in fights, or they were talked about as if they would. Several times a year, tournaments were played involving a number of teams: Alto's 'The Strongest' and Bajo's 'Bolivar',¹² but also Medio's 'Horizonte' and the school-teachers' team. The winners of the tournaments received trophies, jealously kept in designated places, for everyone to admire: in Portachuelo Bajo in the old church, which also housed the television set and where official meetings were held; in Alto, in a newly built brick house, part of a rice-processing project that was never completed. The winnowing machine never arrived, but a large sign with the name of the President of Bolivia and the slogan: 'Working together for the future of Bolivia' made a very impressive appearance outside the house, which was used for meetings, for storing materials and a small electricity generator.

In 1983, the SIL missionaries wrote in their *Culture Notes*: '[the Ese Ejja] don't have the competitive spirit Americans and Bolivians have. They feel inferior and are afraid to be aggressive for fear of hurting the other person and causing them to be angry with them' (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 111). The missionaries were mistaken as to the lack of competitive spirit, but not as to the fear of causing another to be angry. On the pitch, I observed a great deal of competitiveness, both in men and in women, who took the game very seriously. They certainly played to win, but, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the desire for victory was offset by the aspiration to peaceful living, because flagrant victories always caused bad temper and dissatisfaction and often degenerated into physical fights. In fact, while they copied most of the mannerisms of football seen in Riberalta or on television such as the poses of the goalkeepers, the expressions of the defence when they form a barrier, the arms movements of the linesmen and of the referee, one obvious exception was the exhilaration which normally follows a goal. No jumping, no hugging, and no bowing to the fans: after a goal, the players resumed the game with very stern looks on their faces. This contradiction became apparent in the

¹² The names of the teams based in La Paz.



Plate 11. Women's football team

attitudes towards scores. There was no doubt that each team tried to score more than the other, but the supporters' comments seemed to indicate otherwise. Whenever I arrived at a match and I asked what the score was, if there was only one point of difference, the person I asked invariably replied by telling me how many goals were needed to equalise. 'Four-three. They need just one more.' At first, I interpreted this as an outright desire for even results, but, when I started playing myself, I realised that, while a victory was what is aspired to, a draw was more desirable because it eliminated the chance of further violence, of abuses, sorcery threats and fights. This is consistent with the general tendency to avoid confrontation observed in other contexts.

So far I have described how the Ese Ejja have absorbed *dejja* manners, which is why they can say of themselves that they are almost *dejja*. In the final section of this chapter, I describe how, face to face with *dejja*, the Ese Ejja cease to be like Bolivians and conform to the stereotypical image of the wild Indian, by which they are known among non-indigenous people. In such situations of direct confrontation, the Ese Ejja's self-image is altered and so is their own perception of Bolivians, who cease to be seen as models, and are attributed with a series of negative qualities, contrasted with the values upheld by the Ese Ejja. This twist explains the contradictory opinions displayed in the desire to be like *dejja* and the fear and dislike of them. This contradiction is apparent in the way people talk about the life in Portachuelo in contrast to that in Riberalta.

As I described in Chapter 3, the Ese Ejja ideal of life is that of tranquillity, a condition mentioned when comparing the village with the town. In Portachuelo one lives *queabihui*, happily, because there is no scarcity of food, because one can always go and fish, hunt or collect fruits in the forest, but also because one is surrounded by one's kin who will always provide for each other in case of need. People also stress that, in Portachuelo as a whole, there are no dangers from aggressive Bolivians, there are neither policemen nor soldiers, who are called *dejjamase*, bad men, nor are there *maliantes*, (Sp.) criminals. Except for when they visit the Swiss Evangelical Mission, where they receive medical treatment and some attend Bible courses, the Ese Ejja in town are in danger of being mistreated, and of starving, if for some reason they are obliged to reside there for a long period of time, as was the case of those who worked for CIRABO for several months. The few Ese Ejja who reside semi-permanently in Riberalta live on the muddy banks of the river, 'eating rubbish' as Ino often said. They are ostracised by the rest of the group and even by their own kin. In fact, it is as if they

hardly existed, as I learned when I was told that there were no Ese Ejja in Riberalta, only to discover later that several people had relatives there, but they were ashamed of them. Others simply scorn them, as I observed on a trip downriver. As the boat slid past the rickety encampment just outside the town, Biumajja and his wife turned to me and shouted: 'Look, Issa, there are tourists!' and everyone laughed.

Face to face with Bolivians

In Portachuelo, the main interaction between Ese Ejja and *dejja* is through the schoolteachers and through the Tacana of Medio, whose status shifts between *dejja* and *indígena*. Bolivian schoolteachers have little contact with the majority of the adults in the village, who refuse to attend parents' meetings and have to be forced to participate in the construction work required at the beginning of every year to render the teachers' houses habitable. The teachers often complain about the unfriendly and uncooperative nature of the *chama* and they insist that they are lazy and wild. They say they have no desire to improve themselves and they are selfish towards their children when they take them away from the school in the dry season, when they move to the beaches. But, while they see their job as a Sisyphean task, nevertheless they try to instil their discipline into the pupils as best as they can, through quasi-martial drills.

In Bolivia, a strong patriotic rhetoric surrounds schools: the Day of the Student and the Day of the Teacher are school holidays, in which the progress of the nation is celebrated and the diligence of the pupils is praised as a sacrifice to the country. A martial air pervades many school activities: every day, children are assembled at eight in the morning in front of the school for the hoisting of the national and regional flags, while the national anthem is sung as everyone stands to attention. One of the teachers presides over the ceremony, ringing the bell to call the students and shouting at them to get in to lines according to their grade. Ese Ejja children sing half-heartedly, many do not understand the words, and teachers shout at them to sing louder and 'with more patriotism'. Once a month, children should perform the *acto cívico*, the civic performance, consisting of series of patriotic songs, readings and recitals but Ese Ejja pupils never take an active part, letting their Tacana peers do the performing. The rhetoric reaches its climax when the pupils are asked to sing the 'Himno al mar', the hymn to the sea. Over the last two centuries, Bolivia lost large portions of its territory to Brazil, Chile and Peru, but the loss the Bolivians regret the most is that of the 'Litoral', when in 1884 the country became landlocked and its Pacific coast was taken by Chile.



Plate 12. Morning assembly

Never in my life have I witnessed anything more incongruous than small Amazonian children pledging their lives to the recovery of the sea which they have never seen and probably never will.

Ese Ejja children only go to school for the first three or four years and very few reach the seventh, which is the highest grade available in the village. To date, the only Ese Ejja who have found employment as a result of schooling are the young men who have attended the indigenous bilingual teachers project, a course which in practice allows them to teach in their own community, but nowhere else. On the whole, Ese Ejja children perform poorly in school, and one of the reasons for this is the great mistrust that their parents have for the institution. In the early 1980s, the SIL missionaries wrote that the Ese Ejja opposed the school and thought their children should be paid by the government to attend (Shoemaker et al. 1983). This attitude is still present today, and adults say schoolteachers owe their salaries to the children because, were it not for them, they would be out of a job: therefore, the teachers themselves should pay their pupils. Bolivian teachers, on the other hand, say parents are reluctant to send their children to school because the Ese Ejja are envious and they do not want their children to become better than them. This interpretation would be plausible if adults thought schooling was of any use and had the power to improve people, but my impression was that many, especially women, perceived it as an utterly useless imposition. On this matter opinions were not homogeneous and some saw the benefits of learning to read and write, but those were mainly the ones who had a member of their close kin group involved in the bilingual programme. Yet, even Ino, whose son was a teacher, was reluctant to send her youngest daughter Cuocuo to school, because she wouldn't have anyone to keep her company and help her at home. Those who have no connection with bilingual teachers are indeed envious of their salaries and tend to say that they are incapable of teaching. Some even say Ese Ejja teachers are useless and only the Bolivians can teach properly. The old Penó, for example, told me how the Ese Ejja did not teach children how to behave, whereas the Spanish speakers taught 'how to greet properly, how to respect the house and the *chaco*', the garden.

All the same, the general feeling towards Bolivian teachers is one of mistrust, but people also rely on them for desirable goods, as they sell foodstuff in exchange for forest meat, fish or chickens. When this happens, people become very excited and they rush to buy tinned fish, rice and especially sweets, and for a day or two one can see

children and adults wandering around with lollypops stuck in their mouths or chewing gum with great satisfaction. But when the rush is over, people start to complain that the teachers are stingy, and their goods are too expensive, which is true because they sell them at twice or three times the price they pay in the town. The same happens with the merchants who sail up the Beni selling goods to the isolated communities. They ask exorbitant prices, but they sell very desirable things, such as biscuits, sweet fizzy drinks and sometimes clothes, as well as rice, pasta, salt, sugar, oil and alcohol. To me, the exchanges seemed ludicrously unfair, as a sack of one hundred grapefruits was exchanged for a few packets of sweet popcorn, but I suspect that the Ese Ejja sellers thought it fair because of the value they placed on the exotic goods.¹³

Relatively frequent occasions for coming into contact with non-Ese Ejja were football matches, when foreign teams were invited to play in Portachuelo or when home teams played away. On these occasions, the contact with the adversaries was minimal and the differences between Bolivians and Ese Ejja became evident. The most striking differences could be observed in the supporting crowds: on the Bolivian side there was excited cheering, shouting and insulting, especially on the part of the women, who became fantastically creative and daring in shouting abuse at players and referees; the Ese Ejja crowd on the other side sat in absolute silence. Mothers nursed their children and watched as if only mildly interested in the event. Nevertheless, away games caused much excitement, as I observed on a number of occasions during a tournament that took place in the mestizo community of Bella Flor, one hour upriver by boat from Portachuelo. The excitement built up in the morning, as young wives and sisters of the players cooked food for the journey and an animated crowd piled in a boat and set off for the venue. Towards the end of the journey though, a mounting dread took over the excitement: the fear and the embarrassment of being confronted with *dejja*. On leaving the boat on the riverbank and walking towards the village where the event took place, people became progressively quieter. When they arrived at the pitch, an expanse of grass by the side of a dusty road, surrounded by a few thatched houses, they found a corner under a tree and sat quietly, trying to avoid any interaction with *dejja*. One of the attractions of these occasions were the sweet ice lollies which entrepreneurial locals

¹³ For an in-depth discussion of the irresistible attraction of foreign goods for Amazonian people see Hugh-Jones Hugh-Jones, S. 1992. Yesterday's luxuries, tomorrow's commodities. Business and barter in northwest Amazonia. In *Barter, exchange and value. An anthropological approach* (eds) S. Hugh-Jones & C. Humphrey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. and also Taylor. Taylor, A.C. 1981. God-wealth. The Achuar and the missions. In *Cultural transformations and ethnicity in modern Ecuador* (ed.) N.E. Whitten. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press.

brought in large polystyrene boxes, which the Ese Ejja relished. But when I offered to buy some for a group of girls, they categorically refused to go and buy them saying they felt *queabicho*, ashamed, because there were so many *dejja*, *quiadejjahuiso*.

The other *dejja* which figure in the Ese Ejja everyday experience are the Tacana. The Tacana of Portachuelo Medio are part of a recognized indigenous group, but they are often referred to as *dejja* in casual conversation, although when probed, the Ese Ejja say they are 'indigenous people like us'. This is because, with the exception of few elders, the Tacana are monolingual Spanish speakers; they have closer links with the town and they consider themselves fully 'civilized'. They have more money, they wear better clothes, they eat around tables, they have birth and marriage certificates and they own bicycles. The Tacana call the Ese Ejja *paisanos*, they say they are *salvajes*, savages, by contrast with themselves who are *gente buena*, good, respectable people. The relations between Ese Ejja and Tacana range from avoidance to outright hostility, and only in a few cases they become friendly, as in the rare instances of mixed marriages.

Occasionally, when drinking parties occur, men from Medio may mix with Ese Ejja men, but they both prefer drinking amongst themselves. The drinking camaraderie is never extended to activities such as hunting or fishing, and many failed attempts by outsiders to make them work together at communal projects confirm it. Ese Ejja football teams play against Tacana teams, but they never play on the same side. These games heighten the normally unspoken hostility and the Ese Ejja often accuse the Tacana of cheating and bullying.

Another instance in which the two groups come in close contact are the trips to Riberalta, when members of both travel on the same boat. During these trips, people, particularly women, do not mingle, but divide the cramped deck in clearly defined spaces. Ese Ejja women sit at the back with their babies and children, next to the hot and noisy engine; they nurse, eat, delouse each other or just sit and stare into the void with a resigned look. Tacana women sit in the middle, doing more or less the same, but they also talk, since the noise of the engine is not so deafening there. On the whole they look much more at ease, confident enough to take up as much space as they like, while the Ese Ejja seem to want to disappear in the darkness of the rear. The men, Ese Ejja and Tacana, stand by the tiller, sit on the prow or lie on the roof.

Ese Ejja in town

The knowledge of *dejja* is also constructed during these fortnightly, or sometimes, weekly trips to Riberalta. The town exercises a strong attraction, particularly on young people, but it is also a source of fear, because the older Ese Ejja say *dejja*, and the police in particular, want to kill them and they can do so with impunity if one is found without identity papers, which few of them have. I have never heard of such incidents but I would not be surprised if some Ese Ejja had been killed by the police in the recent past. Certainly it was the case at the height of the rubber industry, when indigenous people were sold as slaves or hunted as game for sport. I have often heard from Bolivians how Nicholas Suarez, rubber magnate and local hero, at the end of the nineteenth century, in revenge for an assault on his brother Gregorio by Caripuna Indians, used to entertain himself and his guests with hunting parties, in which Indians were killed.¹⁴ Yet, the Ese Ejja never mention hardship related to the rubber industry: it may be that, thanks to scattered living and constant movement, they escaped enslavement to some extent, but it may also be a case of selective memory. Father Álvarez refers to the rubber era as a time when Ese Ejja were kidnapped from Peru, to be sold on the market in Riberalta, yet nobody in Portachuelo talks about slave labour. Only once, Sehua, the young man who maintained the ancient people were strong because they did not eat salt, told me how, when he was *católico*, that is, before he became Evangelical Christian, he used to hate *dejja* because his father and grandfather had taught him to, because they had worked for them as slaves, *sosemá*, for nothing. But now that he was *creyente*, believer (meaning Evangelical), he did not hate them any longer.

In Riberalta, the Ese Ejja stand out in the crowd of *mestizos* who inhabit the town. What follows is a short description of the history of the town and of the composition of its population. Riberalta was officially founded in 1894, at the height of the rubber boom, and in the space of two decades it became the centre of the regional rubber industry (see Becerra Casanovas 1984). According to the scant records that exist, at that time there were no Ese Ejja living in this region, but as I mentioned, some were captured in Peru to be sold on the flourishing slave market of Riberalta (Álvarez Fernández 1998a). After the end of the second rubber boom during World War Two, Riberalta's population of a few thousands rose tremendously, when tens of thousands of unemployed rubber-

¹⁴ The killing of Gregorio Suarez is described by Valerie Fifer. Fifer, V.J. 1970. The empire builders. A history of the Bolivian rubber boom and the rise of the house of Suárez. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 2, 113-146.

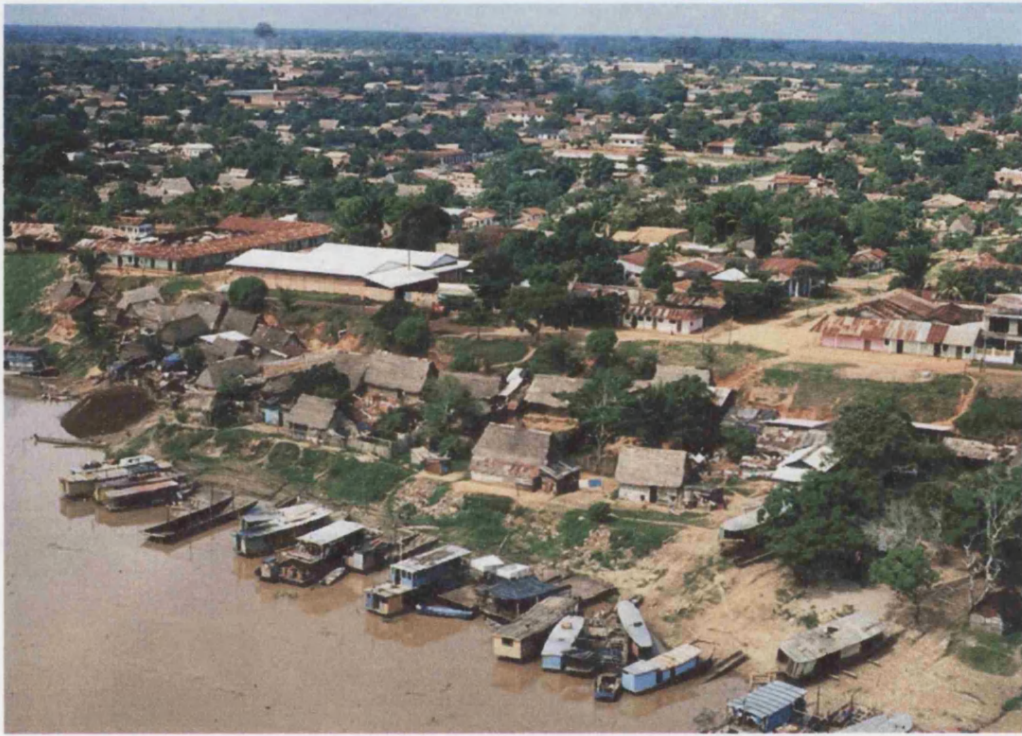


Plate 13. Riberalta (by Lois Jammes, courtesy of Sjoerd Mayer)

tappers were forced to move closer to the town. This caused a sprawl of *barrios*, with no services of any sort and creating a rural proletariat ready for exploitation in the Brazil nut industry, the only remaining industry in the region – timber being comparatively marginal. While the centre of the town counts only a few thousand inhabitants, when all the surrounding *barrios* are taken into account, the population rises to around seventy thousand, depending on the season. The wealthy inhabitants of the town are a considerable number of Japanese immigrants who moved to the region at the turn of the twentieth century, and became shopkeepers, technicians, lawyers and doctors. Furthermore, there is a white upper class of landowners and timber barons, originating from the southern region of Santa Cruz, but also from Germany, Switzerland and Italy, who barricade themselves in their mansions and are seldom seen around the town. There are also a number of petty traders who come from the Andean and sub-Andean regions, mainly from the valleys of Cochabamba. A large part of the population consists of military men, since Riberalta prides itself of having a naval base, an infantry regiment and an air force base – although the airstrip is little more than a muddy field – and the heavy military presence contributes to the Ese Ejja's fears of the town. The only people the Ese Ejja interact with are the Andean traders in the market, but even these encounters are kept to a minimum.

When they reach Riberalta, they moor the boat on the bank of the river, away from the official port, where they are less likely to be charged a landing tax – although inspectors have started to climb down the steep banks to the Ese Ejja mooring for this purpose. When they arrive, those who have brought plantains, bananas, sugarcane and occasionally papaya and grapefruits, go to the market in search of a buyer, who takes the bulk for a low price. Some sell directly, by piling their fruit on the pavement of the busy road that runs along the market. During the dry months, camps are set up on the hard mud on the banks of the river; shelters are built with branches and bits of scrap metal and covered with tarpaulin, rags and straw mats. The cover reaches the floor, leaving the ends of the hut open; fires are lit for cooking and, for most of the day, people lie inside the shelters. Women sit and chat, they look after babies, they finish weaving the mats they have brought for sale and wait for the men to come back from their business. When they are ready to sell their mats, they wander in groups of three or four around the only part of the town they know: the market. I once joined a group of women and discovered they had never been to the town square, which is only two blocks away from the market and is the centre of the urban social life. There is the post

office, the public telephone company, the most popular restaurants, two ice-cream parlours, the *Club Social* and the newly built monumental cathedral, none of which is of any significance for the Ese Ejja. I took the group of women to the shop of an acquaintance, who bought one of the mats, but I could see that they were terribly uneasy and I suspect they never went again.

Trips to the town reveal the different ways in which Ese Ejja men and women relate to *dejja* and to the dangers that come from the outside. Town is a dangerous place as opposed to the safety offered by the village, but it is also the source of desirable goods such as food, clothing and medicine; in this sense it is homologous to the forest. This observation resonates with Joanna Overing's argument about the Piaroa's attitudes towards hunting and shopping in the market (1992). But for the Ese Ejja, wandering in the market and the forest are not so much pleasurable experiences, as is the case for the Piaroa, as dangerous activities. Men are more confident in the forest and venture there alone, when they go hunting, in the same way that they are more likely to engage in contact with *dejja*; women on the other hand, never go to the forest or around town on their own. Occasionally, young men go to bars, where they buy beer amongst *dejja* and it is obvious that these expeditions are a male domain. The gendered nature of the relations with the outside world has been observed in other instances in Amazonia, by McCallum (1997) and Gray (1996) for example, and the Ese Ejja are no exception. Men are more confident than women in engaging in *dejja* life: they tend to be more educated, they are more proficient in Spanish, they are the only ones who attended the three-year teachers' course, they wear *dejja* clothes, and are more curious about the world outside.

When in town, Ese Ejja women always stay in a group, with other women and children and preferably a man, but men wander around on their own, especially on their way to the offices of CIRABO or to the Swiss Evangelical Mission. Children and teenagers walk in gangs, like they do in the forest. They have hardly any contact with non-Ese Ejja, except with sellers in the market when they want to buy or to be given something for free. When they have a few coins, they buy sweets, especially chewing gum, and distribute them among their friends. They are particularly fond of the ones that come with transferable pictures inside, which they proceed to plaster themselves with. As I have mentioned, the Ese Ejja stand out amongst the town's people: they are smaller in size, even than the average Bolivian, they are fair skinned and their eyes and hair tend to be lighter. Sometimes women and children wear no shoes, their clothes are old and

stained and women carry babies strapped to their sides instead of pushing prams. They walk slowly and carefully, in single file like they do in the forest. It is their attitude more than anything else that makes them stand out and reinforces the prejudices that town's people have about them. They walk cautiously, in little bands, they stand in corners and look at the hustle and bustle around as if they did not belong in it, as if they had just landed from another planet. Standing in corners, people exchange comments in Ese Ejja under their breath; they look into houses if a television is on, and they stare. They hardly speak to anyone, they are ashamed of doing so; they are afraid of being ridiculed and harassed. One day, I accompanied my friend Bajjima to the hospital for an antenatal scan. Back in Portachuelo, she often spoke to me in Spanish, she had been to school and she was one of the most eloquent of the young women; but in front of the doctor and the nurse, she did not utter a word and let me talk. In any case, I had a strong sense that the doctor was not talking to her directly; there was an expectation that she wouldn't have understood and I, a *gringa*, probably from the Swiss Evangelical Mission, was there to speak for her.

On the whole, the Ese Ejja are reluctant to engage in any permanent contact with non-Ese Ejja. They imitate them, in clothing, in football, in music, in food, but they prefer to observe them from afar. Observing from the outside is a useful a metaphor for the Ese Ejja attitude towards Bolivians: they are attracted to them, but they are afraid of getting too close, for fear of being harmed. This attitude was brought to my attention every time the Tacana or the schoolteachers had parties in Portachuelo: men and women, adults and children, Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals, gathered outside the house where the party was held, and watched through the gaps in the adobe walls all night. Being inside the house was a curious experience because I couldn't see out but I could feel dozens of eyes pointed at me and hear the odd whispered comment and the occasional giggle. If it was a teachers' party, Ese Ejja schoolteachers would participate, dragging their reluctant wives along, but since the majority said they were Christians, they would only stay for the food, but wouldn't drink or dance; they would leave as soon as possible and join the crowd of the onlookers outside.

Strategically avoiding confrontation

The descriptions given above illustrate how the relationship with Bolivian nationals is characterised by a mixture of fear, shame and desire to emulate. Fear is the sentiment that characterises all relations outside the group of closest kin. Outsiders are always

seen as potentially dangerous. The world of the Ese Ejja is full of visible and invisible dangers and measures must be taken to avoid them. These dangers are brought by enemies, by non-kin, by other indigenous peoples, by nationals and by spirits, who are always ready to harm one, out of pure greed, out of envy or in revenge. The main Ese Ejja strategy when dealing with these dangers is that of avoiding direct confrontation, removing oneself from the anger and the envy of an enemy. This attitude characterises relationships inside the village as much as those with outsiders, be they *dejja* or spirits. Men seldom fight, except when they get drunk, and people never insult each other directly but always through gossip. Accusations are never made face to face, but always through the grapevine; when people become seriously angry, they resort to sorcery, but these attacks are never talked about openly. Instead, people talk and either the gossip is dismissed after a while or, in extreme cases, one of the parties involved in the dispute permanently leaves the village. During my stay, I became aware of two such cases. One was that of Antenor, mentioned in Chapter 3, who, not only had been accused of abusing his position of *Capitán* and of stealing the community's money, but had also fallen out with the missionaries and eventually left Portachuelo to found another community. A less dramatic departure was that of an old woman, who was constantly accused of practicing sorcery, who left to go and live with her relatives in Peru, because she couldn't stand the gossip. I am told she is now back in Portachuelo, a couple of years later. Perhaps she has suffered the same treatment in Sonene or Palma Real.

As far as spirits are concerned, people try not to anger them by observing the appropriate behaviour with regards to food consumption and sex, and they go to great lengths to avoid attracting their attention. Babies are particularly vulnerable to attacks from spirits and when a baby is born, no one pays attention to it and even the mother pretends not to care; this is because, were the spirits to think that it was precious, they would steal it. The Shoemakers report a similar attitude towards the spirits that are making a person sick.

By showing no outward concern but contempt for the sick one, they 'convince' the evil spirit that his desire to cause them fright, sadness or pain for breaking some taboo is of no avail. A grieving loved one may be forced to leave the side of a loved one because he or she insists on crying or wailing due to lack of self control (1983: 243).

The strategic avoidance of Bolivians takes this same form of self-deprecation. One day, I was visiting a friend who is married to a bilingual schoolteacher and is better off than most Ese Ejja. One of the Bolivian schoolteachers appeared outside her house and, through the bamboo wall, asked her to borrow some soap. My friend, who had been very chatty until then, replied in a pitiful voice: 'No teacher! I am a poor poor Indian, don't have nothing', even distorting her Spanish in which she was quite proficient. The teacher left without insisting. On another occasion, I heard Ese Ejja men in a meeting lamenting that they couldn't go and collect Brazil nuts because they were cowards and they were afraid of being killed by Bolivians. As Chini explained, 'if you go to the forest and you come across *dejja*, you must leave all that you have collected and hide, or he'll kill you.' Indeed, the Ese Ejja are reluctant to engage in this activity. Moreover, people refuse to take up official roles as representatives of the community outside by saying that they cannot speak Spanish and that they are afraid that if they went to meetings in town they would be killed. These examples show that when the Ese Ejja present themselves to the nationals as lazy, dirty, ignorant, poor and cowardly, picking up on an historical discourse, they do so to avoid any involvement with them. Thus they can keep at the margins of Bolivian society, and not be asked to participate in these dangerous relationships.

I once heard a woman say that she wore her most tattered clothes to go to the market so that the sellers would take pity of her and give her free food, but in general, people do not consciously implement this strategy in a calculated and detached manner. Most of the time, I was under the impression that they themselves bought into the discourse of their own inferiority, as it was clear from their characterisation of *dejja*. The Ese Ejja say Bolivians are educated and they are ignorant, that Bolivians own 'things', while they have nothing. One day, some girls came into the house I had recently occupied and, looking around at my few possessions, laughed saying I was not *dejja* because I did not have anything. The Ese Ejja often comment that Bolivians are clean and they are dirty – both in Bolivia and in Peru they have a reputation for being dirty river-people, and, on seeing pictures of my 'mother', Ino Tahua, who had accompanied me on a trip to Peru, people remarked that she looked like *dejja*, because she was so clean.

Other-becoming

One of the most striking aspects of the Ese Ejja attitude towards Bolivians is their desire to be like them in spite of their fear and mistrust. This contradiction constantly

reminded me the socio-cosmological process Viveiros de Castro describes as 'Other becoming' (1992: 1). Other-becoming is particularly apparent among the Araweté, who, according to the author, see themselves in the process of becoming what they are not.

Viveiros de Castro argues that non-dialectical societies such as those of the Tupi-Guarani family, experience a tension towards the exterior, towards the other, understood as a goal or a destiny. This 'passion for exteriority' (1992: 3) is maintained through the elimination of internal differences. This is not strictly the case among the Ese Ejja, who create difference, however fluid, in the distinction between territorial units and language groups (Chapter 3), and between *uapa*, cross, and *uapapojiana*, parallel relatives, as discussed in Chapter 6. However, in the encounter with Bolivians, these differences are being erased, even the kinship classification is being eroded, as when they say that *uapa* and *uapapojiana* are all *familia* and reduce them to a single category of 'cousins', and otherness is sought outside. In this sense, the Ese Ejja could be undergoing a historical change, which would explain the desire for new others, from outside the group.

But the parallel with the Araweté goes further. Living Araweté, Viveiros de Castro argues, see themselves as children in relation to the *Mai*, the cannibal celestial gods, who are like adults. In the beginning, the Araweté lived on earth together with the *Mai*, but a god was insulted by a woman, so he made the earth he was standing on rise up and with him went the *Mai*. *Bide*, the Araweté, were left behind and today they speak of achieving their full realisation through death and cannibalistic consumption by the *Mai*, who then become their spouses. The association of ancestry, otherness and enmity is also found among the Bolivian Yuquí, who refer to Bolivian nationals as '*abá*'. This word exists in other Tupi-Guarani languages and, according to Thierry Saignes, it refers to superior men as opposed to slaves (in Stearman 1989). The Yuquí claim that they descend from the first people on earth, who were *abá*; moreover, at death, the *biague* part of the dead person becomes an *abá*. This entity is highly feared and it has the power to cause sickness, death and other misfortunes: it is an archenemy. This logic of projecting the power of 'superior men' onto ancestors and foreign enemies, be they Bolivians, gringos or spirits, shows striking similarities with the one displayed in the Ese Ejja discourse about Bolivians as *dejja*. Ultimately, it is an admission of inferiority, but one that leaves open the possibility of recovering the lost power.

Viveiros de Castro describes how the Araweté are less interested in their relations with other living Araweté and more concerned with their future encounters with the cannibal gods in the sky, after death. The comparison with the Ese Ejja situation may appear farfetched, since the actors involved in the relationship of otherness are so different: gods in one case and living enemies in the other. It could be argued that Viveiros de Castro's argument refers to the cosmological level, while the problem of the Ese Ejja is a sociological one. But as Overing has pointed out, one cannot separate these two planes when dealing with Amazonian societies, as social rules and social structure 'cannot be clearly distinguished from cosmological rules and cosmological structure' (1981). Moreover, what I am interested in here is not in the sociological value of these categories, but the logic that can posit entities as enemies as well as the object of one's destiny. Like the Araweté, the Ese Ejja need others who are always potential enemies, but rather than looking at the dead and the gods, they look at living beings for their fateful other. Becoming like the enemy other is not achieved through death and cannibalism, but through practice and conviviality and in the process of 'civilisation'. This process in which they learn how to dress, eat, speak, marry like *dejja* is what characterises the present. In this sense, like the Araweté, the Ese Ejja are submitted to a 'centrifugal dynamic' to use Viveiros de Castro's words (1992: 3), whereby the tension is not towards the preservation or the reproduction of the group or of existing relations, rather it is that of becoming something else, which lays outside the boundaries of the group. So, while the nationals are feared and avoided, they are also talked about as if they were the Ese Ejja's destiny, as when young people are described as 'almost *gente*'. Jena, a twenty-six-year-old man, explained why he did not know how use bow and arrow: 'The ancient people did, but when we were young, and we were almost *gente*, we did not want to learn. Other indigenous people do, but we did not want to be harassed.' When speaking of the Ese Ejja who live in Infierno (Madre de Dios, Peru), Ejapa, who is in his fifties, told me they spoke Spanish most of the time: 'They are almost *gente*.' This transition is central to Ese Ejja sense of history, characterised by the process of civilisation discussed in the next chapter.

Play of mirrors

In discussing the position of the Bororo *vis-à-vis* the Brazilian State, other indigenous groups, namely the Xavante, and the Salesian missionaries, Caiuby Novaes maintains that:

Whenever a society focuses on another population segment, it simultaneously forms a self-image based on the way it perceives itself in the eyes of this other segment. It is as if the viewer (the original population) transforms the *other* (the other population) into a mirror in which it can see itself. Each other is a different mirror that reflects a different image of the original viewer. Given there are usually several population segments with which a society coexists and which transform into looking glasses, the original society ultimately forms several distinct self-images (1997: 45, italics in the text).

Seen in this light, the different attitudes observed among the Ese Ejja cease to seem contradictory. The metaphor of the play of mirrors is a useful tool to understand the multifaceted reality of the interethnic relations in the Amazonian context. In this play, so far, I have considered the Ese Ejja and the Bolivians, and partially, the Tacana. But three more groups must be taken into account: contemporary 'savage Indians', who project back an image of the 'savage ancestors', the missionaries and sympathetic outsiders such as anthropologists and political activists. These reflections are outlined below.

The Ese Ejja see themselves as 'almost civilised', some more than others, but not completely, neither wild nor tamed. However, they are adamant of the difference between their present condition and the absolute savagery they attribute to their ancestors. Most of my informants spoke of the distant past as 'long before' (Ese Ejja, *yahuajo nei*), which refers to the time prior to 'civilisation', when the ancient people were 'savage Indians' (Spanish, *indios bravos*), and as I mentioned before, they wore no clothes (Ese Ejja, *daquimá*), they did not eat salt and they did not know proper food. At that time, animals were still human. The ancient people were bigger and stronger, they were constantly at war, raiding each other's camps, and killing each other with arrows; they did not know *dejja*. I often heard people describe the time their grandfathers had been 'civilised' by the Bolivian soldiers and by the missionaries. The soldiers civilised them with their guns and many died. Penó said: 'My father used to tell me how we were before a man civilised us. Before, we killed people. We were the enemies of the people. We killed them with arrows, our weapons. The Bolivians civilised us, but many of them died. They fought wars.'

The present is characterised by a transition from 'savage' to 'civilised'. Now the Ese Ejja live in houses, they eat *dejja* food, they wear clothes but they are still *chama*. They think it would be good to be like *dejja*, but at the same time they do not seem to want to change their way of living: becoming *dejja* belongs to the future. The impression that they see themselves in the process of becoming like *dejja* is confirmed by the fact that sometimes the Ese Ejja describe themselves as being children, before the civilising encounter with the Bolivians. The word for 'to bring up a child' is *ehuoneji*, which also means 'to tame'. Alexiades recorded one of his informants saying that his ancestors had been tamed, *ehuoneji*, by *dejja* like he tamed spider monkeys (1999: 158).

Savagery is also an attribute of distant Indians referred to as *Iñapane* (sometimes *Iñapare* or *Inambare*). These live deep in the forest, they are big in stature and wander around naked, or only wearing bark cloth and they are ignorant of 'people' and of their ways. Peno told me the *Iñapane* were Araona, another Tacanean group.¹⁵ He told me they were bad, they had no houses, and they lived in a hole in the ground, like *se'ao*, *paca*. Chini, a man in his thirties, told me:

the *Iñapane* are savage Indians, they live where the river ends, at the headwaters of the Madidi, deep in the forest. They don't know metal tools and they make weapons with animal bones. The bones are very hard because they don't cook the animal, they eat it raw. They use teeth to make the points of arrows and they don't know fire. The *Iñapane* make very large bows; we can't bend them, but they are very strong. They have blowguns too and they eat people: they kill to eat, they don't know. They always hide. Not even helicopters can find them. People tried to find them, they left presents of sugar and salt and matches by their houses. They did not take them and never returned to their houses. They are very good marksmen; they know animals very well. Their houses are like those built by *yaji*, the collared peccary, with leaves going all the way down to the ground. This is how the house of the savage Indian is.

¹⁵ According to Gray, Gray, A. 1996. *Mythology, spirituality and history* (The Arakmbut of Amazonian Peru 1). Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books. the *Iñapari* may be a Tacanean people who live on the frontier between Bolivia and Peru on the banks of the Madre de Dios, but I have never met any, nor hear of them as an officially recognized group. Peter Gow suggests that, since the SIL established the *Inapari* spoke a language closely related to Piro, these may be the same people as the *Mashco-Piro* of the *Manu* (personal communication).

Then he told me a little about the ancient people: 'They did not know salt nor sugar; they did not plant rice nor plantains; they accompanied their food with palm hearts and they made fire by twisting a stick on a piece of wood and with cotton.' Jiojji Huo'o, a woman in her fifties living in Sonene said: 'Before God made us, my grandfather used to live at the headwaters of the Heath. He did not know people then. They wanted to know people and they came down.' She also said there were still naked natives, the Inambare, who did not want to know people, 'they are bad.'

While the nationals provide the Ese Ejja with a negative image of themselves, of their customs and of their way of life, their self-image changes when they see themselves in the eyes of the Evangelical missionaries. The Ese Ejja know the missionaries care about them and that they are offended by their mistreatment on the part of the Bolivians. The missionaries are hostile to the schoolteachers, to neighbouring settlers and to the Tacana, who are either Catholic (therefore not properly Christian according to the Evangelicals) or affiliated to other protestant Churches. The missionaries condemn the sinful life of the town and of the cities and contrast it with the peaceful and proper life of the village, especially the 'new life' that follows the acceptance of the Christian god. Therefore, in relation to the missionaries, the play of mirrors produces three images: that of the Christian, sober, monogamous Ese Ejja against, on the one hand, that of the Catholic, drunk, promiscuous Bolivian/Tacana and, on the other, that of the superstitious, unsaved, savage ancestor. But, as I have shown throughout the chapter, these identities are not fixed because, when confronted with *dejja*, the image of the *chama* Indian is associated with laziness and ignorance and Bolivianness with hard work, wealth and bravery.

Finally, over the last decades, the Ese Ejja have started to see themselves through yet another mirror, that is, that of the activists of the growing indigenous political movement, and of anthropologists. The presence of sympathetic outsiders has had a long-standing influence on indigenous people elsewhere, especially in Brazil, as described by Turner (1991a), Ramos (1991), Caiuby Novaes (1997) and McCallum, (1997) but also in Peru (Gray 1997). Elsewhere, indigenous people have been able to seize the opportunity offered by the foreign interest in their past and in what these strangers called their 'culture', and to use it for political ends. As the case of Turner and the Kayapo demonstrates, this depended largely on the commitment of specific individuals. Whether or not they were successful in manipulating foreign interest to

their advantage, indigenous people were encouraged to preserve their customs and to cherish their past. As I describe in the next chapter, the same phenomenon only began to develop in Bolivia in the late 1980s. No revival has taken place (yet) among the Ese Ejja, but the idea that they must preserve their *cultura* is voiced among young people (see also chapters 5 and 7). Clearly, sympathetic outsiders reflect yet another image to the Ese Ejja, not of the savage Indian, but of the brave, skilful, knowledgeable one. This image is not just a reflection, but also yet another foreign idea of how the Indians should be, which is forced upon them.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how the Ese Ejja see themselves in relation to Bolivians, and I have made some hypotheses about the statement that they are not the true people. This statement is interesting because it contradicts those of most Amazonian peoples described in the anthropological literature. I have discussed how these statements in themselves are open to misinterpretation, and how the boundaries that they refer to should not be taken as rigid and unchanging. I have explained that whether or not the Ese Ejja are denying their own humanity is a false problem, since they do not say so in relation to different others: what they are denying themselves is strength and prestige. This points to the historical dimension of the relationship as well as to the nature of Ese Ejja strategies to deal with danger. The Ese Ejja may have picked up on the Bolivian notion of their savagery and inferiority and use it as an excuse for not getting involved in dangerous relations, but this strategy is only part of the story. On another level they speak of themselves as becoming the enemy-other as when they say that young people are almost *gente*.

This discourse can be interpreted as a local version of the logic of other-becoming that characterises other Amazonian societies. The Ese Ejja see their enemies as their destiny, a notion often expressed by the Ese Ejja themselves, and they superimpose the superiority of distant ancestors, the ancient people, onto powerful foreigners. As I have shown, the association of the strength and power of ancestors with the power of the non-Indian enemies is also found in the language of the Yuquí people of central Bolivia, who refer to Bolivians (enemies) and ancestors (dangerous) by the same term, *abá*, supreme men (Stearman 1989). Furthermore, the language of the Yuquí echoes the statements of the Brazilian Araweté, who say they were left behind, forsaken by the superior beings, but whose destiny is to become like them after death, after being eaten

by them. Viveiros de Castro (1992) does not describe the relations of the Araweté to non-Indian people but provides another example of a people whose self-image is one of imperfection to be overcome by becoming like enemies/ancestors.¹⁶ As I have stated, comparisons between similar but different peoples can be unwarranted, but the existence of the Yuquí and the Araweté discourses supports the Ese Ejja challenge to the traditional 'ethnocentric' portrayal of Amazonian people.

Today, the Ese Ejja see the Bolivians as more knowledgeable and powerful and see themselves in the process of becoming like them, like children turning into more knowledgeable, powerful adults, nevertheless their feelings towards them remain ambivalent. Many people have taken on some aspects of *dejjaness*, such as their clothes, their houses, their weapons, their kinship terminology (with a tendency to merge the categories of cross and parallel cousins, as I discuss in Chapter 6), which suggests that they want to be like Bolivians. But, at the same time, *dejja* are still seen as enemies, as 'bad people' and undesirable spouses because they cannot speak Ese Ejja, they are violent and rude, and they are always ready to kill. This apparent contradiction is best understood through the metaphor of the play of mirrors in which self-image is based on the way a subject perceives itself in the eyes of an other subject, employed by Caiuby Novaes (1997). This approach suggests that the statement 'we are not the true people' cannot be taken in isolation as a sign of the Ese Ejja self-identity and self-deprecation, but as a marker of the relationship with *dejja*. In this chapter I have described how the relation is created and maintained at the local level; in the next chapter, I consider the issue historically, in the context of the Bolivian State.

¹⁶ Taylor reports that Jivaroans refer to all non-Indians as '*apachi*', grandfather or little father. Taylor, A.C. forthcoming. Sick of history. Contrasting regimes of historicity in the Upper Amazon. This may simply be because their first stable contacts with whites were with Catholic missionaries, who were called 'fathers' (the Ese Ejja called Alvarez, '*papa chii*', little father), and the author doesn't elaborate on the matter. But this evidence juxtaposed with the Ese Ejja, the Yuquí and the Araweté cases suggests that more comparative research is required on the relations between indigenous Amazonian people and ancestors.

5. Contrasting histories

As I have discussed, today the Ese Ejja in Portachuelo live in relative isolation from the national society and minimize the interaction with it, nevertheless they interact with it regularly, and some young men have become involved in national politics, albeit marginally. In this chapter, I consider the Ese Ejja sense of history and relate it to the official history of the Bolivian State. I discuss how, although the colonial and post-colonial discourse of savagery and civilisation had a strong influence on the Ese Ejja self-debasement, this cannot be viewed as a one-way relation. Instead, one must consider why the Ese Ejja themselves should have taken up their position. I argue that they have an interest in doing so, which arises from their own sense of history. I consider the reluctance of the Ese Ejja to participate in Indigenist political movements and argue that this is because Indigenist politics run counter to the Ese Ejja sense of being in history and to their social philosophy.

In Chapter 4, I gave an account of the local encounters between Ese Ejja and non-Ese Ejja, in Portachuelo, in the school, in the market, and in the streets of Riberalta, but the process that led to their self-identification as not the 'true people' *vis-à-vis* Bolivians cannot be understood solely at the local level in a temporal vacuum. It must be seen as a historical phenomenon. The objective of this description is to complete the picture presented so far, in order to understand how current ideas held by the Ese Ejja about themselves have developed, in the awareness that no indigenous culture can be understood as an isolated entity. In this respect, I agree with Stefano Varese who, writing about the indigenous people of the Peruvian *selva*, observes that:

It is in fact questionable how far the concept of isolated ethnic minorities really applies to other American or African countries or in any part of the Third World, and whether it is therefore possible to separate micro-regional analysis from the corresponding macro-historical analysis (1971: 116).

In this chapter, I explore the possibility that the statement that the Ese Ejja are not the 'true people', while partly the symptom of self-deprecation due to the absorption of the century-old discourse of the inferiority of Indians *vis-à-vis* the nationals, marks a shift in the Ese Ejja attitude towards Bolivians, from that of predators or prey, in the context of warfare, to that of peaceful co-residence, which creates sameness. In the next section,

I elaborate on the Ese Ejja sense of history referred to in the previous chapter, of being in the process of creating peaceful relations with Bolivians.

Here I follow the approach of Anne Christine Taylor (forthcoming) who analyses the contrasting ways of relating to the past in northwestern Amazonia, among the 'wild' Jivaroans, the 'tame' Quit chua and white colonists and argues that these different modes of constructing the past are in fact interdependent. However, my research to date has been concerned with the Ese Ejja and this is not an ethnography of non-indigenous Bolivians or State officials, therefore my analysis is skewed and I have little evidence of how the Ese Ejja sense of history may affect that of others. But, while the Ese Ejja do not write their history, State departments do, and, to present the official version of events, I draw largely on documents produced by the State. Between the Capital and the village, clearly missing are the histories of the Tacana people and of mestizos, who dwell between the forest and the town, and of the people of Riberalta.

Being in history

In Chapter 2, I gave an outsiders' view of Ese Ejja history as that of semi nomadic bands, once perhaps vassals of the Inca, who in the late nineteenth century roamed the rivers, terrorising more peaceful and 'civilised' Indians. In the twentieth century, they were pacified by missionaries and soldiers and settled to learn about civilisation. In Chapter 4, I introduced the insiders' view of history as a movement from the savagery of the ancestors to the civilisation of the young people, who are 'almost *dejja*', from the violent clashes with non-Indians to peaceful if not friendly relations with them.

For the Ese Ejja, this movement is not only metaphorical because the transition is also a spatial one: from deep in the forest, where they say 'savage' Indians still live, to the river and the village. Thus Alexiades states that: 'In a sense there is an overlay between history and landscape so that rivers flow across a time-space continuum' (1999: 380). I argue that in the Ese Ejja sense of history, space and time are collapsed and distance in time and in space come to coincide: the ancient people lived far away, up river, and they were left behind, both in time and space. The image of displacement is reproduced in personal histories that constantly refer to a movement downriver. Whenever the Ese Ejja speak of the ancient people, they locate them *yahuajo*, before (see Chapter 7), but also *biacua*, upriver. Their fathers and grandfathers travelled down the Tambopata, Madidi and Beni rivers towards their present location from the headwaters. And the Ese

Ejja who descended from the sky (Chapter 7) landed on a mountain, which is also upriver and, as Peno told me, the rope they used to descend still lies where it fell, after the jealous condor-woman bit it. Peno assured me that he had seen it still coiled up. Clearly, the mountainous landscape of the headwaters of the rivers is associated with the past, but the past has not disappeared and it still exists. This is consistent with the idea, for example, that the dead never really disappear but continue to live somewhere else, far away. The now, on the other hand, is here, in Portachuelo, between the savagery of the forest and civilisation, which is downriver, in the town.

Importantly, upriver and savagery are associated with a time of constant warfare, with other indigenous people, with *dejja* and with a host of cannibal powerful beings. The movement downriver and to settled life coincides with the end of violence and the beginning of the tranquil life. The Ese Ejja no longer wage wars and they are less threatened by enemies. Some seem to think they are less threatened by supernatural enemies too, who 'don't come to Portachuelo.' This condition is associated with being 'civilised' and becoming progressively like *dejja*. But the present position is also one of weakness expressed in terms of being inferior both to the Bolivians and to the ancestors. The ancient people were naked, they had no houses and they did not know salt, but they were strong and their weapons were invincible. Now, the Ese Ejja say they are weak, cowardly and vulnerable. This loss of strength and courage is also manifested in the shift in the use of the word *dejja* from themselves to the Bolivians, which expresses the Ese Ejja sense of their historical predicament. But the loss of strength is the price they are prepared to pay for a tranquil life.

Clearly, although these narratives resonate with the supposedly objective migratory patterns of many indigenous Amazonian people, driven to the more inhospitable headwater areas by the onslaught of white and mestizo colonists, and then moving back to the more fertile floodplains and the towns, they are based on very different constructions of history. However, the Ese Ejja did not develop this perception in a vacuum. While they were busy moving down river, away from savagery, the society around them formed ideas about them, imported philosophies from the old world and devised strategies to annihilate them, to render them innocuous, to convert them to Christianity and to 'civilisation'. In this sense, my hypothesis is that State policies, whether manifested in the brutality of soldiers or expressed through the preaching of missionaries and through the lessons of schoolteachers, found a fertile ground in the Ese

Ejja sense of history. In particular, I refer to the ideal of *mestizaje*, the possibility of transformation of Indians into citizens, through the acquisition of different practices, which characterised the post-colonial history and rhetoric of many Latin American countries.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, during my stay I could not elicit statements as to the exact meaning of *dejja*, as opposed to other terms used for men such as *yahue* or *cuiji*, but undoubtedly *dejja* refers to adult status, maturity and knowledge. This suggested that the Ese Ejja were attributing Bolivians a prestige which they were denying themselves. The loss of prestige and of self-esteem as a group in the encounter with powerful Whites and their ideology of civilisation is not an isolated phenomenon, but perhaps it has been given less attention in the ethnographic record than indigenous statements of uniqueness have. However, Stephen Kidd (1995), writing about the Enxet of Paraguay, provides a useful comparison. He reports how the Enxet ‘suffered a tremendous loss of prestige as they became aware of the “superiority” of the white man’ (1995: 50), and explains how the encounter with the Whites brought about a conflict in their value system, especially regarding prestige. The traditional Enxet leader, the *wese*, derived his prestige and his position from personal qualities such as ‘hunting ability, success in war, generosity and mystical power’ and ‘his leadership ... must be clearly divorced from all forms of coercion’ (1995: 51). But the prestige of the Whites rested on ownership and on the power of coercion. As the latter became dominant, the term *wese* was transformed; it came to be used for powerful white men and ceased to be used for Enxet leaders. This loss of prestige was epitomised in the statement: ‘The Enxet long ago were good people. They were not savages but powerful. Their name did not use to be Lengua’ (Kidd 2000: 52), Lengua being a derogatory term. Another example of this phenomenon, cited by Kidd, is that of the Chaco Indians described by Loewen. ‘When Chaco Indians were asked what was their deepest desire, they replied: “To become a person”’ (2000: 52). Loewen (1966) does not elaborate on the implications of this statement, but there is strong probability that he observed something very similar to the Ese Ejja attitude towards the national society.

The idea that they are not *dejja*, originated from the loss of power *vis-à-vis* the Bolivians, was certainly reinforced by the dominant discourses which have existed in Bolivia since the foundation of the Republic in 1825.

The State and Indians

The early days of the Bolivian Republic were characterized by notions of equality inherited from the French Revolution, in which the most desirable future for indigenous peoples was presented as their transformation into Bolivian peasant citizens, provided with independent parcels of land. This was the model envisaged by Simon Bolivar, hero of the independence of Bolivia, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, which would influence national politics for over a century. But the effect of Bolivar's 'misconceived liberalism', as Varese (1971: 122) describes it, was the sale of land by the Indians to powerful landowners and the creation of large private estates. By the second half of the nineteenth century the model of the *hacienda* had established itself, founded on the exploitation of the indigenous population. In this period, national policies were directed to the eradication of traditional forms of communal tenure such as the Andean *ayllu*, and to the elimination of indigenous peoples. In the lowlands, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw the intensification of the explorations of a region which until then had remained virtually unknown. In 1880, the American doctor Edwin Heath navigated the lower Beni river, considered inaccessible, thus linking directly the rubber rich interior of Bolivia to the Amazon system via the Mamoré. Until then, Bolivian produce had to be shipped via the Acre and the Purus rivers to the north, making it much less competitive. Once the region was open to national and foreign economic interests, the State did not provide any legislation for the indigenous population, and simply allowed the army to hunt it down to protect the interests of commerce. This is the time when entire indigenous populations 'disappeared', whether because they were decimated or because their members sought refuge in the towns and in the *haciendas*, adopted Spanish as their language and erased their Indian past.

Some indigenous groups, less inclined to integrating into the national society, fled into the more inaccessible regions of the forest away from the major waterways, a phenomenon observed throughout Amazonia and documented by archaeological evidence (c.f. Varese 1971). In the southern Bolivian lowlands, indigenous people had felt the strong presence of the Jesuits and after them, of the Franciscans, but, with the exception of the Mission of Cavina, on the Undumo River, subsequently relocated on the Beni, Catholic missions in the northern regions never reached the scale of the those in the Chiquitanía or of Mojos to the south. On the Madidi and Beni rivers, the most significant encounters between indigenous people and representatives of the national society in the early twentieth century were those with soldiers, merchants and slave

raiders. At the time of the settlement in Portachuelo, which according to my informants should be placed around 1930, some encounters with Catholic missionaries must have taken place, as some of the elders refer to them occasionally, but they did not result in a permanent missionisation, which was only to happen thirty years later with the arrival of the Evangelicals.

During the formation of the Bolivian State, in the early nineteenth century, through to the first half of the twentieth, lowland Indians were hunted, enslaved, or at best they entered in unfavourable trade relations with mestizo and white merchants. There is little evidence to document this period from the point of view of the Ese Ejja, but, as I have shown, the stories about the encounter with *dejja* are tales of aggression and killing. In less violent encounters, the Ese Ejja were treated as sub-human and were exploited. As I reported in Chapter 1, the missionaries' *Culture Notes* describe how, early in the twentieth century, the Ese Ejja were told by Bolivian merchants that they were not 'real people' (1983: 105). This was consistent with the widespread conception at the time that wild Indians were sub-human, that they could be bought and sold and they had to be tamed or killed. The reference to 'real' people returns further in the *Notes* note, where it is written that: 'The Ese Ejja call the nationals "real men". These "real men" treat them as lower class citizens or some strange Indian' (1983: 109). Missionaries' observations must be considered with careful attention to the context, but they are the closest reference to the experience of the Ese Ejja at the time and they reflect the reality of an unequal encounter, showing how the nationals' discourse of their superiority and of the inferior status of the Indians was transmitted to the latter. This undoubtedly strengthened the sense of inferiority that can be observed today.

But, as I have argued all along, one cannot explain the self-debasement of the Ese Ejja solely in terms of the absorption of the colonial discourse, because other indigenous people in similar situations did not develop the same ideas. Even admitting that the colonial experience may have been particularly harsh for the Ese Ejja, one must look at endogenous motivations for accepting such discourse. These reasons are to do with the cessation of violence and warfare and with the desirability of peace and of a tranquil life. This explains the Ese Ejja's reluctance to become involved with the expanding indigenous political movement that pits Indians against non-Indians and would turn them once again into enemies of *dejja*.

Emergence of political movements and changes in State policies

The analysis that follows draws largely on the data presented in a report published in 2001 by the Ministry for Rural and Indigenous Affairs (MACPIO 2001). The nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* and of the inferiority and savagery of indigenous people, although pervasive, encountered resistance throughout the twentieth century and finally some changes began to take place, at least at the institutional level. In this section, I give a brief summary of the changes that have occurred in Bolivian State policies regarding indigenous people and I describe the reaction of the Ese Ejja to these new views and practices.

When considering the history of the interaction between Indians and the State, it should be borne in mind that the indigenous reality in Bolivia is composed by two very different experiences: the Andean regions, with higher population density and with a longer history of coordinated action, of struggle and self-determination, and the lowland regions, much less densely populated and with a more recent active involvement in the politics of the national society. This division has had a profound impact on the history of the indigenous political movement because the inhabitants of the two regions do not share a common ideology, on the contrary, highland and lowland indigenous people have often been suspicious or hostile towards each other. Specifically, highland people consider lowland indigenes as backward and uncivilised and tend to exclude them from their political discourse, while lowlanders are suspicious of their political agenda, which includes:

- (1) The reconstruction of a modernised Inca empire extending beyond the frontiers of Bolivia;
- (2) the reform of the nation-state on the basis of recognition of traditional Andean structural features such as the *ayllu* and the *marka*; and
- (3) the creation of a multicultural and plurinational state with corresponding new participative democratic structures (Ströbele-Gregor 1994: 115).

Moreover, while the Andean movement was the product of a long history of struggle against the colonial powers, which subsequently became a fight against the State, lowland peoples lacked such a history. Their struggle was largely initiated at a much later date, by the external influence of intellectuals and activists of Bolivian and foreign origin.

In the highlands, the seed of the rebellion against the discrimination of indigenous people was planted at the time of the Chaco war (1932-35). During this disastrous enterprise, Indians were recruited *en masse* and sent to unfamiliar parts of the country, enthused by their superiors with the rhetoric of equality and nationhood. The following years saw the formation of indigenous movements in the Andean plateau and in the valleys of Cochabamba, influenced by the First Inter-American Indigenous Congress in Mexico in 1940, which led to the founding of the Bolivian Indigenist Institute in 1941 and of the first National Indigenist Congress in 1945. The political climate culminated in the 1952 National Revolution, followed shortly after by the first Agrarian Reform (1953). The Reform was designed according to the ancient ideals of the 'Liberators' of the previous century and was based on a strongly assimilationist or integrationist programme, in accordance with the spirit of the Inter-American Indigenous Congress. The revolutionary rhetoric upheld the mestizo as the symbol of the Bolivian nation-state and the Indian was to be transformed into a *campesino*, a peasant farmer, in the name of civilisation, of progress and of modernisation. This ideology promoted assimilation as the key to social mobility, but the reality contradicted it, and a small creole minority continued to enjoy a privileged position, while the majority of the population was denied its basic rights. From the growing awareness of this discrepancy, an indigenous peasant movement emerged in the 1970s, which drew inspiration from the heroes of the Aymara anti-colonial uprisings of the 1700s, named *Katarist* after the leader of the 1781 insurrection, Tupac Katari.

According to a United Nations Development Programme Report on Human Development, the Revolution 'symbolically integrated indigenous populations; but did so in classist and nationalist terms, rather than cultural and diversified ones.' Thus 'the Indian became peasant and Bolivian, but lost his proper cultural status of Aymara or Quetchua' (in MACPIO 2001: 44). The use in this document of 'cultural status' is ambiguous, and reflects a rather rigid view of ethnicity or cultural identity, nevertheless the observation reinforces the fact that in Bolivia, at the time of the Revolution, there was no room for difference and the Indian had to be either excluded or integrated. But, as the Report continues, 'the Revolution itself curiously produced a generation of educated Indians who more and more appealed to the cultural order and claimed the right to difference and the recognition of their proper identities' (MACPIO 2001: 44). These educated Indians were the heirs of the ancient tradition of anti-colonial struggle.

However, the first indigenous movement, ultimately a peasant one, was still informed by the model of the labour movement and, as it has been pointed out, the Union that emerged from it, the Unitary Union Confederation of Bolivian Workers and Peasants (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores y Campesinos de Bolivia, CSUTCB) remained heavily dependent on the dominant political culture and on the workers movement (see Ströbele-Gregor 1994). On the whole these events had little direct impact on the indigenous people of the lowlands and were primarily confined to the reality of the Andean people.

The first real break at national level with the old politics, and the appearance of Indianness on the political scene, took place with the advent of democracy in 1982, and especially under the administration of Jaime Paz Zamora. At this point, the State rhetoric took a different turn and, as the 1990 National Plan for the Defence and the Development of Indigenous Peoples declares, the Indian came to be recognised as ‘the live manifestation of the identity and of the social patrimony of all and each one of us [Bolivians]’ (MACPIO 2001).

1990 was a significant year for the movement of lowland people, who came together for the first time in the ‘March for territory and dignity’, when Indians from the Oriente, Chaco and Amazonía regions walked for a month from the city of Trinidad to the administrative capital, La Paz, demanding recognition. However, this momentous event had little or no impact on the Ese Ejja who never talk about it. Indeed, I suspect that very few, if any, Ese Ejja took part in the march. The recognition demanded by the protesters included the rights to political participation, to land, to development of the economy, to education, health and a proper legislation.

The latest turn in the Bolivian political discourse regarding indigenous people was the redrafting of the constitution in 1994, in which Article 1 declares that Bolivia is: ‘Free, independent, sovereign, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural’, and Article 3: ‘The State recognizes the legal status of indigenous and peasant communities and of the peasant associations and unions’ (MACPIO 2001: 39). Today, the Bolivian Government’s paradigm for indigenous politics is that of *Desarrollo con identidad*, development with identity, with the intent of preserving indigenous traditions and knowledge, and of integrating indigenous people in the national society, not as second-class citizens, nor as potential victims, but as actively contributing members.

The Indian political movement in the lowlands had begun in the late 1970s with the help of intellectuals, mainly anthropologists and sociologists, with the aim to establish or restore contact between the scattered indigenous peoples of the Bolivian *Oriente*. This effort led in 1982 to the formation of the Indigenous Confederation of the Bolivian Orient, Chaco and Amazonía (CIDOB), and subsequently to various indigenous organisations throughout the lowlands such as the Organisation of the Indigenous People of Beni (CEPIB), which played a central role in the organization of the 1990 March for Territory, and the Indigenous Organisation of the Amazonía Region (CIRABO), to which the Ese Ejja became affiliated, amongst others. The formation of these organisations depended on official acts of reconciliation between enemy groups, but in practice, ancient feelings of hostilities remained alive. Yet, in spite of internal divisions, the organisations succeeded in initiating the process of recognition of territorial rights for indigenous people. As result, the new national Constitution of 1994 recognised the right of indigenous peoples to ‘Communal lands of origin’ (TCOs), covered by the Law of the Institute of Agrarian Reform (MACPIO 2001: 53). As late as 2000 though, the titles to these territories had not yet been officially ratified and the indigenous organisations planned another protest march for August of the same year. Only two Ese Ejja men were sent as representatives. This time the march did not need to reach the city of La Paz as the Government proceeded with a hurried agreement. The legal documents were to be delivered in February the following year, but the Government failed to meet the deadline. In response, the indigenous organisations of the North staged a blockade of the main artery linking the region to La Paz, which lasted several weeks, until, on the 28th of March, President Hugo Banzer travelled to Riberalta to personally hand over the land titles.

Reaction to political changes

While the Ese Ejja welcome the benefits, real or apparent, that the new situation offers, they are reluctant to take part in the political movement. My hypothesis is that what the movement proposes, the union of indigenous peoples against the State, clashes with the Ese Ejja sense of being in history characterised by the progressive *rapprochement* with Bolivians. The revival or invention of the indigenous tradition is a powerful political tool, of which there are many examples in South America, but my impression is that the Ese Ejja have not espoused it, because the imperative to become *dejja* is stronger.

Kidd (1995) reports that among the Enxet of Paraguay, the loss of prestige due to the encounter with colonists went hand in hand with a loss of land in the gradual colonisation of the Chaco region by foreign private enterprises, following the sale of fiscal land without titles by the Government of Paraguay in 1885. The situation worsened when, in 1940, the Government promulgated the Agrarian Statute. The Statute was conceived as a measure to reduce the size of large unproductive estates owned by foreigners, but the expropriation resulted in the sale of land on the part of large owners and the fencing off of areas previously occupied by the Enxet, who were reduced to a cheap source of labour. At the level of legislation, the situation of the Enxet should have undergone a radical change in the early 1990s, when the National Constitution recognised the right to land of indigenous people 'held as communal property, of sufficient size and quality for the conservation and development of their own characteristic ways of living' (Kidd 1995: 55). According to Kidd, however, the reality was quite different, because, while communities have received legal recognition, none has obtained land. Nevertheless, in the process of reclaiming their territory, the Enxet have been developing a political discourse, and regaining confidence in themselves as people. This political discourse is characterised by a partial reinvention of history and its transformation into myth, in which the Enxet are represented as opposing a strong resistance to colonisers, a resistance in which shamans are said to have played a central role. This, according to the author, 'is indicative of a renewed pride in their own culture and a recovery from the crisis they underwent with colonisation' (Kidd 1995: 60). This recovery, at the ideological level, is 'strikingly evident in the assertion by a young leader that the shamans could use their power to kill the President of Paraguay but, because of their benevolence, they choose not to' (1995: 60).

A kind of creative use of the past can be observed among the Ese Ejja. This became clear to me in the growing idealisation of indigenous decorations and weapons which I observed during the Land Titles crisis in 2000-2001. During the first meeting in which participation in the blockade following the failure of the Government to meet the deadline was discussed, Biumajja, the village nurse, concluded: 'We must prepare bows and arrows. They are afraid of them.' At the second meeting, when everyone refused to go and give support to Cuano Machuqui, then President of Portachuelo Alto, who alone had joined the protest, once again I heard people say that arrows were what *dejja* were really frightened of. These episodes reminded me of rumours I had heard when I accompanied the Ese Ejja of Sonene to a protest march in Puerto Maldonado (Peru).

There people said that Arakmbut men were painted with powerful designs and that if the police shot them, the bullets would bounce off and kill two policemen for every Arakmbut hit. Another sign of the emergence of a process of recovery or invention of tradition was the embryonic concern with preserving 'culture', which will be discussed in Chapter 7. As Sehua, a bilingual teacher himself, said to me, 'if the Ese Ejja forget their *cultura*, they will not get any money from the Government'. This tendency became particularly noticeable when the news circulated that the ceremony of the distribution of land titles by the President of the Republic would be held in Portachuelo. Over a few days, young leaders became very excited, they started to plan the reception of the President and told the elders they should prepare a 'traditional dance' and make arrows and costumes with feather headdresses. These directions were given by Bocua, a young ambitious man, with an eye for the traditional craft business, who convinced his wife to make wood ornaments with strings of seeds and tried to sell them to me. Bocua's attitude confirmed my impression that the Ese Ejja were not really espousing a return to their supposed 'customs' but wanted to be like *dejja*. As he was telling people to get ready to show the President their customs, he also insisted that the village had to be cleared of rubbish and that latrines – the ultimate sign of civilisation – were to be built; in the same breath he also told how he had applied for food aid which should be distributed to all families. He insisted that all the couples should be counted as families and husbands and wives should build houses for themselves and stop living with their parents – as the brideservice obligation requires them to do.

In the end the meeting with the President was held at the stadium in Riberalta and a large group of about one hundred Ese Ejja went. Interestingly, at the ceremony, they did not wear beads and feathers, they did not paint themselves and wear bark cloth tunics. Instead they wore trousers and shirts, blouses and skirts and shoes, because ultimately they do not want to be seen as (savage) Indians. Rather than re-gaining confidence in themselves as a people, as in the case of the Enxet described by Kidd (1995), I would argue that the Ese Ejja are objectifying their past to suit the demands of the Government and funding bodies. Recent developments in international and national policies have been promoting the respect for difference and the valuation of Indianness, and they are reflected in the language of the 1994 Bolivian Constitution, with its stress on multi-ethnicity and multi-culturality.



Plate 14. Protest march in Puerto Maldonado, Peru



Plate 15. Young Ese Ejja at Land Titles presentation in Riberalta

But, in this climate, the Indian is being re-invented by non-Indians and the reinvention is detrimental for two reasons. First, for the consequences for the integrity of the indigenous people themselves: these will only be judged in the future, but possible outcomes can be foreseen by comparison with similar phenomena which have developed in Brazil two to three decades before. Secondly, in the short term, it is obvious that Government policies based on the re-invented Indian are difficult to apply because they clash with indigenous social philosophy.

In Brazil, the indigenous political movement began in the 1960s, under the aegis of the Conselho Indigenista Misionário, a Catholic organisation informed by the Second Vatican Council¹⁷ (1962-65), which sponsored regional assemblies of indigenous leaders throughout the 1970s. This movement led to the construction of a new figure of the 'Indian', a term that ceased to be derogatory, and came to identify a political role. One of the factors which permitted the growth of the movement was the support of political voices suppressed under the military regime. In a climate of repression, the banner of the Indian cause allowed many white Brazilians to vent their own protest against the establishment. But in order to be recognisable and hence a powerful actor, the 'Indian' had to conform to the stereotype held by the Whites. Caiuby Novaes' description of the 1982 First Meeting of the Indigenous People in Brazil is a perfect case in point, when she reports that: 'In a clear attempt to demonstrate publicly their individual identities, the Indians of the Northeast came to the meeting wearing headdresses, clubs and other "typically Indian" ornaments – many of which are no longer worn on a daily basis' (1997: 24). The author affirms that 'dressing up like an Indian' was the condition for gaining visibility. However, I would argue that there is a serious risk in adopting this strategy. By conforming to the new stereotype of the Indian, people are also accepting the stigma that necessarily remains attached to that image, albeit in a dormant form, and the Indian has a voice as 'Indian', not as an equal. The voice of the Indian as 'Indian' would only be heard and listened to in a system where existing values and hierarchies were subverted, but there is no sign of such subversion in Bolivia.

¹⁷ The 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church was convened by Pope John XXIII and continued under Paul VI with the purpose of the spiritual renewal of the church and reconsideration of the position of the church in the modern world.

Moreover, the adoption of Indianness as a strategy is precarious because it is based on rhetoric and on romantic ideas rather than on reality and therefore, when the Indians appropriate the white category of 'the Indian' they are appropriating a ghost. Some authors, such as Terence Turner describing the experience of the Kayapo, suggest that this ghost can be effective, but I suspect that its success depends on contingent factors, mainly the indigenous sense of being in history, as well as the dedication of an anthropologist and sudden mediatic fame. The case of the Kayapo offers an interesting comparison with the Ese Ejja. According to Turner, until the 1960s the Kayapo regarded non-Kayapo societies and peoples as "less social", that is less fully human by Kayapo standards' and this negative classification was expressed in the term *mē kakrit*, meaning 'people of little worth or beauty' (1991a: 295-96). With integration in the Brazilian society, this vision transformed and Brazilians were admitted into the category of humans, while the Kayapo began to consider themselves as belonging to the novel category of 'Indians'. According to Turner, the adoption of this new category of self-identification coincided with the acquisition of a novel form of social consciousness and of concern for the preservation of their cultural identity, which produced political action. Thirty years after Turner's first visit, the Kayapo displayed a conservatism regarding modes of subsistence, diet and the performance of ceremonies, which formed part of a political strategy with the objective of obtaining the support of sympathetic forces outside their direct world, such as anthropologists, conservationists, journalists and so forth. But the possibility of adopting this new Indianness was consistent with the Kayapo mode of being in history, described by the author as one of staunch conservatism, as when they resisted conversion and 'clung tenaciously to their traditional social and cultural values' (1991a: 287). According to Turner, the changes that occurred in Kayapo culture as a result of interethnic contact were superficial ones, and as they adopted Brazilian style clothes and houses, native social and cultural forms persisted. Therefore, it is not surprising that once they were presented with the possibility of gaining political visibility and power *vis-à-vis* their enemies by reviving their own customs, they should have seized the opportunity. As I have shown, the current situation of the Ese Ejja is different. This may be because the re-invention of the Indian is a relatively recent phenomenon among them, and has been gathering momentum over the last decade. But the Ese Ejja are eager to become their enemies, to adopt their customs and entertain friendly relationship with them, therefore is not surprising that they should be less enthusiastic about being Indian and that they should have no desire to take part in indigenous politics that require them to be Indian.

National politics versus indigenous social philosophy

On another level, the involvement in national politics clearly clashes with Ese Ejja social philosophy. Those who become involved in politics are viewed disapprovingly by the other Ese Ejja and often they are accused of wanting to better themselves, of being selfish and arrogant, and, unless they are careful, they can become alienated from their community. This was the case of the Antenor Monje, mentioned in Chapter 3, community nurse and subsequently *Capitán*, who, as I described, after being accused of stealing money from the community, left Portachuelo for good. His son Maquini, who is school educated and very ambitious, moved to the town of Cobija, where he became the Vice-President of a new indigenous organisation, the *Central* of the indigenous people of the Pando Department (CIPOAP). Maquini has been very successful in so far as he has gained access to political figures, with whom he interacts in the local political and social scene, but he is totally alienated from the people of Portachuelo, who speak of him as a *picaro*, a rogue or a scoundrel. The fate of those like Maquini has been described by McCallum in an insightful analysis of the creation of the 'modernised Brazilian Indian' according to the notions of Indianness held by the activists of the Pro-Indian Commission of the State of Acre (1997: 133). The author points out how these activists are positively seeking to fashion a new identity of true 'Brazilian Indians' and how, in the process indigenous culture becomes folklore. The perilous predicament of the Brazilian Indian leader is discussed by Alcida Ramos, who describes the high costs of political activism as: 'Heavy drinking, marginalisation at home and elsewhere, generalized distrust of the world, anguish, psychological confusion, and even assassination' (1991: 232). The Ese Ejja have not experienced such activism, nevertheless, those who have been in closer contact with the world outside the community have become aware of the expectations of the national society and of the political advantages of complying with those expectations. However, in the majority, the Ese Ejja remain suspicious of outsiders and especially of politicians, who are often described as those who 'promise a lot and give nothing.'¹⁸

Moreover, active involvement in the indigenous political movement demands that representatives of the community reside in Riberalta for long periods of time, but, as I

¹⁸ Although this is the dominant form of rhetorical hostility, the politicians' promises sometimes do materialise, as when ADN politicians promised generators and televisions in exchange for the community's votes, which they delivered.

described in chapters 3 and 4, the Ese Ejja are reluctant to do so, as it would involve relinquishing the tranquillity of the village. A couple of years before my arrival, Dejja Oshie accepted the role of secretary of CIRABO and lived in Riberalta for six months, but when he recalled those days, he became terribly sad, remembering how he had nothing to eat and how he eventually left. Subsequently, no one volunteered for the post and Ervin Chao, a Tacana married to an Ese Ejja woman, became the representative of the community. To this day, the Ese Ejja are unwilling to participate in public meetings, especially when they involve travelling to other regions. This attitude was epitomised in the 2001 blockade, when barricades were erected and manned by members of the Chacobo, Tacana and Cavineño groups. Of the Ese Ejja, only Cuano participated, while others kept procrastinating, saying they would join him later, but never did. While the blockade was already under way, a meeting was called to discuss participation, because Cuano had been calling for support and requested that twenty Ese Ejja men join him. All the people present agreed that it was an important issue, but no one offered to go, arguing that they had to take care of their gardens or of their Brazil nuts that were rotting in the forest; someone said they did not want to go because they couldn't speak Spanish, and someone else, because they were lazy. These are perfect examples of the strategic use of self-deprecation discussed in Chapter 4.

Incidentally, another factor which still plays heavily against the involvement of the Ese Ejja in the indigenous movement, and especially in acts of protest against the Government, is the presence of the Evangelical missionaries. In the recent history of the Ese Ejja, missionaries have supported their need for land through the purchase of an estate, which is now Portachuelo Alto, but they are very critical of indigenous activism and especially of CIRABO. This is because they fear the revivalism associated with the Indigenist political movement, which they view as a threat to their missionary activity. These fears are founded on the generalised hostility of the supporters of Indigenist politics towards missionaries, especially Evangelicals. This hostility was revealed in the 1977 Barbados Declaration, in which the Inter-American Indigenist Institute accused the SIL of 'ethnocidal' activities and demanded its expulsion from Latin America (Castro Mantilla 1997: 35). Moreover, the missionaries preach the respect of authorities, in compliance with Paul's letter to the Romans, which declares that: 'The powers that be are ordained by God' and 'Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God' (Romans 13, 1-2). Their very presence and the constant support with medicine and

with education have removed a more pressing need for change, for government recognition and for direct action.

Finally, a further reason why the Ese Ejja so far have been reluctant to become involved in politics is the principle of the union of indigenous people of the world under a common cause, which clearly clashes with the Ese Ejja perception of other Indians. I have noted above the absence of a common ideology between highland and lowland indigenous peoples and the presence of interethnic conflict; but this lack of cohesion also exists among lowland groups. In spite of the rhetoric of reconciliation and cooperation, these groups remain enemies and their hostility is reflected in their relation to party politics. Chacobo people are associated with, and receive support from the leftist party of the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), while the Ese Ejja see themselves as the allies of the rightwing ADN Party and stress their rivalry. This reality became dramatically clear to me when President Banzer visited Riberalta to hand over the land titles. On that occasion, a confrontation broke out between the leadership of CIRABO, mainly composed of Chacobo and Cavineños, and that of CIPOAP, the new indigenous organisation based in Cobija. CIPOAP, supported by the ADN Party, is dominated by Tacana people, and some Ese Ejja would like to be affiliated to it too. Indeed, Maquini Monje – son of Antenor who had abandoned Portachuelo – became its Vice-President in 1999. At the presentation ceremony, the President of CIPOAP, Mario Duri, a Tacana, stepped forward to receive the Title for the TCO ‘Multietnico II’ – the demarcated territory which includes the Ese Ejja and some Tacana communities – and handed it to Maquini. Once the ceremony was over, I saw Duri held by the scruff of the neck by a Chacobo man in front of a large crowd, being marched towards the headquarters of CIRABO: the land Title had disappeared. Duri was held hostage overnight, tied to a chair, surrounded by a mixed crowd shouting abuse at him, accusing him of stealing the document.

The police and the authorities were involved in a search, and eventually the document reappeared, apparently as it was being taken away by Maquini Monje to the headquarters of CIPOAP, the rival organisation, in Cobija. The title was returned and Mario Duri released. At the time, I thought the violence of the event disproportionate to the situation, but clearly more was at stake than a piece of paper and the episode was an opportunity to vent an animosity that had been mounting since the creation of CIPOAP and that reflected a long standing hostility between the various indigenous groups.



Plate 16. Mario Duri receives Land Title and is photographed by Maquini Monje

Political factionalism is sometimes reproduced even within the same linguistic group. I have observed the division within Portachuelo itself, when fights broke out at the time of the elections among people queuing at the ballot box. Accusations of cheating and lying, of taking advantage of politicians' gifts and then of voting for someone else – a behaviour that offends Ese Ejja notion of reciprocity – gave people the opportunity to express their animosities. Thus it is clear that the involvement in national politics, rather than being a uniting factor, can be very divisive, hence the reluctance of the Ese Ejja to participate. This reluctance in turn, reproduces and reinforces their reputation of savagery and ignorance in front of nationals and other indigenous people.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the recent Ese Ejja history is characterised by a change in their attitudes towards Bolivians, from one of aggression to one of amity, expressed in the desire to become like them. I have introduced the Ese Ejja sense of history, as a spatial as well as a temporal construct. This history collapses time and space and it is characterised by displacement and transformation from Indians into 'civilised' people, towards the cessation of hostilities and the acquisition of a tranquil life.

I have argued that, rather than being informed by the dominant, national mode of constructing the past and time, Ese Ejja historicity offered a fertile ground for that ideology to be imported. I have outlined the history of national political ideas about Indians and I have identified the external factors that contributed to the self-deprecation of the Ese Ejja. However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, this cannot be understood purely as an exogenous phenomenon, but one must take into account its desirability in terms of the Ese Ejja ideal of peaceful living.

This congruence between the national ideology and the Ese Ejja self-deprecation is also found in the present form of Ese Ejja cosmology and myths. As I will show in Chapter 7, the cosmogonic myth of 'The descent from the sky' posits the Ese Ejja as inferior beings, who fell from the sky to be tricked by Capuchin Monkey and became mortals. The beautiful ones, who were left in the sky, became angels. It is impossible to know whether this myth is a *post hoc* rationalisation of their current condition or whether it predates the appropriation of the colonial and post-colonial discourse, but the

contemporary evidence, which is what I am concerned with, is that they see themselves as somehow deficient and in the process of recovering their lost integrity.

I have also shown that, at present, there is a lack of fit between the new Indigenist ideologies and the Ese Ejja sense of history. In the next chapter, the Ese Ejja changing attitude towards Bolivians is explored in the context of kinship ideas and practices.

6. Ese Ejja kinship

In this chapter, I describe Ese Ejja kinship terms and practices and I discuss the ideas of sameness and difference around which kinship is constructed, in the constant effort to fend off the dangers of the other. My description should be read on three levels. On one level, it includes my own ideal-typical model, drawn from older people's explanations and preferences. With this model, I illustrate the Ese Ejja 'traditional' kinship terms and practices. Traditional is an ambiguous term, but it conveys younger people's opinion that this is the way of the ancient people, elders and ancestors (an indigenous model – the second level). On the third level, I describe the variations in people's practices, as the observable, lived system consists of different practices and discourses which coexist and compete. These discrepancies account for changes, as the recent patterns of inter-village marriage between Portachuelo Alto and Bajo indicate.¹⁹ In the final part of the chapter, I discuss the domestication of others through marriage.

In what follows, I consider notions of sameness and difference and how these notions affect kinship relations. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the concern with dangerous others is central to Ese Ejja life. Here, I suggest that this concern also explains older people's preference for group endogamy, which I describe below, while younger generations are more inclined towards domesticating others and turning them into 'people like us' than in avoiding or fighting them. The hypothesis is justified by the transformation of marriage practices which reveal a changing perception of the dangerousness of others, with a preference for alliance over war. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the relations between the two opposed sections of the community, the villages of Alto and Bajo. The increasing number of inter-village marriages suggests the possibility of opening up marriage preferences, to replace hostile relations. This opening to outsiders for marriage may be a step towards an even more generalised exogamy, which could include other indigenous people (and already some Ese Ejja have married Tacana), non-indigenous Bolivians and even white foreigners.

In order to describe the kinship terminology of the Ese Ejja, I will briefly discuss the widespread adoption of Louis Dumont's Dravidian model (1953) to make sense of Amazonian systems and conclude that, as a formal ideal-system, 'dravidianate' is a

¹⁹ For a discussion on 'models' see; Holy, L. & M. Stuchlik (eds) 1981. *The structure of folk models*. London: Academic Press. on 'levels of data'. Barnard, A. & A. Good. 1984. *Research practices in the study of kinship*. London: Academic Press.

suitable and useful model. Terminology does not correspond nor explain lived relations, and Ese Ejja kinship practices are inevitably different from the ones studied by Dumont. However, what emerges in the Ese Ejja classification of relatives is the idea that difference is rooted in the cross-sex sibling relation and is transmitted through generations in a manner which coincides with the Dravidian model as understood by Dumont. Difference, however, is not understood exclusively as opposition, but also as relative distance, and Ese Ejja ideas of 'same' and 'other' are better described as 'concentric dualism' – a definition adopted by both Peter Rivière (1993: 511) and Viveiros de Castro (1993b: *passim*). This dualism originates in the undifferentiated kin group and expands to the worlds of foreigners and of the powerful beings.

The Ese Ejja in Portachuelo told me very little about kinship relations in explicit terms, except for categories of sameness and difference. They did not describe a positive marriage rule, although they often referred to the prohibition of unions between siblings and older people favoured village-endogamous marriages, opposing younger people's desire to find partners in the opposite village, Alto and Bajo respectively. Nor did they refer to any specific division of residence groups into clans or moieties. There was no voiced ideology of a special relation between groups sharing the same Spanish surname, although in practice these groups tended to live close together and in some cases to intermarry, nor about alliances between differently named groups, even where there exist a *de facto* alliance among groups living in close proximity. This contradicts the evidence presented by Chavarría (1984) and Burr (1997). In the early 1980s, Chavarría observed that among the Ese Ejja there were two terms for father, 'kaka' and 'icha', which corresponded to two sections of the population, the 'wiího' and 'batsája' respectively (1984: 16). The author labelled them as moieties or clans. Burr follows Chavarría and states that 'the Ese Eja community [of Sonene] is divided in two patrimoieties' (1997: 90). According to Chavarría these clans have a mythological 'explanation' (1984: 16), as the groups would have descended from two different monkeys, *ichaji*, capuchin, and *yisa jahua*, squirrel monkey. However this author provides no explanation as to how the division functions on the ground, since there are no marriage rules or prohibitions between them, nor are there any prohibitions in relation to the supposed totemic animals. The distinctions voiced by Chavarría's informants are the physical traits that characterise the two groups, such as the darker colours of the *batsája*'s skin and hair. Burr does not provide compelling evidence either, stating that 'organisational categories such as moiety and the residential system do not

regulate or determine people's lives' and 'moieties do not regulate marriage' that can be moiety-endogamous as well as exogamous (1997: 82-3). What seems to matter is the 'emotional power of the patri-moiety' (Burr 1997: 90). In Portachuelo I recorded the existence of different terms to refer to the father. These were: *chii*, prevalent in Bajo, *papa* in Alto, *tata*, attributed to the Tambopata Ese Ejja and *kaka*, to the ancient people. As I have suggested, the Ese Ejja use language to stress otherness and to define groups, but it would be too speculative to conclude that these are the signs of the presence of a concrete moiety system.

The situation I encountered in Portachuelo between 1999 and 2001 is a fairly recent one, being the result of a settlement process which began in the 1930s. Therefore, my analysis is concerned with three generations. Moreover, the villages, as clusters of kin units, must be understood as transitory realities. The most recent migrations suggest that the kin groups were formed by adult brothers who travelled together, with their children and their spouses, as was the case of the Peruvian Cojjassio/Juan Tirina and Peno/Pedro Machuqui, who came from Sonene. Peno and Cojjassio – the latter had died some years before my arrival – were not born of the same parents, but Peno always told me they were brothers, and their descendants address each other as if they were. Once they settled in Portachuelo Alto, their children (male and female) formed the core of the residential group (Biia, Ejapa, Dejja O'o, Qui Cuaya, Pona Bisó and Qui Bene and Cacuajehua Tirina, and Bashojehua and Que'Ba Machuqui). Of their children, who are now the youngest married generation, seven married their cross cousins (see Table 1), six turned to Ese Ejja outsiders in Portachuelo Bajo, one in Villanueva – six hours walk upriver, one in Rurrenabaque, on the Upper Beni, and one in Palma Real in Peru. Five women married Tacana men. If we accept Burr's identification of a patrimoiety system in Sonene, it is likely that Peno and Cojjassio belonged to the same moiety, which would partly explain the absence of such system in Portachuelo Alto.

The history of the people of Portachuelo Bajo prior to settlement is harder to retrieve, but it seems that the first stage of the settlement of Ese Ejja coming from the Madidi River took place in Villanueva, and the marriages which have taken place in Bajo over the last forty years suggest a constant flux of female spouses from this settlement, while most of the in-marrying men came from Rurrenabaque, to the south.

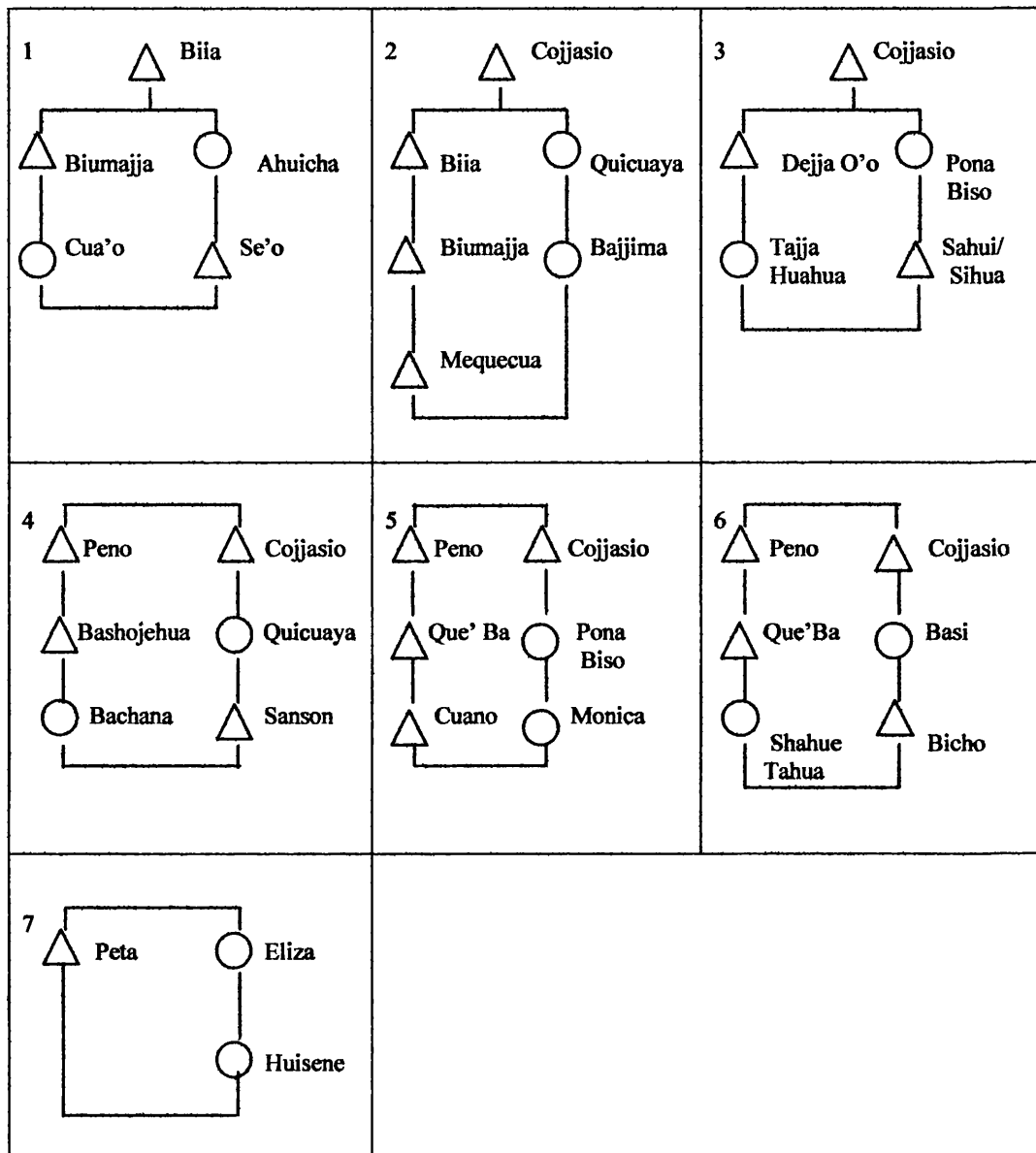


Table 1. Cross cousin marriages in Alto

The generation of people married around or after 1980, have mainly contracted village-endogamous marriages (15), or have married either in Alto (9) and, to a lesser degree, further away, in Villanueva (2) and Rurrenabaque (5). Over the last fifteen years, several men have come from Rurrenabaque and have married in Bajo, becoming incorporated in the residential groups, and there seems to be a closer relationship between Bajo and Rurrenabaque than between Rurrenabaque and Alto, where people are considered more different – the difference often expressed by saying they are Peruvian.²⁰

It should be noted that because group membership derives from the interaction of inherited substance and conviviality, expressed in the Ese Ejja concept of co-residence (*enije-jaajji*, lit. with me to live/sleep), it is not a given and it can vary during a persons lifetime. Moreover, the Alto-Bajo division is not very meaningful beyond the opposition between villages, because each village is not a corporate group, and families are independent units within each. This is less obvious in Portachuelo Alto, where most households are closely related through living siblings. Villages, as units, have hunting and fishing areas of preference, as well as areas where they plant gardens, but, although they tend to keep to their own, their control over land and water is not sanctioned in any way. Moreover, hunting, fishing and agriculture are seldom village-wide activities. But the fact remains that the inhabitants of Alto and Bajo maintain that they are different from each other (Ese Ejja, *pia-jaajji*, those who live/sleep somewhere else, see below) stressing the fact that they are Bolivians and Peruvians respectively.

Terminology

When dealing with an Amazonian kinship system – ideal or actual – one is soon confronted with the problem of what language to use to describe such a system in order to be understood by one's readers, while remaining faithful to the lived situation described and to the indigenous terminology. Particularly problematic is the use of notions of descent and affinity. Since the 1976 International Congress of Americanists, a growing number of authors have engaged in the discussion of the appropriateness of using terms such as descent, affinity and alliance in the Amazonian context (c.f. Overing Kaplan 1977a; Rivière 1993). As various authors have pointed out (Seeger et

²⁰ As was reported in Chapter 2, according to Kimura, the inhabitants of Bajo and Villanueva are a mixture of two groups: 'Na Tahua (blue/green water) *cuiñajji*' and 'Equijati (mouth of the river) *cuiñajji*', Kimura, H. 1981b. Informe. Economía y cultura material de los Ese Ejja (Chama). La Paz. but now they are known simply as 'Cuei Ai (big river, Beni River) *cuiñajji*'.

al. 1979), the tendency to describe Amazonian kinship systems in terms of descent groups, according to models developed in Africa, South-East Asia and Austronesia, reduced the indigenous systems to anomalies, which in fact were nothing but 'the result of forcing incomplete ethnographic facts into inappropriate analytical moulds' (Henley 1996: 2). The main problem in adopting these concepts was identified by Irving Goldman who argued that an adequate theory of descent must be rooted in the 'understanding of the native theory of descent, that is of the generative process' (in Rivière 1993: 509) or, in other words, the theory of how people are made.

Since the pioneering work of Peter Rivière (1969) and Joanna Overing (1975) many anthropologists working with Amazonian societies have discussed the implications of the adoption of the Dumontian model of Dravidian kinship (Daillant 2000; Dreyfus 1993; Fausto 1995; Henley 1996; Housman & White 1998; Rivière 1993; Taylor 1998; Viveiros de Castro 1993b; 1998b). The discussion has led to important insights, and what has emerged are the striking formal similarities between the terminologies of the Amazonian systems and Dumont's ideal-typical model, which fully justify the borrowing. Clearly, none corresponds exactly to it but nor do all the systems on which Dumont's model is based. The common 'Dravidian' scheme is 'the distinction of two kinds of relatives inside certain generations' (+1, 0 and -1) into parallel and cross, which Dumont calls 'kin and affines' (1953: 34, 39). According to Dumont, this system reflects a marriage rule through which the system is maintained. Among the Ese Ejja, as elsewhere in Amazonia, the distinction between parallel and cross cousins is less concerned with a positive marriage rule – often absent – and more with the essential differences between members of kin groups, which in turn determine marriageability.

At the level of the cognatic group, the Ese Ejja make a distinction between those one cannot marry, called *uapapojama*, non-other, and those one can marry, called *uapa*, other. Sometimes people also use the word *pia* instead of *uapa* and *pia-pojama*. For the sake of clarity, I use *uapa* in my discussion, which is the one most used by my informants. The category *uapapojama* corresponds to the parallel relatives in the ideal-typical Dravidian model, and cross cousins are said to be *uapa*. Relatives in the second ascending and descending generations (G+2 and -2, grandparents and grandchildren) are all non-other. The terminology is summarised in Table 2. I should point out that in the context of kinship relations, *uapa* refers to internal others (i.e. cross relatives). While the terms which in the tables refer to *uapa* are also applied to affines that do not

belong to the cognatic group, the latter are considered a more different kind of people. Other people of the latter kind are called *pia-jaajji*, those who live/sleep elsewhere, as opposed to *enije-jaajji*, those who live/sleep with me. The Ese Ejja system varies from this model in the behaviour towards cross relatives in the generations 0 and -1, with a tendency to merging the categories of cross and parallel cousins and their offspring, who are often referred to as *shehue*, younger sister and *chahua*, younger brother irrespective of the sex of the speaker.

It should also be noted that *uapa* is not exclusively a kinship category, and can be used to describe other kinds of difference, as when an elderly woman called Cuaesena told me that the highland people in Peru spoke a 'different language', and used the expression '*uapa mimiani*'.

The condition of otherness implicit in affinity changes with marriage because, when a person marries into a group, to an extent, they become likened to kin, at least for their spouse and his or her parents, as is demonstrated by the use of teknonyms. This practice is not uncommon in Amazonia and has been described for example by Overing (1975) for the Piaroa, as a mechanism to overcome the contradiction between the desire for unity and sameness and the necessity of difference and affinity, and by Vilaça (1992) for the Warí, as a marker of the consubstantiality of spouses. The Warí express the assimilation of spouses in terms of coming to share the same blood through sexual intercourse and the consumption of the same food (Conklin 1995; Vilaça 1992; 1995). My friend Huisene once said: 'my sister-in-law is not different' (Ese Ejja, '*ecue nene pia pojiamá*'), once she marries she is no longer *pia*.' Huisene's case is particularly interesting because her HZ (*nene*) is also her own natural mother Eliza, but having been adopted, she did not know this until she was an adult (see Chapter 3). In general, if the spouses are not cross cousins they maintain their position of outsiders in the eyes of the other members of the group.

From my discussion it will become apparent that terms of address do not always coincide with terms of formal classification elicited in the abstract, because actual relations are not given but they are made in practice and classification terms do not correspond to people because they are positions which one can take in relation to others.

FEMALE SPEAKER

	Uapapojjama		uapa	
	M	F	M	F
G+2	BABA/ANO (MF,FF/MM,FM, but also HF,HM)			
	CHII, PAPA (F, FB)	NAE, MAMITA (M, MZ)	TOTO (MB)	NENE (FZ) ANO (HM, HMZ)
G.0	NONO (B, FBS, MZS)	AI (eZ, eMZD, eFBD)	IAHUE (H); SHIA (ZH);	NENE (BW); NENE (HZ)
		SHEHUE (yZ, yMZD, yFBD)	SHIA (HB)	
G-1	BACUAEJJA (S, ZS)	BACUAPIONA (D, ZD)	OSECUAJEAJJI (DH=CCF);	OSECUAJEANA' (SW=CCM);
G-2	OSECUA (SC,DC)			

MALE SPEAKER

	M	F	M	F
	G+2	BABA/ANO (MF,FF/MM,FM, but also WF/WM)		
G+1	CHII, PAPA (F, FB)	NAE, MAMITA (M, MZ)	TOTO (MB) BABA (WF, WFB)	NENE (FZ)
G.0	O'I (eB, eFBS, eMZS) CHAHUA (yB, yFBS, yMZS)	JJOI (Z, FBD, MZD)	EHUAPE (WB); EHUAPE (ZH)	EHUANASE (W) SHANA (WZ) SHANA (BW)
G-1	BACUAEJJA (S, BS)	BACUAPIONA (D, BD)	OSECUAJEAJJI (DH = GCF); BOÉ (ZS)	OSECUAJEANA' (SW= GCM); BOEASE (ZD)*
G-2	OSECUA (SC,DC)			

*According to Kimura, the term 'boyase' [boease] refers to the woman 'hue'e' [uapa ?] of the first 'descending generation of the speaking man *or woman* (FZD, MBD, ZD, FZDD, MBDD, ZDD, MBSD, ZSD, etc.)' [Kimura, 1981a #9: 16, note 17, italics added].

Table 2. Uapa and uapapojjama

Sameness and difference

Ese Ejja notions of sameness and otherness, expressed in the idiom of kinship, have two dimensions: on the one hand the diametrical 'us versus them' opposition and, on the other, a scale of levels of differences. These differences are determined by language, residence and 'blood' – where shared blood characterises parent-child and siblings relationships, but it should be made clear that these relations do not depend necessarily on biogenetic transmission as the Euro-American model of filiation assumes. In certain situations, identity may be attributed to the transmission of substance from parent to child, yet in an important sense, it is also contextual and relational. Sameness and difference are given but they are also made, and various factors contribute to their making.

An Ese Ejja is first of all member of a household, which in turn belongs into a named group. But as I have shown in chapters 2 and 3, the boundaries of the group are permeable. Kimura states that membership in a group is transmitted in principle from fathers to sons (1981b), but I observed that if women reside in their natal group after the period of brideservice is over, they remain part of it and their husbands become incorporated. The principal factor in the making of group membership, other than inheritance, is conviviality (c.f. Overing & Passes 2000), which includes residence, shared food and shared activities, such as childrearing, fishing, hunting, weaving, cooking, washing, building houses, playing football and, importantly, shared language. A person is born from a father and a mother through sexual intercourse: in the act, the sperm (Ese Ejja, *emajii*; Ese Ejja Spanish, *leche*, milk) sticks to the mother's belly and the baby is formed. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, according to my informants, it is sufficient for intercourse to take place once and I have never heard anyone mention the need for repeated intercourse to build up the foetus as is said in other parts of Amazonia. A child is said to have her father's 'blood' (Ese Ejja, *ená*; Spanish, *sangre*). The mother is considered not to contribute with any substance to the foetus: 'she is like a bag' Saida told me. Nevertheless, children are expected to resemble both parents, which confirms that the transmission of identity is not solely bound to the passage of substance through the semen/blood complex. The father's 'blood' becomes important in mixed marriages, because the child of an Ese Ejja man and a Tacana woman is said to be Ese Ejja and the child of a Tacana man is Tacana. My informants were very explicit and adamant about this. Yet, if the children of a Tacana man are raised by Ese Ejja, as was the case of Chini and Ino Tahua, they will be considered Ese Ejja. However,

someone may always find it convenient to describe them, under certain circumstances, as Tacana. This confirms the fact that identity is more contingent than absolute, relations are never fixed, and they can change through time; nor are they exclusive and one can entertain the same kind of relationship with what to the observer seem to be different categories of people. This is particularly evident in relations of adoption.

My friend Cua'ó called her grandmother 'mother' because she had been adopted, but occasionally referred to Erlinda (M) as mother too; moreover she called her own biological brother Mequecua '*nono*' (B) but she used the same term for Elico (MB). Another example is Ino Tahua's who, having been cared for by different people during her lifetime calls 'father' three different men (Romualdo, Cuimá and Shope). This is consistent with the logic which Peluso and Boster describe as 'partible parentage' (2002: 137), whereby a child is attributed to different fathers who have had intercourse with the mother during pregnancy – Ino's mother was said to have had many lovers, although, as I mentioned this idea was never voiced to me. This flexibility explains the apparently loose use of kinship terminology in everyday talk. When a child is adopted, he/she will call the adoptive parents 'mother' and 'father', although if he/she goes back and live with the natural parents, he/she will use the same terms for both sets. Thus one's kin are those one calls kin at any time; what matters is the nature of the ties that are established between kin. These ideas reveal the presence of two elements in the system of identity formation: the notion that one's identity is passed through men, and that identity depends upon one's behaviour. To see these positions as contradictory is to essentialise identity as a property of the person that can only derive from one source, and that is permanent and unchangeable, but all the evidence shows that in Amazonia this is not the case. A typical example is the position of spouses, who are taken on the basis of their otherness, but are turned into the same kind of beings through the use of teknonyms.

Same and other

As I discussed above, from the point of view of Ego, the world is divided between *uapa*, other, that one can marry and *uapapojiamá*, non-other, the same as me, that one cannot marry. *Uapapojiamá* are one's grandparents, one's parents and siblings, which include mother's sisters and father's brothers, who are called mothers and fathers, their children, who are considered one's siblings, Ego's children, including the children of same sex siblings and Ego's grandchildren (see Figure 1).

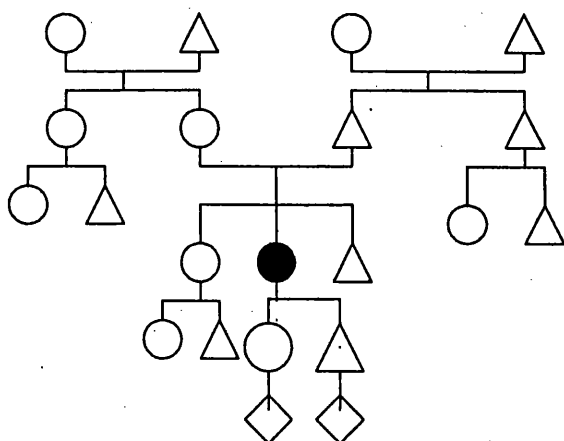


Figure 1. Female Ego's *uapapojtama*

Uapapojtama are the same in the sense that they are thought to share bodily substance. This becomes apparent in the context of food prohibitions that must be observed by all the members of a close kin group. Moreover, they show a deep emotional attachment for each other, and are expected to care and worry for and to miss one another. While I was away in Riberalta in January 2001, Alecio, a young man, father of five, went missing in the forest for three days; when I returned I was told his family had been crying all the time, however I was told his wife did not cry at all. Alecio's wife is from Bajo, she is not a cross cousin and she is considered '*pijajaaji*' by Alecio's kin. Bajjima told me the man's *familia* cried: 'We could not sleep.' Bajjima's use of the Spanish '*familia*' is interesting because she is Alecio's FZD and also his FBSSW (BSW). Formally she is *uapa* to him insofar as she is his cross cousin and she married his classificatory son, Mequecua, but they are cognatic affines. The Spanish term '*familia*' is used here to refer to *uapapojtama* and cognatic affines, thus eliminating at the local level the affine versus non-affine opposition.²¹ As Cacujehua said to me about his ZD: 'Well, she is *uapa*, but she also isn't. She is *familia*.'

As I have shown, *uapapojtama* and *uapa* who live in the same village are called *enijejaaji*, those who live/sleep with me, which stresses physical closeness over the genealogical one. When an Ese Ejja moves to another community, begins to speak like the members of that community, marries one of them, begets children and participates

²¹ This resonates with Viveiros de Castro's discussion of effective and potential affinity, where it is potential affinity that embodies true alterity. Viveiros de Castro, E. 1993b. Alguns aspectos da afinidade no dravidiano amazônico. In *Amazônia. Etnologia e história Indígena* (eds) E. Viveiros de Castro & M. Carneiro da Cunha. Sao Paulo: NHII/USP and FAPESP.

in the production, circulation and consumption of food he or she becomes one of them. This logic is consistent with the reports of many Amazonianist ethnographers who have described the role of food production and consumption and that of procreation in the construction of identity and sociality (Gow 1989; Hugh-Jones 1979; McCallum 1997). But Noonina's case shows how the process of assimilation of others into *enijejaaji* is never total and in certain circumstances, otherness is remembered. Moreover, some people choose to identify themselves with one place or the other regardless of residence, as did Sehua who, in spite of being born and brought up in Alto called himself Bolivian, stressing his membership in Bajo, where his father came from. Jena, however, thought that if a foreigner lived and, above all, spoke like an Ese Ejja, he would become 'like' an Ese Ejja – the 'like' conferring a certain ambiguity to his statement. In any case, it is clear that people say different things at different times to suit their needs and classifications are neither rigid nor permanent.

Siblings and the origin of difference

The strongest ties are those between parents and children and those between same sex siblings, even if siblings of the opposite sex often show reciprocal care and affection, by looking after each other and providing for each other's needs, especially before they are married. In my family, the son, Sapa Ai (eighteen), and the daughter, Quisaa (sixteen), often went fishing together; sometimes they sat together and listened to music; she cooked for him and washed his clothes and he provided for her and her baby, whose father had left. Coco (eighteen) and his sister Chitta (fifteen) spent much of their time together, playing and laughing with each other, and Ino Tahua, my 'mother', often cooked for her brother Chini, who lived in the opposite village. Parents and children and siblings must look after each other: they hunt and fish together, they help each other in the gardens, they look after each other's children and they share food. The bond between siblings of the same sex is particularly strong and very valued. A woman who has no sisters is said to be 'all alone', even if she has brothers and the same is the case for men. Ino told me how she had adopted Cuocuo, her BD, because she could not have any more children and Quisaa would have been alone. When I said I only had one brother – and a twin at that – people regarded me with pity and wondered what was wrong with my mother that she stopped having children.

Siblings of the opposite sex are by no means the equivalent of same-sex ones: as I mentioned, the sex difference of siblings is the root of the distinction between other and

non-other. As I explained, the children of a sibling of the same sex are considered one's children; a brother's children may be referred to by his sister as *chahua*, younger brother, and *shehue* younger sister, but they are *nenejabacua*, children of sister-in-law, who is other. A man's ZS is his *boé* and his ZD his *boease*, who are different from him; he may address them as younger brother and younger sister but they are potential spouses of his own children. In the past, a man could marry his ZD, but today this is rare and people say it is shameful. Like the children of a sibling of the opposite sex, cross cousins may also be assimilated to siblings in everyday talk, especially those of the same sex, but as far as marriage is concerned, they remain different. Basi told me that my MBD was my *shehue*, younger sister, but her children were *uapa* for me and they could marry my children. Moreover, her brother, my MBS, was *totoja-bacua*, maternal uncle's son, and he was *uapa*: I could marry him.

In sum, from a woman's point of view:

1. Sisters are called *a'i* (oZ, MZoD, FBoD) and *shehue* (yZ, MZyD, FByD) and brothers are *nono* (B, MZS, FBS);
2. All her female cross cousins in the same generation can be called *shehue* and the male *chahua*, a term used by men to call their younger brothers;
3. In the first descending generation difference is firmly established: MBCC and FZCC are *uapa*, other;
4. While the children of a woman's MZD and FBD are considered as children and *uapapojiana*, non-other, MZSC and FBSC, like BC, are the children of *nene*, BW and they are *uapa*.

From a man's point of view:

1. Brothers are called *o'i* (oB, MZoS, FBoS) and *chahua* (yB, MZyS, FByS) and sisters *jjo* (Z, MZD, FBD);
2. All cross cousins of the same generation can be referred to as younger brother or sister (using *chahua* and *shehue*), but men seem stricter in using the specific terms of *boé* (ZS, MBS, FZS) and *boease* (ZD, MBD, FZD);
3. In the first descending generation, cross cousins become *uapa*;
4. MZSC and FBSC are *uapapojiana*, while MZDC and FBDC are *uapa*.

Among the Arakmbut of the Madre de Dios region of southeastern Peru, Gray (1996) observed the same flexibility in the reference terms for the relatives in level 0. There,

cross cousins were often referred to by the terms used for siblings and parallel cousins and the reason given by the author was the quality of the relations with siblings. A person is friendly with those he or she calls brother or sister, therefore, when one is on friendly terms with a cross cousin, the two will call each other 'siblings'. He also observed how, with cross cousins, when the relations became less friendly, the Arakmbut reverted to the classification terminology to stress distance (Gray 1996).

This use of kinship terms among the Ese Ejja reflects the contrasting needs and desires referred to above: on the one hand that of keeping the close kin group together, on the other the need to avoid marrying one's siblings or the need to marry out. This process of creation and subsequent suppression of affinity is not uncommon, as Gray's discussion reveals (1996: 100). The desire to be surrounded by kin and the reluctance to reside with affines is voiced openly: my friend Quijehua, who married Chini from Bajo, told me how after one year in his village convinced him to move to Alto because she was unhappy, because people talked all the time, meaning that they gossiped. Chocha refuses to go and visit Ino, her sister-in-law in Bajo, because as Ino put it: 'The women look at her. They are *mironas*', a Spanish word which describes someone looking insolently and insistently. 'They say she is ugly', Ino added, and it is true that Bajo women often accuse Alto women of lacking in beauty. From these comments one gets a strong sense that it is desirable to live among close kin, where one can expect to live in peace. This impression was confirmed by the repeated references to hostilities in the past. People told me that in the past, the Ese Ejja were constantly at war, with Tacana, Cavineños and Whites; but to my surprise they stressed how they fought with their relatives. Ejapa, a man in his fifties, told me: 'Before, the Ese Ejja fought amongst themselves, they killed. Who knows why! Even though they were family, they killed each other, those who lived in different places, *pia-jaajji*.' Indeed, in the 1930s, Father Álvarez complained about the difficulty of teaching the 'savage Huarayos [Ese Ejja]' the principles of Christian charity. He declared: 'For them there is no one worth love and help other than their consanguines; the rest, even if they belong to their same tribe, they do not care whether they live or die' (1998a: 287). He also reported conflicts between Ese Ejja 'tribes' in which men were killed and women and children stolen: these conflicts caused the fragmentation of groups (1998a; 1998b).

When asked why they used to fight, people sometimes said: '*Jama tii*', just like that, or, in Spanish, '*Por gusto*', for the sake of it. Some say they did so to steal ornaments and

machetes. Men relish describing how the killings were done. Showing me some arrow points made with black palm wood and bamboo, used for fishing and hunting, Dejjá Ai and Que'ba – two middle-aged men – explained how the ancient people used them for killing each other and sometimes to kill *dejja*. 'If it goes in, it cannot come out, until one is dead. Right here in the ribs they would shoot. It isn't like a bullet that may come out and one recovers. With one of these, you are dead.' Statements of this kind are in sharp contrast with the non-aggressive appearance of contemporary Ese Ejja. Dejjá Ai told me the ancient people used to travel long distances to fight. He did not know why they did so, but they fought: the Sonene against the Cuei Ai *cuiñajji*, the Pahua Tehue *cuiñajji* and the Bahuajja *cuiñajji*. They would attack in the middle of the night, when it was very cold; they would go in to steal ornaments and machetes. 'The women stole. Basi's grandmother used to steal!' He laughed and nodded towards his wife. 'They wore ornaments in their noses and ears and on their elbows, with feathers. They had straps around their wrists to aim better their arrows.' Then he went on to say: 'They killed everybody and they ate their children', a detail relevant to my discussion of cannibalism as a mode of hostile relations (Chapter 9). He also told me they fought the Cavineños and the Tacana. He described how, a few years earlier the first encounter between different indigenous groups was held in Riberalta, but the elders refused to go. There it was decided they would no longer fight, nevertheless he concluded that that was why, now, they were like enemies, because they used to fight. Months later, in Riberalta, a member of CIRABO described the event to me, and told me how for hours the four different groups refused to sit in the same room. The Ese Ejja entered first, then the Chacobo walked in, but as soon as the Cavineños arrived, the Ese Ejja left from a side door. Several hours passed before they all agreed to sit down to talk, but since then, while most other groups seem to have become accustomed to working with each other, as I described in Chapter 5, the Ese Ejja are reluctant to do so and seldom participate in collective activities.

Alto and Bajo

If the relationships between Alto and Bajo tend to be hostile, there are also signs of attempts at more peaceful interaction. This is partly due to external agents, such as the Government and CIRABO, who want Portachuelo to be one community, a *Comunidad Indígena*, but also internal ones, as inter-village marriages suggest. The present situation indicates that hostility is not the only mode of relation between peoples that consider

each other different and as enemies. Like kinship terms, notions of amity and hostility can be made and undone.

In a very insightful article, Lévi-Strauss (1976) describes how, among the Nambikuára of Central Brazil, foreign groups were both feared and considered necessary. When they came into contact, they had the chance to obtain articles which they were unable to produce or did not possess, but the encounters could as easily turn into fights as into peaceful exchanges. According to the author, ancient travellers tended to privilege the description of hostile relations between indigenous groups because of their dramatic character, and they neglected the positive aspects of these relations. But that peaceful exchanges existed is testified by flows of materials and artefacts and by systems of social organisation. The need to deal with others and to make peaceful relations with them may be, according to the Lévi-Strauss (1976), one of the factors which contribute to the dual mode of social organisation which characterises most Amazonian societies. The need for each other may induce people to see themselves as opposite parts of a dual system. In the Ese Ejja case, the opening to the opposite village can be read as a sign of a transition from group endogamy towards a more generalised exogamy. Henley suggests that: 'Variations in the specific features of Amazonian kinship systems can be linked to ... subregional differences in the density and complexity of exchange networks' (1996: 46). He observes that where groups are more isolated, as in headwater areas, there is a high incidence of Dravidian systems, which permit group endogamy. Instead, in areas where people are involved in wider 'networks of trade, ceremonial exchange and political activity', exogamy is preferred to endogamy, and prohibitions on closer marriages emerge (Henley 1996: 46). These prohibitions are expressed in the progressive hawaiianisation of cross cousins, which become assimilated to parallel cousins in the category of non-marriageable people. Following Henley's hawaiianisation hypothesis, I suggest that, when the Ese Ejja lived in isolated groups scattered in region of the headwaters of the Madidi, Heath and Tambopata Rivers, possibly fleeing the advance of colonisation, they employed a system that enabled them to reproduce without establishing durable relationships with dangerous outsiders. When they turned to outsiders for spouses, they stole women from their enemies, and the new wives were incorporated into the group.²² However, as they moved downriver, towards

²² Chavarría reports that: 'Until the first half of the [twentieth] century, the Ese Ejja often made violent incursions among neighbouring ethnic groups, particularly among the Harakmbut and the Tacana, the latter in Bolivian territory. The objective of the attacks was the quest for women and, as a result, foreign

more populated regions, near Maldonado in Peru and Riberalta in Bolivia, the need arose for wider alliances and for exogamous marriages.

Today, in Portachuelo, teenage boys seem to think it is desirable to find girlfriends in the opposite village. This was brought to my attention in a conversation with Confesor, a very bright sixteen-year-old from Alto. He started by telling me how his friend Esisi, son of Elico – who is originally from Bajo but lives in Alto – was sad because his girlfriend was leaving Portachuelo to go to Peru with her father. The girlfriend was Caji from Bajo, daughter of Eminyo, originally from Alto. Confesor went on to explain that he and his mates went to Bajo to look for girlfriends because in Alto they were all cousins (Spanish, *primos*). I asked him whether one could marry cousins and he said one couldn't, 'because of the name': he explained a child should not have the same name of his parents, an issue to which I return below. Confesor's words reveal the emergence of an alternative view to that of adults, who frown upon mixed marriages. His comments reminded me of something Ino Tahua had told me many months earlier about her son, Sapa Ai, marrying Qui Eña. She was concerned because Qui Eña was the daughter of her brother Fredi: she was *familia* to Sapa Ai. She also condemned Alto people because 'they all marry their cousins.' Which suggests that the merging of cross and parallel cousins is also performed by the older generations at least at the discursive level, even if eventually Sapa went on to marry his MBD.

Marriage

Marriage is one of the means by which the contradiction between the desire for sameness and the necessity of difference may be temporarily and partially overcome. Today, the Ese Ejja practice four types of marriage: they marry cross cousins, preferably of a different generation (i.e. MBSS). There are two cases of MB marriage, but they are criticised, although the kinship terminology suggests that this type of marriage is acknowledged, as parents-in-law are referred to with the same term used for grandparents. Moreover, in the 1970s, the Shoemakers and Arnold wrote that marriage between MB and ZD and between FZ and BS were permitted (1975). An alternative, if not unproblematic, form of marriage is that with members of the opposite village, but

women were introduced in Ese Ejja society through marriage. Moreover, there were cases of children, probably orphans, who were taken and raised by Ese Ejja families. Our first investigation in the oral traditions of the group revealed the existence of elders of Arasaeri and Toyeri origin, who were survivors of these incursions'. Chavarría Mendoza, C.M. 1996. *Identidad y armonía en la tradición oral Ese Ejja* (Tacana). Doctoral Thesis: University of Minnesota.

people may also marry far, geographically as well as genealogically, and even outside one's linguistic family, with Tacana. Finally, people consider the possibility of marriages with Bolivians and gringos: the former are rare and of the latter I have never heard, except in fantasy.

The Shoemakers and Arnold maintained that territorial groups were 'generally endogamous and only occasionally practice exogamy, which however, causes many conflicts' (1975: 8). This was because the groups considered each other as enemies and they often undertook long voyages with the sole objective of taking revenge. 'Marriages between members of different groups are not accepted nor perceived with sympathy and they can be annulled at any moment. Nevertheless, sometimes they are permitted especially when a distant kinship tie is proven, but they always regard [the spouse] with suspicion, looking out for treacherous intentions' (Shoemaker et al. 1975: 9). The comparison with the opinions I recorded may reveal a shift in attitudes over the last thirty years, although it may also be that conflicting opinions existed in the past and the missionaries recorded the dominant ideology.

Today, marrying someone from the opposite community, which is only a couple of miles up or downriver, is disapproved of by the elders, nevertheless, these marriages do take place and they account for the changing distribution of names between Alto and Bajo. In June 2000, when I counted a total of 390 Ese Ejja living in Portachuelo (Alto and Bajo), there were nine mixed (Alto-Bajo) couples living in Alto, out of thirty-one marriages, and nine in Bajo, out of forty-three.²³ In Alto, in five cases, it was the men who married in; in one case, Noonina Callaú and Alecio Tirina had lived with her parents and had given them their first daughter Chapolin; only in the case of Erlinda Ortiz and Biumajja Tirina, it seems, the wife came to live with her husband, although it is likely that they lived in Bajo during the initial years of marriage. But when Erlinda moved, her mother, who had become a widow, moved to Alto too and so did Erlinda's brothers Elico and Cuasamaji: Cuasamaji married Jeanobia Machuqui, granddaughter of Peno, founder of Alto, and Elico married Chichapea Monasterio who comes from upriver. Most of the women who married into Portachuelo Alto came from Villanueva, although Noni is from Naranjal and Chichapea from San Marcos, both on the Beni River. In the case of Tepe Ai, from Bajo, and Choco, from Alto, the couple went to live

²³ I am not including here the Ese Ejja-Tacana marriages, of which there are nine: one in Bajo, three in Medio and five in Alto. In all cases Ese Ejja women married Tacana men.

with his kin, but her MZ lived in the vicinity and so did her FB. In Bajo, in all eight mixed couples, it is the men who have married in. These arrangements are not permanent and once a couple is established, they become a unit in themselves: they can move to the community of the husband if they have observed post-marital uxori-local residence or they may move to another community, even hundreds of miles away from their natal home.

Marriages tend to be monogamous, with few exceptions, but testimonies from elders and data collected in the 1960s by Mario Califano (personal communication) suggest that, in the past, sororal polygyny was a common form of marriage. The ancient people had two or three and even four wives but today only two men, Santo and Huajojó, have two. Until not long ago Eminyo did too, but the older wife became unhappy with the arrangement and found another husband. In all three cases the co-wives are sisters, and it is also quite common to marry a woman and then leave her for a younger sister. Santo's co-wives have separate houses, but people say that in the past co-wives slept together 'under the same mosquito net', and Eminyo's children told me they used to all live together in the same house.

Cross cousin marriage is never explicitly described as the most desirable, but it is common especially in Alto, where eight out of thirty-one couples are formed by cousins, while, to my knowledge, in Bajo only three out of forty-three are (although it is very possible that more were related by ties which I ignored). This may partly be due to the relative size of the settlement and the concentration of 'cousins' in Alto, but unions outside one's residential area are often opposed by the parents of the man, especially those with members of the opposite village. One of the reasons for the dislike is the obligatory uxori-local residence, at least until the birth of the second child. On the other hand, unions with members of distant Ese Ejja groups from Rurrenabaque, to the south, or from Peru seem less problematic than the Alto-Bajo ones. This may be attributed to the sense of loss experienced by parents when one of their children marries – which leads to the gifting of first born children to the grandparents. This sense of loss is comparable to a death, and as with death, a person overcomes the loss once the lost person is forgotten. Similarly, if the departing children move to a distant territory, the parents may, partly, forget them, in the sense that by not seeing them they will not be constantly reminded of them. If the child marries in the opposite village, the chances of seeing him or her are greater and the parents will not be able to let go of their memory.

In a sense, a distant marriage ensures that the spouse is dissociated from his or her kin and becomes part of the new residence group and accepts and becomes accepted by the in-laws. If his or her own natal group is not so distant though, the disassociation is harder and she or he can constantly turn to kin for support. This threatens the strength of unions. During my stay, I heard several stories of parents running after their sons who had gone to live with someone from the other community and dragging them home.

Undoubtedly marriage, especially that of a son, provokes a clash of interests. During the first years of marriage, the husband should work with his father-in-law. In actual fact, fathers-in-law are forever complaining that their sons-in-law are lazy and are a burden to them. This is due to the clash in allegiances, whereby a young man still feels attached to his natal home and contributes to the households food supply sharing game and fish with them, when he would be expected to provide for his affines. This was confirmed to me by a man who praised his sons, who, although they had a family, still shared their meat with him, comparing them to his useless sons-in-law, who ate his food and did not contribute, thereby confirming my suspicion that young men are not particularly lazy but that generous sons make dependant sons-in-law.

Marriage to non-Ese Ejja is condemned initially, and often it is preceded by elopement, but if the spouse – a man, because non-Ese Ejja women are highly unlikely to marry Ese Ejja men – settles in the community and learns the language, he becomes accepted, although a shadow of suspicion remains. Learning the language is a sign of domestication of the other. As I have explained, language, residence and consubstantiality, derived from the consumption of the same food, are the strongest markers of sameness. Through marriage, others can be made into almost the same, as is demonstrated by the use of teknonyms referred to above. When children are born, the parents become known to their parents-in-law as *osecuajeajji*, the father of my grandchildren and *osecuajaná*, the mother of my grandchildren. Non-Ese Ejja are considered by many to be bad spouses because ‘they cannot speak to their mother-in-law’ (i.e. they cannot speak Ese Ejja), but those who, like Fredi, a Spanish-speaking Tacana, have learned the language and speak nothing else with their wife and children are sometimes referred to as almost Ese Ejja, although the fact remains that they are *dejja*, as Ejapa, Fredi’s father-in-law, told me.²⁴ However, this is just one, if

²⁴ Anne Christine Taylor states that for the Jivaro ‘claims of incomprehension are tantamount to defining interlocutors as *shiwiar*, Jivaroan enemies liable to head-hunting raids’ and also that ‘kin are defined as

widespread, discourse and some people have changed their mind on this respect. Ejapa, who once opposed his daughter's marriage with Fredi, who had to 'steal' her, now wishes his youngest daughter would marry a Bolivian, maintaining that Ese Ejja men are lazy and they do not know how to work. Que'ba told me how his daughter and her Tacana husband had to elope, because he did not want them to marry, but then the son-in-law promised to help him, to provide him with goods and to look after him and he changed his mind. Finally, the women who have married Tacana and moved to Portachuelo Medio seem to be lost to the group. They seldom visit their kin and they refuse to teach their language to their children, who become strangers to the Ese Ejja.

The ambiguous position of foreign spouses suggests that, among the Ese Ejja, the idea of transforming potential affines from enemies into members of the group exists, but it is never fully achieved in practice. Affines are dangerous because they can take away one's children, but once they join the residential unit or the territory, they are assimilated to the group and this assimilation is sealed by teknonyms, nevertheless suspicion on the part of their affines remains. The contradiction between potential affines, who are outsiders and enemies, and effective affines, who are consanguinised through shared life and teknonymy, is explored in depth by Viveiros de Castro (1993b: 167), who shows it to be a quasi-universal phenomenon in Amazonia. In Portachuelo, men hunt, fish, make gardens and build houses with their *ehuape*, WB, and women fish, make gardens, weave and regularly pay visits to chat to their *shana*, HZ, and are expected to do so. But, while through their offspring they may become like kin, in-laws remain suspicious of each other. They are expected to be friends, but they often accuse each other of ill doing, as when Erlinda accused Huinasi, her HFBW, of killing her baby. To mistreat one's siblings-in-law is considered very bad, yet, on one occasion, I heard how Sabina, the thirteen-year-old wife of Quecua, was been made to suffer by her female affines. Basi told me: 'Her sisters-in-law are starving her; she is going to die. Her mother-in-law said she is going to kill her with sorcery.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the traditional kinship system of the Ese Ejja can be described as 'Dravidian' in that it is based on the distinction between cross and parallel relatives, which defines who potential marriage partners are. This distinction is repeated

people who speak the same language'. Taylor, A.C. forthcoming. Sick of history. Contrasting regimes of historicity in the Upper Amazon.

over three generations (+1, 0 and -1), but it disappears in the second ascending and descending generations (grandparents and grandchildren). This system determines who one can and cannot marry, while establishing the possibility of maintaining the integrity of the close kin group.

The observation of Ese Ejja kinship practices reveals a contradiction between the desire to keep the close kin group together and the prohibition to marry one's siblings. I have shown that the logic underlying Ese Ejja social relations is that the only people one cares for and one can trust are those who share one's substance, that is, the members of one's close kin group, and that outsiders are always dangerous. This is what makes marriages with cross cousins and MB/ZD desirable, because these are the closest people one is allowed to marry. However, the increase in inter-village marriages, four between 1965 and 1985 and fourteen between 1985 and 2001, suggests that different ideas about marriage coexist. The existence of such differences is confirmed by the opinions of teenage boys, who say they go to the opposite village to look for girlfriends because they do not want to marry their 'cousins', where the Spanish word '*primos*' merges parallel and cross cousins.

In the past, enemy groups lived in relative isolation and displacement was an easy option. Today, displacement is more difficult, given that people have become accustomed to settled life, they build semi-permanent houses and they enjoy living surrounded by large numbers of people. When fissions do happen, they are signs of serious crises, and, in general, people prefer to marry out rather than make war. This attitude is also combined with the desire to adopt the kinship terms and practices of their powerful neighbours, the Bolivians. In this situation, one can detect some changes in action, but they cannot be read as the outcome of the passive absorption of the national model by a marginalized indigenous group, rather, there are multiple factors contributing to the transformation of the system. These are: the desire for peace and the pressure from national institutions, as well as the desire to borrow the neighbours' knowledge, all of which contribute to the questioning of existing ways of relating to the world.

Certain radical historical changes can be observed, such as the gradual disappearance of polygyny and of communal houses. However, the assimilation of parallel cousins to cross cousins described in this chapter is not a universal phenomenon among the Ese

Ejja. Marriage preferences vary from kin group to kin group, as parents who have married out are more likely to allow their children to do the same, as was the case of Dejja Ai and Basi. Moreover, variation is generational. When people are young, they express the desire to find partners unrelated to them, but when they age, they become more conservative about the issue. Generational variation is a crucial factor in the analysis of cultural change among the Ese Ejja, as will become clear in the next chapter, where I discuss attitudes towards the knowledge that comes from the past.

7. Ancient people's stories

In this chapter, I describe the context in which I came to know the mythical narratives of the Ese Ejja, starting from how and why people chose to tell them or not to tell them to me. In Amazonia, the study of myth is overwhelmingly informed by Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach and even his critics cannot but acknowledge his monumental contribution to the subject. My discussion is inevitably influenced by his writing, but my attention here is not on the structural aspects of this class of narratives. Instead, I want to relate their contents and the way they are told to the everyday, lived experience of the Ese Ejja, to understand what motivates them to carry on telling them. In this sense, my work fits in the current of studies of Amazonian societies in which the authors have tried to 'link Lévi-Strauss's work to in-depth field data collected by essentially Malinowskian protocols' (Gow 2001: 25).

As I began to write on this subject, I became aware of the fact that the analysis of myths presents an insurmountable problem: as anthropologists we search for their meaning, whether understood as significance or importance (meaningfulness) or as hidden signification. The problem is that, in most if not in all cases, the people themselves consider mythic narratives as 'just stories'. So we are left in the uncomfortable position of assuming that we know better than they what their stories are about, simply because we want to explain them beyond their narrative expression.

Most authors working in Amazonia would agree that there exists a category of narratives that could be labelled as 'myths', which are manifestations of a mode of consciousness or of a narrative genre (see Hugh-Jones 1988:141 and *passim*; Turner 1988a: 195). They are stories that account for the origin of the present state of things, often telescoping the past. Lévi-Strauss defines them as stories that lack a recognised author and have been adopted by the community as a whole, and by virtue of this lack of authorship they are open to a series of transformations (see Lévi-Strauss 1981: 627). Moreover, they are not random stories but they respect a number of structural restrictions; these may be seen as more or less rigid, depending on the propensity of the observer to adopt a structuralist approach, but most would accept that new events are portrayed in myth in terms of existing cultural parameters, although this does not necessarily mean that 'the event thus enters the culture' as a whole 'as an instance of a received category' as Marshall Sahlins puts it (1985: 7). Ultimately, myth is seen as a means of explaining reality, 'to define the essential features of social phenomena in

abstraction from their concrete manifestations in particular contexts, actions or events', (Turner 1988b: 273) or more simply, 'to reduce the chaos of real experience to manageable order' (Hugh-Jones 1988: 141). But whether, as I discuss below, one takes a semiotic, psychoanalytic view, as is for example the case many authors working in Melanesia, or a Lévi-Straussian structuralist approach, like most Amazonianists – the opposition is arbitrary because many take a mixture of both – the answer to why people tell these stories remains open. Before I turn to my ethnography, I consider briefly the propositions made by authors writing on other regions as well as by those writing on Amazonia. In the rest of the chapter, I describe the process of getting to know these stories, the cosmological context in which they belong, and I outline the contents of the most significant ones for my argument. Finally, I discuss why they are relevant to people and whether and how the insights obtained from other regions and different authors can be of help in the analysis of the Ese Ejja material. Finally, I consider the contrasting and contradicting opinions expressed by different informants regarding these narratives at different times.

Broadly speaking, scholars have attempted to relate the contents of myth either to universal human dilemmas, experienced by a particular group, or to universal structures of the mind. James Weiner, and other Melanesianists, after Roy Wagner, have described myths as 'a set of moral statements' or as 'metaphors of real life' which provide a clue for the understanding events such as marriage, exchange and death (Weiner 1988: 172, 286). Myths offer a commentary on the nature of lived relationships and create social meanings, mediating between individual and collective identity. Moreover, they lay bare the fundamental paradoxes of social values, contradictions that apprehended in everyday life would disrupt the quotidian flow of activity. Another important feature of Melanesian myths, according to these authors, is their relationship to space and their role in people's perception of it. This feature has also been observed in Australian myths, and a collection of essays is dedicated to the comparison between the two regions (Rumsey & Weiner 2001). The authors of the essays argue that, not only myths develop following features of the landscape, but geography itself is shaped by these stories. As Wagner puts it: 'The grafting of mythic content upon distinctive features of the terrain is definitive of "country" and landscape' (2001: 77). This statement echoes David McKnight's discussion of the myths of the Lardil and Yankaal of northern Queensland, in which 'the actors visit and name many places ... and by doing so in a sense they create them' (1995:71). This relation between mythical narratives and spatial

knowledge is epitomised in the stories relating the cosmogonic journeys of creator heroes, which span from Papua New Guinea to Australia and of which each people knows the fragments that concern the creation of its territory, and attributes to its neighbours the knowledge of antecedents and sequels. McKnight and the authors of the collection mentioned above espouse the Malinowskian notion that myths are charters for the interpretation and the constitution of reality: of sociality, of sexuality, of geography and of decay and death.

The notion of myth as a charter is also found in Amazonia, especially in the context of a series of myths about secret flutes, supposedly concerned with gender inequality, which tell how women stole the instruments – or sacred ornaments – from men and subverted the moral and social order. In the myths men recover the objects and punish women, thus re-establishing harmony. Some authors have taken these stories to be ideological naturalisations of male domination, which they consider a universal fact (Bamberger 1974; Gregor 1985; Murphy & Murphy 1974). But Cecilia McCallum (1994), following Ellen Basso (1985), opposes this interpretation, arguing that these myths, and the rituals associated with them, are active ways of dealing with the problem of cosmic order, of the proper mixing of substances and the appeasement of powerful beings that threaten the very existence of life. As McCallum points out, Bamberger and Gregor see myth both as ‘charter for an ideal type of social relation’ and as ‘a manifestation of unconscious conflicts’ and assume that ‘ritual and myth are indigenous forms of representation’ (1994: 91). But the assumption is unwarranted, since much of the regional literature stresses that, in Amazonia, performance is attributed with concrete transformative powers.

The analysis of ritual through or with myth is at the centre of Stephen Hugh-Jones’ (1978) seminal work on the Barasana Indians. The author argues that it is ritual which gives myths their force in the context of daily life and therefore these stories must be related to the rites or they cannot be fully understood. In this sense, myths are seen as charters, which inform and are informed by rite. This is very valid point for the Barasana material, but in many cases these stories are not related – at least in their present form – to any particular rite, as in the contemporary Ese Ejja narratives discussed in this chapter. The notion of myth as charter does not offer a solution to the problem of how to understand myths and how to relate them to everyday life and knowledge.

In considering the contents of mythical narratives, Hugh-Jones takes an explicitly structuralist approach, but, while agreeing with Lévi-Strauss that myths can only be understood in the light of many variants, he maintains that 'myths from one society [must be] seen as a relatively bounded and self contained' because the analysis of myths as signifieds and not just as signifiers is only possible within a 'specified social and cultural context' (Hugh-Jones 1978: 259). In the light of my experience with the Ese Ejja, I suggest that while myths as signifieds are rooted in the specific history of any particular group, they also belong to a common stock which is shared across linguistic and territorial frontiers. This view, famously endorsed by Lévi-Strauss (1969), finds support in the material presented here (see 'The origin of weapons and of jaguars' below).

A common understanding of myths is that they are metaphors, symbolic representation of tangible reality. Criticising this view, Joanna Overing argues that metaphor is a safety net, resorted to by observers who cannot deal with the chaos presented by some of the statements of their informants, which offend their logic and rationality and concludes that we should look at indigenous 'ontologies and cosmologies' for an explanation of their statements (1984b: 29).²⁵ Terence Turner discusses the problem of how to treat informants' most peculiar statements focusing on the generative power of metaphor. In his argument, metaphor is not seen as a 'figurative relation between two received semantic entities and their meanings' but as 'constituting a new, integral construct, a metadomain ... with new meaning uniquely defined in the relation to the context constituted by the interaction between its source and target members' (1991b: 125). Turner's argument is compelling, but the answer to why people tell myths does not depend on knowing whether and how people believe in what they say, which is a philosophical matter. On this point I agree with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, who, when asked whether he believed that white-lipped peccaries were dead Araweté or he was just being patronisingly polite towards his informants, replied that 'as anthropologists we don't travel to remote places to find something new to believe in, but to understand what it means for the people we study to say what they say' (personal communication). Viveiros de Castro's treatment of myth is situated in the context of what he considers to

²⁵ On the other hand, the author also suggests that when faced with apparently irrational statements, we should treat them 'methodologically as we would literary metaphors in our own culture'. Overing, J. 1984b. Today I shall call him 'mummy'. Multiple worlds and classificatory confusion. Paper presented to the ASA Malinowski Centennial Conference, 1984b.

be the indigenous theory of perspectivism. Myth is the 'vanishing point' of Amerindian perspectivism, because, he argues, it is the place where 'the differences between points of view are at the same time annulled and exacerbated' (1998a: 470, 495). The limit of perspectivism as a theory of indigenous philosophy is that it cannot be falsified, nevertheless, in mythical discourse, it remains a very strong ethnographic fact and in many of the myths I have recorded one can find evidence of a perspectival view of the world.

Myth and history

One of the most fruitful debates in the recent years on Amazonian myths has been that over the issue of whether they should be considered as records of, or antidotes to, history. For Lévi-Strauss, myths are historical artefacts, memory banks, or 'structured sets' built out of 'the remains and debris of events' (1966: 22), which transform in order to minimize the impact of events on the society that owns them. He observes that: 'All Indian people of both North and South America seem to have conceived their myths for one purpose only: to come to terms with history and, at the level of the system, to re-establish a state of equilibrium capable of acting as a shock absorber for the disturbances of real life events' (1981: 607). One of the major critiques of Lévi-Strauss's work on myth, developed since the publication of *Les mythologiques*, has been over the presumed failure on the part of the author to acknowledge the fact that what he calls cold societies possess a sense of history. The critique is voiced in the volume *Rethinking history and myth*, edited by Jonathan Hill (1988) with the substantial contribution by Terence Turner, and objected to by Peter Gow in *An Amazonian myth and its history* (2001).

In Turner's words: 'The work of Lévi-Strauss and other structuralist writers on lowland South American cultures has perpetuated certain romantic notions about the nature of social consciousness in these societies, such as that they lack a notion of history ... having instead a totally "mythic" formulation of social reality' (1988a: 195). As Hill puts it, one of the main aims of the collection of essays is to contribute to the critique of 'Lévi-Strauss's distinction between "cold", mythic societies that resist historical changes and the "hot" societies that thrive upon irreversible, cumulative changes', in which 'cold' societies are taken to be 'without history' (1988: 3-4). Yet Lévi-Strauss himself recognises that the value of his distinction between hot and cold is 'mainly theoretical, for there is probably *no concrete society* which, in its whole as well as in its

components, corresponds exactly to either type' (1977: 29, italics added). However, the opinions expressed in *The naked man* (1981) seem to confirm the statement made in *The savage mind*, to the effect that some concrete societies indeed should have as their objective 'to make it the case that the order of temporal succession should have as little influence as possible on their content' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 234). In the last volume of *Les mythologiques*, the author clearly states that: 'Each American community had its own independent and extremely complicated history, whose dramatic events it constantly tried to neutralise by reshaping the myths' (1981: 610). I am inclined to think that the effacing of time is indeed one of the effects of the mythic mode of thinking and narrating, but less so to attribute this process to a directed effort (conscious or unconscious), as the author seems to suggest. Nor do I agree that the mythic mode excludes other ways of relating to the past, although it is not clear to me that Lévi-Strauss maintains this position. But, in the absence of writing, of deep genealogies and of permanent material artefacts, it is not implausible to say that Amazonian history has constantly been effaced through the transformations of stories that purport to tell about the past, while they are constantly reshaped by the present. But this empirical fact does not imply the absence among Amazonian peoples of different modes of social consciousness as well as narrative genres, which are used at different times, under different circumstances to relate to the past, an assumption his critics wrongly attribute to Lévi-Strauss (see Hill 1988: 9; Hugh-Jones 1988; Turner 1988a: 273).

It may be argued, with Hugh-Jones that, while recognising that all societies are affected by historical changes, Lévi-Strauss shows little interest in 'the impact of such change on the cultural systems that he analyses', as shown by the fact that the presence of white people is given very little place in *Les mythologiques* (1988: 139). But, while this is true, it is also fair to point out that the time span the author addresses in the *opus* far exceeds the conquest of the Americas, therefore it takes into account amongst other things, the autonomy and originality of Amerindian historical sense, as stored in the 15,000 year-old *bricolage* of a mythic system that spans from the Bering Straits to Patagonia, in which the arrival of white foreigners is but an episode, albeit cataclysmic in the long run. Gow makes this point when he defends the possibility that 'myths might be functioning to annul the effects of these societies *own* histories, a series of events and processes that may have nothing to do with European colonial penetration' (2001: 16, italics in the text). There is however a substantial difficulty in identifying these 'own' histories, because we know so little of the distant past of people who have left scarce

material trace of it; hence the constant reference by anthropologists to the time of contact as a privileged historical event, because it is the only one that was recorded (by white people). While it is useful to look at indigenous elaborations of the encounter, it should be remembered that it is only a fortuitous case, and that the encounter with white people is but one of the momentous events in the histories of Amazonian societies.

Leaving aside the debate over supposedly hot and cold societies, among Amazonianists there seems to be some consensus on the fact that mythical narratives transform to adjust to historical changes, as Hugh-Jones puts it: 'to keep up pace with an ever-changing present' (1988: 149) or 'to keep pace with the world, in order to preserve the illusion of their stability' (Gow 2001: 73). If the transformations can be recorded through the comparison of different versions of the same myth, they can tell us a great deal about historical transformations that have caused particular elements to fall into oblivion and new ones to appear. Specifically, Gow maintains that: 'variation is a general feature of Piro mythic narratives, even over the life course, but ... certain forms of such variation are linked to specific changes in the Piro lived world' (Gow 2001: 79). This is a very attractive proposition, but this approach is limited by the availability of comparable material in the form of recorded versions of myths from past epochs. How are we to understand what a myth might mean in the present and in the absence of comparative data? While I am aware of the importance of the historical analysis, I am also conscious of the fact that it requires data that exceed what is currently available to me. Therefore, in the next section, I explain what contemporary versions of Ese Ejja myths are about and what they do for the Ese Ejja themselves. Where possible, I refer to past versions.

Gow argues that myths survive because they are transmitted and they are transmitted because they are meaningful to the people who tell them: 'Piro myth narrators ... tell the myths that they, and their listeners find interesting now' (2001: 96). But why are they interesting? In the case of the Piro myths, relevance is defined both in terms of historical adaptations and in terms of the context of the telling, as when Piro tell to white people stories about white people. If myths are to be seen as 'structures of significance, pointing outwards ... to draw attention towards important features of their world' (2001: 99), it still remains to be explained why these features are important. The set of myths analysed by Gow reveal a series of adjustments to the presence of Whites, from the changes in the concerns about seasonality, influenced by the introduction of

the Gregorian calendar to the assimilation of Christian cosmology and the reassertion of shamanry with the decline of the missionary influence. But what about myths that are not about Whites? Meanings are not readily available to the foreign observer, because they are deeply rooted in the history of the people who tell them and in the series of transformations undergone by the myth in question in an effaced past.

At first, the relation between Ese Ejja myths and their lived experience was not at all clear to me. Moreover, their refusal to tell them and their admissions of forgetfulness made me suspect that these stories had lost relevance for them as a consequence of missionisation and schooling, but this was a facile conclusion due to my anxieties as an inexperienced ethnographer, and to my short-sightedness as to the magnitude of the system, which I supposed could be wiped off by a few decades of foreign presence. I later discovered that people knew them and carried on telling them although not in a conspicuous manner. But the problem is to explain why they should do so. Why are these stories relevant? Why are they told? Why do people find them interesting?

The Ese Ejja and their myths

According to the missionaries' *Culture Notes*, storytelling among the Ese Ejja used to be a collective form of entertainment, at least until twenty years ago, but today stories are only told by elders to their children and grandchildren. At first, my informants were reluctant to tell me these stories and, for a long time, they declared they did not know them or they had forgotten them. Then, suddenly, they began to talk. Starting from this experience, I discuss the place that myths occupy in the life of the Ese Ejja and in their relations with outsiders. In the analysis, I consider three factors. First, the outward Ese Ejja attitude to myths is another instance of their ambivalent attitude towards the past, and of their perception of themselves *vis-à-vis* non-indigenous outsiders. Denying the knowledge of these narratives is part of the deprecation of the ignorance and savagery attributed to the ancient ones in front of strangers. Secondly, the deprecation is supported by the powerful message of the Evangelical missionaries. On other matters the missionaries oppose the Ese Ejja self-deprecation, insisting that all humans are the children of God and are equal in front of Him, but on this issue, they are adamant that ancient people's stories are ignorant superstitions, that they are *siajje*, lies, and that those who choose to follow the way of the ancient people will burn in hell. In front of the missionaries, the denial is total and the Ese Ejja laugh at these 'false beliefs'. Finally, I consider the issue of the definition of knowledge. Knowing and being able to

tell do not necessarily coincide and some people, especially younger ones, had heard these stories, and therefore, by my standards, should have known them, but they did not feel they would be able to tell them well and, by their standards, did not know them. The fact that younger generations declare they do not know the stories of the ancient people is not the unquestionable proof that they are in the process of being forgotten, but simply that it is not their time to tell them, as I discuss.

In spite of this denial, people of all ages know, or know of, these stories, which are remembered because they are relevant to their lives and to their sense of who they are and where they come from. This relevance is particularly apparent in the stories of 'Sloth' and of 'The descent from the sky', which contain important clues as to the origin of the world and to the socio-cosmological dimension of the assertion that they are not 'the true people'. However, they cannot be said to be charters for action, nor moral statements, as has been argued by Weiner for the Foi case (1988: 172). Unlike the Foi, the Ese Ejja are not aware of the 'uses and effects [of myths] as metaphors', as Weiner suggests (1988: 288). As I will describe, Ese Ejja myths contain elements of Ese Ejja morality, but they do not hold them as models of behaviour.

First impressions

When I arrived in Portachuelo, full of expectations and assumptions about how an Amazonian people might see the world, the first impression I received was that traditional Ese Ejja ideas – whatever they were supposed to be – had been transformed by the teachings of the missionaries and of the schoolteachers. All the villagers, with very few exceptions, claimed to be Christians and when I naively asked them about their cosmology, people replied that everything had been created by God who lived in the sky, that all believers would go and live in His beautiful house when they died, while non-believers, who were friends of Satan, would burn in the great fire. This issue will be discussed at length in Chapter 8. Then, I learned the expression *etiiquianaja esohui*, ancient people's speak/language, henceforth ancient people's stories, by which they described the non-Christian knowledge of the past, which included myths. Initially, I found that hardly anybody admitted to knowing these stories, and when I asked about them, people replied they had forgotten them, because now they were Christian, and that the ancient people were friends of the Devil.

I accepted these answers and felt profoundly frustrated because the Ese Ejja seemed to have all but forgotten these stories, together with their rituals and shamanic practices. With hindsight, I suspect that the misplaced sensation of having arrived to witness the vanishing of a culture, 'the last notes of a dying tradition' as Gow puts it (2001: 84), is one shared by many ethnographers. For a long time I thought my fears about acculturation and ethnocide on the part of missionaries and the State had been confirmed. To my partial relief, I found that Peno Machuqui was very keen on telling me about the ancient people and their stories.

The first time I visited Peno, I felt slightly anxious because I wanted to record what he told me but I feared I would distract him or, worse, annoy him, if I wrote down or recorded on tape what he said. I sat down on his bench, inside his house, with a small notebook in my pocket, telling myself that, as soon as I left, I would jot down as much as I could remember. However, to my surprise, Peno looked around and asked me where my tape recorder was, and seemed disappointed when I told him I had not brought one. From then on, the visits to Peno became a regular feature in my week and every time I went to see him, he asked me to come back so that we may record more. Gerardo Bamonte, an Italian anthropologist, had visited Portachuelo years before and had recorded many myths, mainly from Peno, which unfortunately to date remain unpublished. Peno was enthusiastic about recording some more with me, which I guessed provided him with a diversion from his uneventful life. A great-grandfather, he was very old by Ese Ejja standards, being 'definitely seventy or eighty-years-old' as people told me, and spent most of the day indoors or sitting alone outside his house, although sometimes I found him in his plantain garden hacking away at a plant with his machete, despite being almost totally blind. Occasionally, one of his children or grandchildren came and listened for a while, but generally it was just he and I.

Peno denied being Christian and complained that the missionaries had ruined the life of the village. He told me how in Portachuelo they used to have parties all the time and play music: drums, flutes and accordion, and how they used to dance for nights on end. He also complained that, because of the missionaries, there were no shamans left. He talked fondly of the sessions when an *eyamiquecua*, a shaman, called the dead, who came and talked to the living and ate, chatted, played music, danced and told very funny jokes. He insisted that young people knew nothing, that they ignored shamans and all

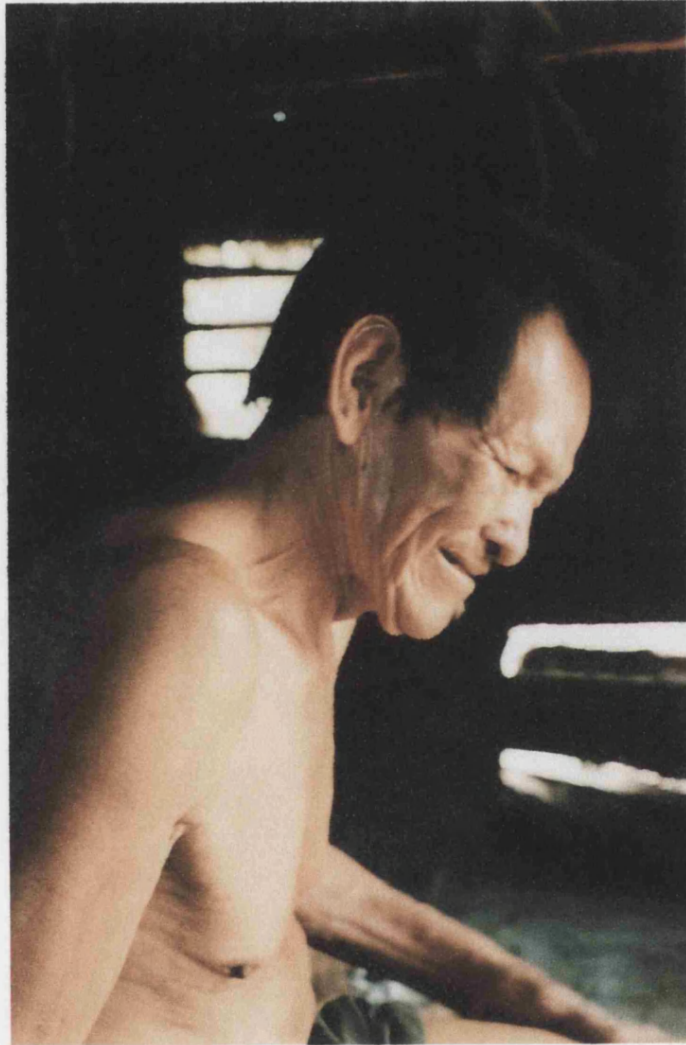


Plate 17. Peno Machuqui

there was to know about the dead. Thus, he reinforced my prejudice regarding the supposed acculturation of the young Ese Ejja.

I was and I am very grateful to Peno, but at the time I could not help feeling that, perhaps, spending so much time with an old man, recording stories that had lost all importance for the majority of the Ese Ejja was a pointless exercise, a kind of 'rescue' ethnography which I was not interested in conducting.

The second stage of my discovery of the ancient people's stories was characterised by the conviction that I had been lied to. Thanks to the information I collected from Peno, I gradually discovered that what people had been telling me was only partly true and I began to suspect that what the Ese Ejja were showing me was just a façade, that they were reluctant to talk to me about the ancient people and that they were hiding their knowledge for reasons that I was determined to discover. I became aware of this for the first time as I was transcribing Peno's tapes and the members of my family started to show curiosity and asked me to play them again. We ended up listening to them at night for hours, as we lay under our mosquito nets; until one day, Dejjá Oshie, who is an assiduous churchgoer and spends much of his spare time reading the Bible out loud to himself, fleetingly commented that Peno was wrong on the sequence of the events in a particular story. From then on, I discovered that most people knew some myths or at least fragments of them, but it was only many months later that, to my great surprise, they started telling them to me. By the end of my stay, some people even told me stories spontaneously, without prompting and without tape-recorder, as was the case of Que'ba. Son of Peno, he was a middle-aged man and a grandfather himself. He had become a good friend, he had built my house and often talked to me, but he had never told me ancient people's stories. One day he came to my house and surprised me by telling me the story of Sloth (see below). I had started asking him about the shape of the world and he explained how there were Ese Ejja living in the sky, who had arrived there after the older brother killed the younger brother's lover, Sloth, and the grieving man had made the earth rise to the sky. This was consistent with the story told me by Peno.

Cosmology

Before I move to the stories themselves, I will describe the cosmological stage on which they are set. For many months, no one, with the exception of Peno, had given me any explicit description of the world, only vague references to the water-world and the sky.

However, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, towards the end of my stay I decided to test what information I received from Peno with other people, by way of semi-structured interviews. I interviewed people from the main adult age groups: the recently married, the ones with several children, the ones with grandchildren and the very old ones. I asked them about being Christians, about illness and death about the question of *dejjaness* and about the shape of the world. The results of the interviews were remarkably consistent and even the so-called Christians admitted knowing about things which for decades the missionaries have tried to convince them do not exist.

The centre of Ese Ejja existence is the river and the world of the living ends where the river ends, where Deer was taken by a bird, fleeing the fire of the envious people (see below). Several people insisted that the Ese Ejja had always lived by the edges of rivers and contrasted this lifestyle with that of the 'wild Indians' that lived in the forest, 'like animals' or even like of powerful demons such as *edosiquiana* and *ecuiquia*. According to the historical record, riverine life would have characterised their history at least since the nineteenth century (Armentia 1976); and today, the Ese Ejja live in established communities, in isolated households or in seasonal beach camps, but never in the middle of the forest. The only exception I know to this is a woman called Besi Tehue, married to a Tacana, Mario Santa Cruz, President of Portachuelo Medio, who lives twenty minutes walk away from the river. When people talk about her house, they always make a point of how far it is, and observe deplorably that it is 'in the middle of the forest'. The river is one of the main sources of animal protein but the quest for food alone does not justify this residence choice: the Ese Ejja are excellent hunters and while they are also skilled fishermen, they consider forest meat by far preferable to fish. The importance of the river resides in its role as link connecting all the places where the Ese Ejja go, namely, Riberalta, Rurrenabaque and the Peruvian communities: the extreme limits of their direct geographical knowledge. They are of course aware of the existence of other places, further away, such as the cities of Trinidad, Cochabamba and La Paz, but hardly anyone has visited them, and they are perceived as cold and dangerous. Finally, they know of the existence of places such as the United States, because the missionaries travel there, and of Italy, Germany, Holland and France, from the names of the World Cup football teams, but their notions of these places are extremely fuzzy. I was often asked whether Italy or the United States were in Bolivia and I realised that the notion of Bolivia itself was also rather vague. The idea of the State is informed by their notion of village and community and my friends always referred to Italy or England as

my *comunidad*. Under the river there is a world inhabited by powerful beings called *ena(water)-edosiquiana*, which will be described in detail in Chapter 9. Another fundamental feature of the Ese Eja world is the forest. As I have shown, the forest is the source of food and of building materials and it is the domain of another kind of powerful beings called *edosiquiana*. When I asked what was under the ground, people tended to say they did not know or that there was not anything, yet, on more than one occasion I was told of someone's hand being grabbed from below when they were digging the ground or the sand, and that a shaman had to intervene to free the victim.²⁶ Ejapa told me of this episode and concluded that under the ground there must be *eshahua*, spirits or demons.

Eshahua, also a common translation of Devil, are identified with the shadow projected by a body, but most often they are referred to in Spanish as *espíritu*, spirit, *alma*, soul, or *sombra*, shadow. I had difficulties in adopting the word spirit, due to my understanding of the term. *Eshahua* have none of the ethereal characteristics associated with this word in Spanish or in English because they are considered to possess solid, tangible bodies. *Eshahua* emanate from other beings, but they do not co-exist with them: they act independently. In this sense, *eshahua* are reminiscent of the *jam* of the Warí described by Vilaça as someone's double: 'Although it is related to the body, since it is from the body that it is constituted, the double is not simply a projection of it; it is mobile and has an existence somehow independent of the body' (1992: 55). Moreover, 'the *jam* needs a body as a signifier, but its presence is only revealed when the physical body is, in a sense, absent': in sleep/dream, in case of a severe illness, and in death (1992: 56). '*Jam* is not a thing that these beings have inside them, but first of all a capacity for action, for transformation, when it manifests itself' (1992: 63). The *eshahua* of humans are said to 'come out' after death in triple form: as *ecuiquia*, a cannibal zombie which runs to the forest to lead a lonely restless life, haunting the path of the living, as *ecojjashahua*, literally the *eshahua* of the eyes or of the face, that goes

²⁶ Chavarría dedicates a whole chapter to the 'World under the ground' described by her informants as inhabited by very small relatives, *paisanos*, who are the original inhabitants, but also of other people who went there at different times and for different reasons. Chavarría Mendoza, C.M. 1996. *Identidad y armonía en la tradición oral Ese Eja (Tacana)*. Doctoral Thesis: University of Minnesota. 'It is conceived as a closed space that can be entered through a hole. They say that following the hole one can go around the world and reach another dimension of reality that is Kueihana' (ibid.: 155), but I was never told about this.

to the sky,²⁷ and as *edojjoshahua*, that of the inside, which goes to *cueijana*, the city of the dead.

Animals and plants have *eshahua* and they can cause illness and death in humans, when they fail to observe the appropriate behaviour in relation to food. Such failure angers the animal or the plant that was consumed and causes its *eshahua* to enter the body of the culpable person and eat him or her. Food taboos prescribe that, when any meat or fish are left over from one day to the next, the hunter must refrain from having sex until they have been eaten, or the food becomes *ebinatta*, causing anyone who eats it to become ill or die. Similarly, when a man or a woman collects certain fruits, they should be consumed before they have sexual intercourse. At first, many people denied that they observed these prohibitions, and I heard the missionary woman scorn these 'superstitions' during the women's Bible hour. The women laughed with her but looked uneasy: they said they did not know about them, that they were stories of the ancient people. However, towards the end of my stay, my closest friends started telling me about them and how they were extremely careful not to eat *ebinatta* or *quea-ajja*, dangerous, foods. Ideas and practices concerning food taboos varied and younger people declared that they ate, and fed their children, everything; that they had experimented and realised that there was no danger in plants and animals. Mi'Ai, who is a grandmother, said parents should avoid dangerous foods until their children reach their first year, but that now young people ate everything. 'Dejja eat everything, but their children do not die. The ancient people spoke like that'. Cuaene, a woman in her late thirties, who has several children, said she ate everything because her parents were dead and there was no one around to tell her what she should and what she shouldn't eat. However, even the more sceptical, admitted avoiding at least red bananas; considered the most dangerous of fruits. A disease commonly attributed to animal potency is *tajja*, leishmaniasis, considered to be the *eshahua* of a carnivore fish which enters and eats the body of a person who does not respect the rules of separation of food and sex. The only remedy for this disease is thought to be fish poison that can kill the *eshahua* of the fish.

²⁷ On the fate of *ecojjashahua*, my informants were a lot less explicit, simply stating that it went to the sky. Some occasionally would say that it went to live with God. I took this as a sign of the adjustment of Ese Ejja traditional ideas to the teachings of the missionaries.

Finally, *eshahua* is also the active principle of sorcery. The most common method of sorcery is to put a red banana on the path of the victim to step on, so that sorcery enters his or her feet. This kind of sorcery is called *ejiojji cuiajji*, to hit the feet: once the victim steps on the banana, the person becomes ill and the only way of rescuing him or her is to cut the plant from which the banana came, to neutralise its *eshahua*.

Interestingly, Andrew Gray (1996) reports how some of the most dangerous sorcerers in Arakmbut society come from other groups, such as the Matsigenka and Ese Ejja.

According to the author, they perform *wa'i*, which means footprint. 'These sorcerers use footprints to work their magic with *ayahuasca* or some other form of incantation.

However any part will do, such as nail paring, hair or bits of personal property' (Gray 1996: 164). The cutting of the plant to avert sorcery is the same method used to neutralise the effects of the breach of food taboos. If a fruit has become dangerous because the person who picked it had sex before the fruit was eaten, the tree from which it came should be destroyed. This suggests that the same principle is in action: the *eshahua* of the plant is making someone ill. Some animals are considered proper sorcerers and are thought to attack out of their own will. Such is the case of the anaconda, which will bring illness to anyone who disturbs it: the only way a person may survive the sorcery attack of the anaconda is to kill one.

The boundaries between people, animals, plants and *eshahua* are not always clear-cut, because according to a virtually universal Amazonian notion, in mythical time most animals, some plants and even objects were human, while in the present time white-lipped peccaries are dead Ese Ejja that turn into animals when they leave the land of the dead to visit their surviving kin. In what follows, I use the names of animals in the capitalised form, when I refer to them in the state prior to their differentiation from humans. Sloth (Bemasha or Behuijajja), Anaconda (Sa'o), and Water Turtle (Cui'Ao), had long hair, they were 'pretty girls, nicely made-up' according to Peno. Howler Monkey (D'o) and Land Turtle (Daqui Ai), were also men and so was Tapir (Shahue). Then, something happened: a wicked act or simply a game, and each one turned into its current non-Ese Ejja shape. Anaconda was mistreated by her mother-in-law and ran away to the river with her new-born baby; Viper (Majjasha), was hacked into pieces for killing one of the daughters of Condor and trying to do the same to her sister, and from the pieces came all the snakes in the world. Turtle pestered Howler Monkey who threw him off his tree and he got stuck in the mud. Then, Turtle tricked Tapir into putting his penis into Turtle's mouth, he bit it and Tapir pulled him out of the mud. Once freed,

Turtle still didn't let go of the penis, so Tapir started to run, and his penis became very long under Turtle's weight. Eventually, Tapir smashed Turtle's hard body against the rocks, and from the pieces came all the turtles in the world. When I asked Peno what turtle's body was like before it broke, he said it was 'like ours': he had a shell, but it was like a coat which he could take off, while 'his face, his feet, his hands, everything was like us'; this is consistent with the notion of body as 'clothing' which activate a perspective, discussed by Viveiros de Castro (1998a).

According to some Ese Ejja, the rainbow is the path to the land of the dead, *cueijana*. When *edojjoshahua*, the *eshahua* of the inside, reaches *cueijana* it starts a new life as *emanocuana*, the dead ones, very similar to the previous one. He or she finds a spouse, begets children and conducts Ese Ejja activities, fishing, hunting, making canoes and weaving mats. Moreover, it retains the memory of the living. He or she can be called upon by shamans under the request of living kin, enquiring after his or her health and will come and talk, joke, eat and drink with them. Sometimes *emanocuana* spontaneously visit their relatives in the shape of white-lipped peccaries. When this occurs, the living should capture a suckling peccary and raise it as a pet, to ensure future visits of the herd. But people lament that for the past few years the peccaries have stopped visiting the village; some say it is because they are hunted down in San Pedro, a former *hacienda*, now semi-abandoned, a few miles upriver. The *eshahua* of people – I could not elicit which one – also manifest themselves in dreams: when a person dreams of a relative or a friend, it is because that relative was feeling nostalgia and their *eshahua* went to visit them. The body stays in place but the *eshahua* travels.

About the sky, opinions varied regarding numbers: some said there was one, others three. The first sky is called *eya tahua tahua*, the blue/green sky, where the clouds and the stars are. According to some, above the clouds, there is water, a river with plenty of fish, and Ese Ejja live there. Christians and non-Christians alike agree that above all skies there are *calles de oro*, streets of gold, where God lives, clearly a reference to the golden city of Revelation (21.18).

My interviews revealed that Ese Ejja of all ages are familiar with this description of the world even if they have ambivalent attitudes towards it. Young adults and middle-aged people are sceptical about the most extraordinary aspects of it, but this is more a generational than a historical matter, as I will discuss. With hindsight, it is not at all

surprising that some should have been reluctant to talk to me about traditional ideas about the world, which for years have been condemned by both the missionaries, who are gringos like me, and by the schoolteachers.

Discovering ancient people's stories

It was only many months into my fieldwork that, looking back at what people had been telling me, I realised the limited nature of my early conclusions. Christianity and contact with the national society had not wiped out traditional ideas nor had they caused stories to fall into oblivion, but neither were the Ese Ejja always lying to me to hide something when they said they did not know the ancient people's stories. Some people denied knowledge of the stories because they wanted to show a civilised, *dejja*-like or Christian appearance, but many did not think they knew them well enough to tell me. They remembered hearing them, but they thought they could not tell them as well as the person who had told them to them, not unlike people who say they cannot remember jokes, because they do not think they are good at telling them and are afraid of making fools of themselves. On this point, I agree fully with Gow who asserts that 'young people's denial of knowledge of myths cannot be taken as evidence that they do not know them or care about them, and hence that they will never tell them. It is instead a simple refusal to narrate' (2001: 85). Any doubt about this was dispelled nine months after my arrival, when a beads 'fever' brought women to my house with endless stories.

One day, I was walking in the forest with a small group of women, on a fishing expedition; I had mastered the rudiments of the language and, in a mixture of Ese Ejja and Spanish, I was discussing mat weaving, an art I was beginning to learn. I had returned the previous day from Riberalta and the word had gone round that I had brought some new beads, a highly coveted good which I generally exchanged with young (and not so young) women for papaya, plantain and the odd egg. Suddenly, Cuasa Caa, a woman in her late twenties, who was walking in front of me, asked what I wanted in exchange for the beads, to which, to my own surprise, I replied: 'Stories.' She was a little puzzled; she asked me what kind of stories I wanted and I explained that anything would do: ancient people's stories, Bible stories or whatever. She remained silent for a while, then she agreed to the exchange. From then on, it was as if a dam had broken and, for several weeks, I received a procession of female visitors of all ages offering to tell me stories, telling me to record their husbands' tales or bringing along ancient grandmothers. Incredulous of what I had almost involuntarily caused to happen,

at first, I was horrified, seeing myself as an invader, swapping colourful plastic beads for precious knowledge. However, the beads brought us together, they gave us a common ground, something we could talk about and, like weaving, they made us into similar kinds of people.

One of my first exchanges was with Cuasa Caa, who asked her husband Tito to tell me a story. I was surprised, because Tito had seemed one of the most fervent Christians and I remembered him reproaching me for dancing at the teachers' party, saying I would burn in hell and insistently asking me when I was going to dance again. Many months later, I discovered that he had been a heavy drinker, and still was, and at the time he was probably making a show to demonstrate his Christian status. Tito, who was twenty-nine, told me he had grown up with his grandfather, Mendoza. 'Mendoza used to know many stories. He used to tell them to me whenever he had time. I went fishing and hunting with him. He told me the story of Deer who had gone fishing with Heron:

Heron wanted to take Deer's fine clothing and when he took it off to fish, he ran away with it. Deer tricked him, hiding in the pond and grabbed him.

Heron was people, but Deer cut him into pieces and made him into a heron, he made all the herons that there are today and told them they must live in the river.

Tito went on to explain that Deer was the Devil; he said it was *eshahua*. He also said that Deer remained like people, he did not transform himself. He remained in the forest. He then told me the Devil was *eshahua* and he transformed himself in to animals and that, when animals died, they turned into the Devil. Tito's classification of the powerful beings is rather muddled, which is possibly an effect of the 'diabolisation' on the part of the missionaries, who associate all supernatural beings with Satan, as described in Chapter 9. Finally, Tito concluded that ancient people said Deer was *edosiquiana*, and that was why when people kill a deer, they burn its head, to stop him turning into a devil (others say, to stop him coming back to life, as in the story of 'Deer and the vultures' below). 'We carry on doing like the ancient people.' Two months earlier he and his wife had caught a deer and had done what he had described. Tito boasted he knew many stories and promised to tell them to me on the following Sunday (he never offered again, but I soon moved to Portachuelo Alto and by then, many people volunteered to tell me their stories).

The stories

What follows is a summary of what I consider to be some of the most significant stories told me by the Ese Ejja, mainly because they seemed to be the most popular ones, and the best known. These are: the story of 'Sloth', which leads to the 'Descent from the sky', followed by the 'Rediscovery of sex and the origin of mortality'; then comes the encounter between 'Deer and the vultures', the fate of the 'Wives of Deer' and the 'Origin of weapons and of jaguars'. The last story I report is the episode of 'Stork' or the 'Origin of the peccaries'. Summaries can be troublesome, as Lévi-Strauss warns (see 1981), and should not be used for exegetic purposes, but they are useful tools to introduce the reader to the general context. Transcriptions of some recorded versions can be found in Appendix 1. One of the striking facts I observed collecting these stories was the degree of consistency between different versions, both contemporary and non-contemporary (see comparative tables in Appendix 2).

In the corpus of Ese Ejja myths, there is no origin story as such, although most narratives present aetiological elements. The world just existed and was inhabited by two identical brothers, who were shamans, who lived together with the wife of the older one. The story of Sloth tells how the younger brother became Sloth's lover and stopped bringing meat to his sister-in-law, who complained to her husband. The older brother became suspicious and discovered the secret. He went to Sloth, wanting to have sex with her. At first, she did not recognise him, because the two brothers were identical, but a little ornament falling from his nose revealed his deception. She protested and he killed her, hitting her across the nose and putting a stick in her anus. When the younger brother discovered her death, he went back to his brother's house crying. He arrived home and all the women (though at the beginning there was only one woman, now there are many) surrounded him. The men had gone hunting. He cried and jumped up and down, as the ancient people did when someone died, and, as he jumped, the earth rose to the sky carrying away all the women. He alone returned to earth, because he was a shaman, and went to hide in the hole of a tree and he never came out. Some say he was *edosiquiana*. Thus the younger brother took his revenge on the older one who had killed his companion, and the women never returned. They became angels. The men, left alone, decided they were going to cook for themselves; then they got into pairs and they shouted and half of them became women. *Edosiquiana* transformed them. In a version

recorded by Maria Chavarría, the men cut the penises of some little boys to make women (1987: 262).

In this story, one can identify several elements of relevance. The conflict between two identical brothers is a reoccurring theme in Amazonian mythology. The unity of the initial group, the two brothers and the woman, is broken by the youth's sexual desire which takes him away, to eat/to have sex somewhere else. The woman's jealousy and the older brother's covetousness cause the world to be separated, the women to be lost to the sky, and the earth and the sky to be separated. The myth also introduces the figure of the shaman, *eyamiquecua*, the only human being capable of mediating between the earth and the sky; and that of *edosiquiana*, powerful beings who can travel between the earth and the sky and who can transform men into women, as they can transform people into animals. Moreover, when people told me this story, they stressed the fact that the younger brother took his revenge on the older one for the killing of his lover. Revenge by killing was often mentioned as the appropriate behaviour. Finally, the transformation of the women in the sky into angels suggests an adjustment to the Christian cosmology. But angels in Ese Ejja are referred to as *quichojji*, with wings, a word also used for birds. This suggests an interesting kind of reciprocal adjustment, because, as the other stories reported here show, birds play a very important role as mediators between the earth and the sky.

Of the following episode I was able to collect ten versions, recorded between 1920 and 2000, four of which were told directly to me. It has been suggested that this is the chronological sequel to the previous one (Burr 1997), but I am suspicious of the connection. In 'The descent from the sky' it is said that there were Ese Ejja, not just women, living in the sky, but this may also be due to an intervening transformation. However, both myths portray cosmogonic events. According to this myth, the Ese Ejja who were living in the sky decided to descend to earth, and to do so they made a cotton rope. Young men and women painted their faces, their arms and legs, and started to climb down, but a jealous old woman became angry because the girls had painted their faces to seduce the young men and they refused to paint hers. She cut the rope with her teeth. Any attempt by the people left above – some say the most beautiful ones – to make another rope failed. They threw down the old woman, who died and became the mother of the vultures: Ba'bosehuaponatii. Those who were left in the sky became

angels. Those who were on earth became the victims of the tricks of Ichaji, Capuchin Monkey, the protagonist of the next story.

The ancient people had forgotten how to procreate, because they had come such a long way from the sky or because the elders had lied to them, and they thought babies were made by filling the women's vaginas with the latex of the rubber tree, but all their attempts failed. (The image always causes great mirth, particularly in old women). They were very sad because they couldn't have babies. Hearing about this, Capuchin Monkey laughed at them and showed them how to have sex, so they began to procreate. Capuchin Monkey told them how some of them were going to live well, but some women were going to live with other men and their children were going to die; some were going to marry their brothers and others their uncles. He said that brothers and sisters who lived together would suffer from fits and they would go mad; girls who were pregnant and had no husbands were going to abort and people were going to die. The Ese Ejja started to multiply.

This story contains some important elements of Ese Ejja everyday concerns and ethics, namely, procreation and mortality. The sadness of the ignorant ancient people is shared by all those who cannot procreate, who have the right to demand the child of a sibling to bring up as their own, and this story seemed to be particularly popular among women, who are the ones who deplore the absence of children the most. Capuchin Monkey's tricks introduce sexual prohibitions, which are also the cause of great concern. Adultery is heavily criticised, although it is very common, especially among young people, and it is said to be extremely dangerous for shamans, who die from it. But especially dangerous is intercourse with siblings and parallel cousins. Finally, pregnancy without a father is condemned, and abortion of fatherless children is very frequent.

On a different level, the story also contains the key of the problem at the centre of this thesis, that is the socio-cosmological context for the assertion by the Ese Ejja that they are not 'the true people'. As I have discussed in chapters 4 and 5, there are historical and political reasons why they should say so, but these alone are not sufficient explanations. While I was desperately trying to understand what the statement could mean, I failed to see that one answer was in front of me all the time, in this story. I am not assuming that the myth provides a motive for the present discourse, but it is not inconceivable that, today, the Ese Ejja make sense of their inferior position *vis-à-vis* the

powerful, wealthy Bolivians by saying that they are the descendants of the ugly, ignorant ones that were separated from their better relatives in the sky. This does not necessarily mean that the myth is a rationalisation of the situation of contact, because I assume that this story, at least in some of its parts, predates and developed autonomously from the encounter with the nationals; but the myth allows us a glimpse of the problem viewed from an Ese Ejja historical point of view.

If myths contain traces of historical events that have taken place over the centuries, perhaps the reference to the 'sky people' or 'the people from above' may even be the debris of the relationship with the Inca rulers or other highland peoples. As I reported in Chapter 2, there is evidence that the Inca State entertained relations with forest Indians called Huarayos (see for example Hemming 1970; Zelený 1976), but there is no way of verifying this with any certainty. Nor is there any way of knowing when the Ese Ejja started telling this story, but what is important is that this myth provides a commentary for the Ese Ejja's present condition, which is presumably why it is interesting to listen to. As I discuss in Chapter 4, what always surprised me about the statement that the Ese Ejja were not the true people was that most Amazonians and arguably, most people in the world consider themselves as the true, exemplar humans in one way or another. However, this myth, which they have kept telling each other (and telling foreigners) for at least the last eighty years (see Appendix 2), says that once, there were beautiful Ese Ejja in the sky. When the Ese Ejja started coming down to earth and the jealous condor woman severed the rope, the beautiful ones were left in the sky. They became angels, while those who arrived on earth were young, lazy and ignorant, and they forgot how to procreate. They were tricked by Capuchin Monkey into committing incest and became mortal. This is not a unique mythical narrative, and it is also found among at least three other Amerindian groups: namely, the Araweté of Central Brazil (Viveiros de Castro 1992), and, in Bolivia, among the lowland Yuquí (Stearman 1989) and the highland Urus (Wachtel 1990). Moreover the severance of the rope that links the sky and the earth is a reoccurring theme throughout Amerindian mythology, as is illustrated by Lévi-Strauss (1981). In the Ese Ejja case, one can see how this logic can account for the enthusiasm with which the Ese Ejja took to Christianity, which speaks of a father who is in the sky and will take them back up, to the beautiful, lost world. Christianity promises to re-establish the communication that existed in mythical time between the sky and the earth and that was severed at the beginning of the present times. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The following story, which I entitled 'Deer and the vultures', was one of the first told me by Peno, and during my fieldwork, I heard seven versions of it. Later, I was to find two more versions recorded by Kimura in 1981, and by Verna in 1986, the latter also told by Peno. The versions I was told, by men and women, by elders and middle aged people, are very consistent with those told twenty years ago.

The Ese Ejja lived in a communal house, like a village, and they did not work. They slept and their children cried because they were hungry. Deer, who was a single man, had planted a garden; he took pity of the hungry babies and told their parents to work. When they saw his garden, they decided to work too and made a huge clearing, which became the *pampa*. They started burning the vegetation that was still green and Deer's garden was left in the middle. He was trapped and was going to burn, so he called for the help of his father/grandfather, a large bird that came from the sky and took him to the end of the river. After many years, Deer returned and the mother of the vultures was waiting for him, making a pot, to cook him. Deer tricked her into getting in the pot, he cooked her and ate her. When the vultures returned, they found the bones of the mother/grandmother and cried and decided to capture Deer. They trapped him in the forest, and he became an animal, trying to escape from their trap. He died and rotted. The vultures approached and started eating him, when he came back to life. He was *edosiquiana*. He transformed them into carrion birds and demanded two daughters of the chief vulture. He took them away as his wives, but once they arrived home, he abandoned them and disappeared in the forest, so the two girls left his house. As they were wandering in the forest, the 'Wives of Deer' – the next episode – came across Viper, who killed one of the sisters with its deadly bite. The other sister escaped. Along her path, she met a series of men whom she married and then transformed into animals. One of her husbands killed Viper, hacking it to pieces from which came all the snakes inhabit the world.

The beginning of this sequence has a strong resonance with people's general attitude to any enterprise. Decisions to work, to clear a garden or to go on hunting or fishing expeditions are seldom taken much in advance, but more commonly people take the lead from somebody else. The condemnation of Deer, left to burn on his own, is consistent with the antipathy often expressed by the Ese Ejja for those who rise in status or wealth above the rest of the group. Other elements of relevance in this myth are the

invention of pottery, the travel to the sky mediated by a bird and the appearance of important features of the landscape: the *pampa*, which the Ese Ejja historically crossed in their journey from the foothills of the Andes to their present location, and the river, especially the end of the river, which marks the end of the Ese Ejja world.

In 'The origin of weapons and of jaguars', the surviving wife of Deer, who was pregnant, was betrayed by Howler Monkey and she was attacked by Jaguar, who ate her. The foetus she carried jumped out of her belly, before she was eaten and the vulture grandmother – also referred to as the mother of Jaguar, hid him in a dish. The foetus grew up very quickly, looked after by the grandmother and he invented bows and arrows, rifles and cannons, with which he shot Jaguar. He killed all the jaguars and made necklaces with their teeth. Monkey came and stole some of the teeth, and swallowed them. The orphan discovered the missing teeth; he hit Monkey and heard the rattling of the teeth in his stomach. He split Monkey's stomach and all the jaguars came out screaming. The orphan killed Monkey and his grandmother too.

This story begins with a pregnant woman walking in the forest. It presents a very familiar condition, that of pregnancy, but also a strongly condemned situation, as no Ese Ejja should venture alone in the forest, especially women and children, lest they should encounter a jaguar or a demon. The woman is eaten. But then the situation assumes an extraordinary character: a foetus survives and grows to perform extraordinary actions. Furthermore, hidden in this story there is very probably a reference to the origin of Bolivian nationals. Penó, who told me this episode, made no direct reference to this, but I am fairly certain of this association. When thinking about the Ese Ejja myths I had been told, I was always surprised at the absence of Bolivians and of white people in them. It was only by comparing this episode with similar ones from distant places in Amazonia that it became clear that the appearance of shot guns in these stories coincides with that of non-indigenous people (I am grateful to Peter Gow for the suggestion, which I failed to grasp for some time). This is a typical example of an interpretation which is only made possible by reference to other versions of myths from across the larger mythical system of Amazonia and the comparison with some of the elements of the Barasana story of Wārībi discussed by Hugh-Jones leaves little doubt about its accurateness (1988: 142-43).

The Barasana story is much more elaborate than the fragment I recorded and it contains explicit references to the origin of white people who descend from Wārībi; but what this comparison suggests is that the two are clearly transformations of the same story and that in the Ese Ejja version the foreign white/Bolivian element has been lost.

Unfortunately, I do not have at my disposal other Ese Ejja versions of this story, which would allow me to speculate on the extent to which this element is absent in current narratives. As I have mentioned, this discussion is not an attempt to a historical reconstruction of Ese Ejja mythical narratives, but a presentation of the current state of affairs. Firearms figure prominently in the recent history of the Ese Ejja, who were ‘civilised by the guns of the Bolivian soldiers.’ Moreover, in the everyday life, they are admired and coveted as hunting weapons. Children make toy guns with balsa wood and they relish seeing firearms used on television. The appearance of cannons in the myth makes it a good story.

Ese Ejja story	Wārībi
A pregnant woman	A pregnant woman arrives at the house of the jaguars
She is killed by a jaguar	She is killed by the jaguars
The condor grandmother rescues her foetus	The jaguar grandmother rescues her foetus
The foetus grows very quickly	The foetus grows very quickly
	He kills the jaguars
He invents bows and arrows, rifles and cannons	He invents the gun and the blowpipe
He kills the jaguar with the cannon	

Table 3. The invention of weapons and the origin of Whites

Another story which seemed to be very popular in Portachuelo was that of Jabiru Stork. For the present analysis it is important because it introduces the relation between the world of the living and of the dead, the white-lipped peccaries and several examples of perspectival changes, in which the point of view of the dead is clearly the reverse of that of the living.

The story tells of an old, sad widower who went to the sky carried by a bird and turned into a little boy. He was hungry and was offered blood by a blood-sucking insect or by an *edojjoshahua* (*eshahua* of the inside). He refused it, protesting he was not dead, which suggests that, from the perspective of the dead, blood is a drink or food. Then he went to the house of Stork. Stork’s wife, who was there alone, cooked for him,

transforming pumpkin/watermelon into *paca* and manioc into a fish (*benton*). Then she hid him in the roof of the house. The man was now an infant and, when Stork returned, he urinated on him, so the wife climbed on the roof and pushed aside the little boy's penis. The wife convinced the reluctant Stork to bring up the little boy, who grew very quickly. Upon seeing his grandmother's (Stork's wife) vagina, he wanted to have sex with her, but as they were copulating a snake escaped from her belly. Stork, on his way back from fishing, heard thunder (a clap of thunder also means that a dead person has reached *cueijana*, the land of the dead, which could suggest that, from the point of view of the dead, sexual intercourse corresponds to death), saw a snake and guessed what had happened. But, when he asked about what happened, his wife replied she had been sitting badly, and the snake escaped.

Here, there is one more reference to a journey to the sky world, mediated by a bird. Furthermore there are several perspectival changes, in the blood/drink seen from the point of view of the living and the dead, or of animals; and in the vegetables turned meat and fish. The dangers of improper, uncontrolled sexuality are depicted in the image of the snakes. The reference to the boy seeing his grandmother's vagina and wanting to have sex, resonates with the instructions constantly given to young women and girls to cover their genitals because, if a man were to see them, he would have sex with them.

In the next part of the story, which some say is a different one all together, white-lipped peccaries, who are dead Ese Ejja, came to call the old man-boy. He decided to go hunting with them and met his dead wife. The peccaries ate *chonta* and said it was plantain; they ate a bulbous tuber and said it was manioc. The man became a white-lipped or a collared peccary. They went fishing. He wanted to cook his fish, but the peccaries said it would rot. They let it rot, which was their cooking. He woke up in the middle of the night and his fish was burning. Then, he went to collect fruit from a tree; he saw his son and hid, but the son recognised him amidst the peccaries. The man ran through the *chonta* tree that opened quickly and the plant took his bristles away. In some versions, the old man-boy stayed with his wife, he died and he became a white-lipped or a collared peccary; in others, he went home with his son who tried to pull off his father's bristles, which caused him great pain.

In this episode, more perspectival reversals take place: between edible and non-edible fruits and between cooking and rotting. Moreover, the dead come into contact with the living. As I have discussed elsewhere, the dead occupy an important position in the life of the Ese Ejja because they are called upon by shamans to heal the sick and sickness is one of their main concerns. Moreover, the protagonist behaves like a shaman, if he is not explicitly one: he can move between the world of the living and that of the dead and assume their subject position, donning their clothes, the bristles of the white-lipped peccaries. This is a very painful and dangerous process and, in some versions, it is fatal, while in others, the man succeeds in rejoining the world of the living.

Relevance

Why are these stories told? These stories are interesting because they deal with issues that are relevant to the listeners. These are: the creation of alterity, expressed in the separation of sky and earth and in the distinction between people and animals, but also the relationships between others, between affines and between the living and the dead. Moreover, myths illustrate familiar situations, and it is likely that the telling of these stories may be sparked off by quotidian occurrences such as the killing of a deer or of a jaguar, the sighting of a jabiru stork standing on the beach, a noise in the forest attributed to the presence of *edosiquiana*, a clap of thunder and so forth. As I got closer to my informants and gained their confidence, I began to realise that, on one level, the mythical world was alien to them. The characters that appear in the stories are animals and 'devils', who do extraordinary things. They transform themselves and others into animals, they eat each other, they die and rot, then come back to life, they age and then become young again. But they also behave like humans: they speak and work, they fall in love, gossip about each other and they commit incest. Because in everyday life these things do not happen, some people, when questioned, express doubt about the veracity of the stories, they laugh and say they are fantasies of the ancient people. But on another level, the relationships and the events that figure in the myths are closely related to their lived experience.

I do not assume the stories have a didactic value, but rather that they are told because they are entertaining and that they are entertaining because they are relevant. Myths present relations of kinship, affinity, friendship and love in ways that are consistent with everyday life. For example, the definitions of parent and grandparent are used interchangeably, reflecting the custom for grandparents to bring up their grandchildren



Plate 18. Skinning a jaguar

and the fact that kinship terms are defined by biological but also by convivial ties (when telling me 'The origin of flute', Peno started by saying how 'grandmothers like very much to bring up their grandchildren'). The assimilation of parents and grandparents features prominently in the story of 'Deer and the vultures', where Deer refers to Capotai Ai, the bird who comes to his rescue, as father and he replies calling him grandson, and where the vultures call Ba'bosehua grandmother and they are referred to as her children. Moreover, in the story of Stork, the old man-boy is adopted by Stork's wife and he calls her grandmother.²⁸

As I mentioned, many of these stories depict very familiar situations and feelings such as love for one's kin, sexual desire, jealousy, envy and gossip and the moral judgements attached to them. Other aspects of Ese Ejja life which recur in ancient people's stories are the obligation to share food with people one lives with, as in the story of Sloth; the preference for endogamous marriage and the difficult relations between distant affines, particularly those between parents and children-in-law, which can lead to separation, as in 'The origin of Anaconda', or to death as in 'Tapir's love' (Appendix 1). The special relation between sister's husband and wife's brother (reciprocal: *ehuape*) is illustrated in the story of 'Ecuiquia and his brother-in-law', which also introduces the theme of the relationship between the living and the dead. As I have shown, this theme is at the centre of the story of Stork, which also presents the dangers of female sexuality and adultery, while 'Deer and the vultures' introduces sororal polygyny and affinal cannibalism. The listener can recognise familiar activities such as hunting, fishing and gardening, courting and sex, child rearing and cooking, but is also introduced to past customs such as pottery, cotton weaving, the use of a particular shell for decoration, and the use of stone tools. Moreover, these stories describe the actions of powerful beings, who constitute an important part of everyday experience, as I discuss in Chapter 9.

In the language of Christianity, *edosiquiana*, *ecuiquia* and *eshahua* have been associated with the Devil and this use has become very widespread among the Ese Ejja, who constantly refer to the Devil or Satan, hearing, seeing or feeling him as they get on with their daily activities. This explains the relevance of the appearance of Deer's pot, in 'Deer and the vultures', which is a fundamental element in the image of the Devil,

²⁸ That the main characters in many myths should be grandparents and grandchildren may also be a matter of context of narration, because, as Gow has pointed out in the Piro case, these stories 'directly invoke the very relationship in which the myths are characteristically told'. Gow, P. 2001. *An amazonian myth and its history*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

wherein he cooks his victims and transforms them into animals (see Chapter 9). These considerations suggest a parallel with the material collected in Papua New Guinea and Australia and that myths do constitute a narrative genre that is common to large parts of the world. These are very similar stories, which describe the origin of the world, and which exist in a mutually constitutive relationship with social values and cultural understandings of the people who tell them. One considerable difference, however, arises in the comparison and that is the 'emplacedness' of these stories. Although I have found that some stories contain references to the landscape – such as the origin of the pampa in 'Deer and the vultures', in New Guinea and Australia the connection is presented as much more explicit and myths are said to be directly related to specific features of the landscape. As McKnight reports: 'The knowledge of [a particular] myth is very useful travelling along the coast because it helps one to locate wells and good fishing spots and makes the unfamiliar familiar' (1995: 71).

Ese Ejja myths which deal with cosmogony require a higher level of speculation. They tell of a series of separations and of the origin of otherness. There is a split between the siblings, one of which marries out, breaking his obligations towards his kin, followed by the attempt by his brother to take his wife, which leads to the separation of the unified world. Subsequently, there is an attempt to reunite the world above and the one below, by the people in the sky who throw a rope, thwarted by the old vulture woman who severed the link out of jealousy. Then, as I pointed out, ignorant and uglier people came down to earth. Capuchin Monkey, who was Ese Ejja, taught them how to procreate and with his tricks introduced proper and improper behaviour and consequently sickness and death. Without imposing a spurious chronology, one can see that this state of decline, of ignorance and mortality is followed by the invention of agriculture and by travels to the end of the river, which is the world of *dejja* and of goods. Deer's flight to the end of the river is reminiscent of the historical voyage which has characterised the movement of all Ese Ejja groups over the twentieth century discussed in Chapter 5, and which returns in other stories, such as that of Anteater (see Appendix 1). This movement downriver coincided with a change in lifestyle, from a more isolated itinerant, to a more gregarious and sedentary one. The end of the river is the end of the Ese Ejja world and the beginning of the world of non-Indians, Bolivians and Peruvians. Both the towns of Riberalta and Puerto Maldonado (Peru) are referred to as *Equijati* and Kimura suggests that *equijati* means 'mouth of the river' (1981b: 11), which makes sense in geographical terms because Riberalta stands at the junction between the Madre de Dios and the Beni

– and one could say that the Beni ends there – and Maldonado stands at the mouth of the Tambopata River, where the river meets the Madre de Dios.

At this level, the myth is about temporal processes of transformation, from sky beings in to earthly lesser beings and from savages, dwellers of the headwaters, to downriver, civilised beings, owners of things, who know how to cultivate the land and hunt with rifles. But this is not a description of a time gone by; it is a process which still goes on, in the a-temporal time of myth.

Effacing history

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Lévi-Strauss maintains that myths are institutions whose purpose is to prevent the formation of non-recurrent chains of events, ‘whose effects accumulate to produce economic and social upheavals’ and ‘should be broken as soon as they form’ (1966: 235). It is not clear to me why certain societies should have mechanisms to efface history, but the important fact is that Ese Ejja myths, at the narrative level, do exactly what the author describes: they transform the past in a timeless, unchanging reality and it is very probable that they influence the ways in which people talk about history. The Ese Ejja talk of time as if it were composed of the present, *jjeya* or *jjeya nei*, right now and the past, *yahuajo*, before. The future is seldom talked about beyond the immediate *quijje*, after/later or *mecahuaje*, tomorrow. The SIL and New Tribes missionaries recorded two past tenses, one of which they called ‘perfect’, characterised by the suffix *-naje*, which is the one commonly used to describe a recent experience of the speaker; the second form is what they called pluperfect, which ends in *-acua* (or *-apua*, in Portachuelo Bajo). The suffix *-acua*, conveys a sense of finitude, since the expression *acua* also means ‘I have finished’, but I do not recall ever hearing this tense used in everyday speech, where the accomplished character of an action is expressed by the perfective suffix *-yo*. Instead, *-acua* is the form used in mythical narrative, which suggests that this suffix does not indicate an absolute tense, but rather the mode of mythical time.

Why are myths told in this mode? Does this indicate a distancing from the events that are told? The creation of a separate but contiguous place for these extraordinary actions, which otherwise would threaten the order of things, as suggested by Gow (personal communication)? As has emerged from the narratives reported above, mythical time is not chronologically separate from the present time. Myths are called the stories of the

ancient people, people from long time before, from a time when wondrous things happened. However, the Ese Ejja also refer to living members of the oldest generation as ancient or almost ancient people and Saida told me that I should ask her mother for a story because she was 'an ancient one'. A similar phenomenon was recorded by Viveiros de Castro among the Araweté: 'Beyond the second generation above the eldest men begins a time that merges into [the] mythical phase of dispersal. The grandparents and great-grandparents of Aya-ro, an aged man of eighty years, are referred to as 'belonging to the time when the earth dissolved' (1992: 63). Hugh-Jones describes myth as a separate but contemporary reality to that of the everyday perception when he asserts that 'the remote past of myth ... persists in the present as an extra dimension of reality' (1988: 141). Among the Ese Ejja, mythical time clearly impinges in everyday life, whenever people encounter, or hear of encounters, with powerful beings.

Examples of this phenomenon are the stories in which the actions of the zombie-like *ecuiquia* are described. In these stories, an *ecuiquia* calls upon a living man, his brother-in-law, who is asleep, to go fishing with him, in the middle of the night. The living man does not recognise him at first, and agrees to go with him the following morning. At the pond, where they poison fish, the *ecuiquia* conceals his face from the man, but he eats his catch raw, as the dead do. The man eventually recognises that the other is a cannibal zombie and chases him away by scalding his face with the juices of the fish he has cooked, and runs home to safety. In another story, the living man is hunting in the forest and discovers *ecuiquia* stealing all his prey. *Ecuiquia* wants to grab him and eat him. This time, with a subterfuge, the hunter succeeds in killing the monster, who turns into a small black deer. As I mentioned, and as I discuss at length in chapters 8 and 9, *ecuiquia* and other powerful beings figure prominently in the everyday life of the Ese Ejja, and the stories of the encounters with them seem to be informed and, at the same time, to inform the myths.

How people relate to the stories

In spite of the relevance presented above, I very seldom heard these stories told spontaneously, and for a long time, I suspected that among the Ese Ejja, storytelling was simply not done. Yet, when people began to volunteer, I could see that they enjoyed recounting and did it with great skill, imitating the voices of the characters, becoming more animated as the plot unfolded, and making great use of onomatopoeia and of body language. This was certainly the case of Nona, an elderly woman who, at first protested

she couldn't tell stories in Spanish and she was embarrassed of telling in front of me. Finally her granddaughters convinced her and, once she started, there was no stopping her, until my tape ran out breaking the spell. We sat on the village bench and girls and young women gathered around. As she narrated, they too seemed familiar with the stories and commented as she went along, in the midst of giggles and excited attention.

But if people enjoyed telling myths when asked, why did not they do so more openly? Indeed that was naivety on my part. Eventually, I learned that nowadays storytelling is a private activity: something mothers do while weaving with their daughters or grandparents who want to scare or entertain their grandchildren at night, when they are going to sleep or older ones, when they go hunting. Saida, a woman of thirty-five, told me how her mother, Eliza, told her stories as she sewed. Saida listened to her for hours, until she fell asleep. Unfortunately, I was never able to witness this directly. Clearly myths are not treated with gravity and they are told casually, while doing something else, in private. I am aware of the fact that one should not exaggerate the public/private opposition in a society where this may not be particularly significant, at least in spatial terms. Certainly, in the past, when the Ese Ejja lived in communal houses, it would have been a spurious distinction, but today, and presumably over the last fifty years, they have adopted single-family houses, and there is clear distinction between what goes on inside and out, even if the boundaries are permeable and transparent. Moreover, there is some evidence that, in the past, storytelling may have been a more collective enterprise. The missionaries' *Culture Notes* describe how:

Parties are the big social event where there's drinking and dancing. There are storytellers and jokesters in every group. They are the life of the party. One may tell a story by himself or with someone else echoing his words for emphasis (1983: 284 –85).

and:

Their tales are very vivid and full of expression and imitation of animals and their actions. They like hunting stories full of blood and guts. The storytellers are good at imitating animal calls, whistles, yells and the pride of the hunter. They laugh much at the accidents to their enemy or some dummy (1983: 295).

There are multiple reasons for the concealment of storytelling. One of them is the demonisation of ancient people's stories by the missionaries, and the Ese Ejja would not be an isolated case in adopting this strategy of concealment. According to Gray:

The Arakmbut are on the whole reluctant to reveal their own culture to outsiders, and there has been a consequent reduction in the evening sessions and opportunities for storytelling or singing between 1980 and 1992. The Arakmbut have not stopped telling stories and singing, but are more inclined to do these things in the privacy of the home, rather than in open sessions (1997: 216).

This behaviour forms part of what the author describes as a process of protective 'internalisation' (Gray 1997: 216).

When I discovered the *Culture Notes*, I remembered the words of Jena, a man in his twenties, father of four, who used to come and talk to me in the first weeks of my fieldwork. When I asked him about myths, he said he knew some stories, because his father had told them to him, but he would not tell them to his children because the missionaries told him they were not Christian words. He said: 'You can't tell them to a Christian. You don't tell them to children because it is dangerous: then they play and kill each other', as if these stories were so powerful that children would be carried away in their games that they would harm themselves.

There may also be circumstantial reasons for the apparent disappearance. Apart from the word of their god, the missionaries brought to the Ese Ejja all sorts of forms of entertainment, from church services to football matches, to children's games, and television. At first, people watched television from outside the missionaries' house, through the large windows. Then, in 1997, local politicians in search for votes for the ruling ADN party gave a television set, a power generator and a satellite dish to each community. As I described in Chapter 3, when petrol is available, the television becomes the centre of everyone's attention, for hours on end, until the early hours of the morning. It is not impossible that the presence of this novel form of entertainment should have taken the place of storytelling as a collective activity, but what is most interesting are the continuities between the two.

The Ese Ejja are very clear about their viewing tastes. Above all, they enjoy watching wildlife documentaries, during which they comment on the animals portrayed, whether they are hunting, feeding or nursing cubs, calling them by Ese Ejja names, even when they are unknown to them, and marvelling at their appearance and their movements. Very popular are erotic (Ese Ejja, *cojjo-cojjo*, sexual intercourse) and horror (*eshahua*) films, as well as action movies portraying bloody battles and fights, especially those involving martial arts, called *pelicula china*, Chinese movie, and people shout and laugh when characters are hurt or killed. These reactions are very similar to those described by the Shoemakers for storytelling (above). Football matches are also among favourites, and the viewers support one team or the other and learn about the style and the bodily expressions of the players and referees, which they reproduce on the pitch. Sitcoms and talk shows, on the other, hand are considered uninteresting; people comment on what is going on for a while, even if they do not understand the dialogues because they are in Portuguese, since the only channels that can be received are Brazilian ones, but soon they lose interest.

On a couple of occasions, I became aware of the fact that the images that are seen on the screen become part of people's own narratives. One day, during the beads fever, two girls of about twelve came to tell me the story of Sa'oa, anaconda. As they spoke, I failed to recognise the story I was familiar with: they told me how the anaconda had eaten Mateo ('Sa'oa Mateo ijiacanaje'), and then, a Brazilian, meaning a black man, arrived and then a woman with a gun. I became suspicious because Ese Ejja women never handle firearms. Eventually, it dawned on me that this was a film they had seen on television and I remembered Mike, the missionary, telling me several months before how he had shown the film *Anaconda*. Mike had joked about the fact that the gigantic snake portrayed in the film was a monstrous exaggeration, but the Ese Ejja were adamant that anacondas they had seen were just like that. Girls of the same age had been telling me about *enaedosiquiana*, the water spirit, also called 'sirena', mermaid. They told me how one had blue hair, the other was blond and the third a brunette. Again, I found out they had seen a video of the film *Mermaids*. Nathan Wachtel, describing the Andean water imps with blue hair which the Chipaya call *serenos*, discusses the superimposition of the figures of women with the body of fish, found on pendants of the Tihuanaco period, and the Spanish iconography of mermaids, in the context a complex process of shift in religious devotion in the region of the lake

Titicaca (Wachtel 1990). What is interesting is that these iconographies exist in both the pre- and post-Columbian period, and in the case of the Ese Ejja, suggest that they may not be solely an innovation introduced in the contact with Europeans.

Age difference

I have described how myths portray a meaningful world while, at the same time, they present a counter-experiential reality, and people consciously relate to these stories in different ways, according to their age and experience. Elders like Peno, Dejjá Oshie Mamio and Eliza (and also Miai and Nona), who are all aged sixty and above, can tell these stories again and again confidently, but younger people know them without being aware that they do, which partly explains why they replied to me that they did not, that they had forgotten them. They were not simply lying, that is, showing me their Christian façade, as I suspected at first, but genuinely thought they would not be able to satisfy my request, because they had not learned them by heart like children learned Bible verses for the Sunday School competition or like the poems the Tacana children recited at the Civic Events in the school. They had heard them many times from older people but did not think about them as a kind of knowledge to be mastered. Moreover, younger people, particularly the men involved in the school or in the church, and who interacted more frequently with the outside world, tended to express doubts regarding the knowledge of the ancient people, on the basis of what they learned from books. They were sceptical about these stories and about the world they presented, they questioned their plausibility and they dismissed them as the lies of old and ignorant people, but the fact that they were unconvinced by them does not suggest the myths are bound to be forgotten. Their attitude was partly due to their exposure to the knowledge which comes from outside and partly to the pressure of the missionaries who condemn them as words of the Devil, but also to the fact they themselves were not ancient people. Myths are by definition *etiquianaja esohui*, ancient people's stories, but as I mentioned above, ancient people are not just distant, anonymous, dead ancestors, instead, they are also living elders. It is very likely that youths, especially young adults, may discard these stories, which become relevant as they enter old age, as they become ancient themselves. This hypothesis is not new and it has been discussed in other ethnographic contexts (Bloch 1992; Gow 2001), but it was explicitly confirmed to me by Peno. He told me how *sehua*, shad (a fish), was maize, but as a youth, he did not know this.

My father said to me: 'Son, this shad is maize.' 'What are you talking about?' I said. 'How can it be maize if it is a fish?' 'No' he said, 'look, this fish is maize; like we sow here, out on the ground, on dry land. So it is. *Enaedosiquiana*, they sow it there. Well? You don't believe me? One day you will see.' Now I know, when for example they fish a lot with nets in the river, when the fish are coming up in the time of August: that's maize they are harvesting, the people from here, from outside [the water]. And then the shad disappears in the water. And you know why? Because *enaedosiquiana* is taking them to his house. He calls them and they go inside and they don't come out again. He is jealous of them, like we are with our crops.

That ignorance of ancient people's stories may be a generational matter was also confirmed by the attitude displayed by Cojja Tehue, a woman in her mid-thirties. When I asked her about ancient people's stories, she said she never heard them and laughed at the thought of a deer clearing land for cultivation. She said her mother never told her any stories. However, later on, Sira, her twelve-year-old daughter, volunteered to tell me a story she had heard from Hueopoggi, her grandmother, and Cojja Tehue's mother. At the time I did not understand much of what she was saying and the recording was of poor quality, with her voice drowned in the noise and the giggles of her friends. However I understood that she referred to the ancient people and the tooth of a snake: clearly a reference to the story of 'The wives of Deer'.

Schooling, denial and the rediscovery of 'culture'

Another reason why people deny their knowledge of ancient people's stories is State education. With the missionaries came alphabetisation and eventually, in the 1980s the State sent Spanish-speaking teachers to educate the Ese Ejja according to the national curriculum. This too contributed to the condemnation of ancient people's knowledge, treated once more as superstitious nonsense. When I asked the old Dejja Oshie Mamio if he told ancient people's stories to his children, he replied that he did not because 'when they were growing up, there was no time.' He did not teach them Ese Ejja but Spanish, *dejjajaesohui*, the language/stories of *dejja*. However, it was one of his children, Tito, Cuasa Caa's husband, who gave me one of the most elaborate versions of 'Deer and the vultures', which he had learned from his grandfather. So, in spite of almost a century of missionary influence and twenty-five of national education, these

stories, passed on by alternating generations, have not disappeared, although for a long time people tried to convince me they had.

Moreover, there is a further development in the recent history of ancient people's stories because, if schooling and Christianity have had a repressive influence on these narratives, the rhetoric of neo-Indigenist politics described in Chapter 5, combined with the interest of anthropologists and aid-workers is also beginning to affect the way the Ese Ejja relate to these stories. During my stay, I observed a process of reification, to which I certainly contributed, in which ancient people's stories were starting to be considered by some as precious goods, something outsiders wanted, called culture and customs. The process is heavily affected by the newly reformed school curriculum, with its emphasis on 'pluri-culturality' and 'multi-ethnicity', as defined in the *Manual for the systemic interpretation of the law of the education reform* (Andrade & Balcazar 1995). This emphasis explains the teachers' obsession with handicraft, seen by them as a legitimate sign of indigenous culture.

Another example of this process is the educational project of the Diploma for indigenous bilingual teachers. During the course of their studies, Ese Ejja students were required, amongst other things, to interview their elders and record ancient stories, 'to preserve our culture' as some of the young teachers said. Instead of embarrassing markers of their inferiority and ignorance, ancient people's words come to be seen as valuables to be exchanged, for beads for example, like bows and arrows which are no longer in use, but are given as souvenirs to missionaries and anthropologists and could be sold at the market. One day, early in my work, Jena told me how the ancient people knew how to make bows and arrows, but young ones couldn't, and they did not want to learn. He told me other indigenous people did, but 'we did not want the others to harass us.' He was also the one who told me he knew ancient people's stories but he wouldn't tell them to his children because they were not Christian. Yet, for the more educated, both artefacts and language have become signs of authentic indigenous identity, the legitimising factor in territorial claims and in other forms of recognition from the Bolivian Government.

This is why, even the more devoted Christians, young men who attend Bible courses and aspire to becoming church-leaders are in two minds about ancient people's stories, because the fact that they belong to their 'tradition', something valuable to be preserved,

rescues them from the accusation of being the work of the Devil. In October 2000, the Ese Ejja were invited to take part in a trade fair in the town of Cobija and they were asked to perform a 'traditional dance'. On that occasion, Alecio and Bahuapojji, two young Christian men who had given up dancing because it was sinful, agreed that performing a *baile tipico*, a traditional dance, was acceptable: 'It is not a sin, because it is our tradition.' The irony was that, once we arrived in Cobija, it turned out no one could remember a real Ese Ejja dance, so it had to be invented on the spot to avoid the disappointment of the authorities, who had paid for the Indians to come and were expecting them to do real Indian things.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how the Ese Ejja relate, and relate to, the stories we call myths: authorless narratives which are known throughout the community and continue to be told in spite of opposing influences and scepticism. Following Lévi-Strauss, I take these stories to be part of a pan-American system of which each individual myth is a transformation, and the comparison between the Barasana origin of white people and the son of Deer is a clear example of this. Gow suggests that myths 'are told by old people to their grandchildren because they are interesting' (2001: 79), which explains how, through mythopoetic processes, some stories are forgotten, because they cease to be meaningful, and are not repeated. Clearly, my data show that these stories are still relevant to the Ese Ejja and, even if for a long time they have been condemned and ridiculed, this has only had the effect of making people more reluctant to share them with strangers.

In this chapter, I have also addressed the issue as to why they should still be relevant, and I have concluded they are interesting for various reasons. First, because they depict situations and events which are familiar, while, at the same time, integrating in them elements of mysterious phenomena (powerful beings, metamorphoses, encounters with the dead). Secondly, because they describe situations in which moral rules are broken and the consequences of these violations are exposed. Finally, they make sense of a distant unknowable past, as well as of the present condition, by depicting a constant struggle to deal with dangerous but necessary others. But it should be clear that these conclusions are highly speculative, because there is no exegesis of this kind on the part of the people who tell them. My suggestion is that these stories portray a familiar world and offer a subtle commentary on it, but they are not morality plays. They touch the



Plate 19. Invention of a traditional dance

listeners on a subconscious level, in a manner comparable to jokes, which work, that is, are funny, when they are told well and as long as they are not explained. Moreover, like jokes, myths carry all the weight of the moral baggage of the culture in which they belong, which makes them readily understood by the members of that culture and accounts for the difficulty in translating them from one language to the other. For this reason, I have described how these stories are told and how the images they convey fit into the everyday reality, rather than attempting a more speculative exegesis. I have also mentioned the temporal dimension of these narratives, manifested in the use of a mode, not employed in everyday speech, which suggests a distancing from the events portrayed. This distance is also obtained in the narrative style, where the teller always begins with the clause: 'They say that ...', thus removing him or herself from the authorship of the story. This strategy is also used when talking about the facts of Christianity, as I discuss in the next chapter.

8. Being Christian

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Ese Ejja were approached by Dominican missionaries near the town of Puerto Maldonado, in Peru. The Dominicans continued to work with them until the 1980s. In Bolivia, the North American Evangelicals of the Summer Institute of Linguistics took residence in Portachuelo in 1962, and were replaced in the mid 1980s by the New Tribes Mission, also Evangelical, whose members have lived there until the present. This chapter is concerned mainly with Evangelical missionaries.

In spite of the relatively long period of direct evangelisation, there is still a profound mismatch between the missionaries' expectations and the Ese Ejja notion of Christianity. For the missionaries, conversion should imply an authentic and permanent 'change of heart', but what they observe, instead, is a change at the level of practices, which they consider superficial and temporary. This notion is confirmed by the fact that the Ese Ejja regularly 'fall' and resume their sinful behaviour, epitomised in drinking, smoking and dancing. For the Ese Ejja however, Christianity has, to some extent, replaced shamanism. Being Christian represents a new and more efficient way of warding off the dangers of everyday life, from sickness to violence, to supernatural attacks. The missionaries associate shamanism with a 'bad' religion, devoted to the worship of Satan, impersonated in the whole array of powerful beings that populate Ese Ejja cosmology. Instead, for the Ese Ejja, Christianity is a form of shamanism, more powerful than that of the *eyamiquecua*, but equally open to verification. But religion constitutes as a separate, secluded domain (from the Latin '*religere*', to set aside, to separate), a truth that is revealed to the believers thanks to magnanimity of God and must be accepted in faith. Instead, shamanism is a matter of experiential knowledge and not of belief, which, as Jean Pouillon (1982) points out, is inextricably linked with doubt.

The mismatch between the expectations of Christian missionaries and indigenous people is a common phenomenon in Amazonia and it is clearly presented by Vilaça (1997) for the Warí. The author explains that the relationship the Warí have 'with eschatological principles and with the beings that people the universe is the domain of *experience* and *knowledge*' rather than of belief (Vilaça 1997: 97, italics added). Similarly, Ese Ejja shamans are perceived as knowledgeable people, whose wisdom derives from a traumatic experience, an illness inflicted by an *edosiquiana*, through

which they learn to call upon the dead and to cure the sick. But the power of the shaman is contingent on its effectiveness and when people are not satisfied, they look for a more powerful shaman or for a more powerful medicine. That shamanism is not a religion is an opinion shared by many authors writing on Amazonia, who agree that indigenous people perceive Christianity as a form of knowledge. However, this newfound wisdom is just as likely to be displaced when it fails to fulfil the role for which it had been accepted (Gow 2001; Hugh-Jones 1994; Vilaça 1997). This partly accounts for the enthusiasm with which the missionaries – new, powerful shamans – were welcomed. But it also explains the apparent inconstancy of indigenous conversion, because, when the missionaries' medicines fail, even the most fervent 'believers' turn to traditional healers.

In this chapter, I consider what it means for an Ese Ejja to say that he or she is Christian. From an outsider's point of view, this statement is often puzzling, because Ese Ejja religiosity can be described at best as intermittent. Indeed, the main difficulty I encountered in writing about Ese Ejja Christianity was in trying to make sense of the contradictory attitudes and ideas which I observed. Over time, it became clear that, for the Ese Ejja, being a Christian does not involve the permanent transformation which the missionaries expect, rather, it is a matter of conduct, to which they are not committed once and for all, which explains why they constantly convert and then fall away. In spite, or perhaps because, of this apparent inconstancy, after forty years of intense missionisation, the members of the New Tribes Mission are still in Portachuelo. Some people have reservations about them, and occasionally complain that the gringo behaves like the *patrón*, the master of the village, but the Ese Ejja want the missionaries to stay, because Christianity has a strong appeal for various reasons.²⁹ They see the missionaries as a rich source of material goods, especially medicine. Secondly, Christianity offers them the prospect of becoming more like 'people' and less like 'savages', through the ownership of goods such as clothes and watches, and the ability to read and write. Furthermore, there are striking consistencies between traditional methods of fending off sickness and death and Evangelical Christian prohibitions, both of which are thought to give effective protection against the harmful powerful beings. This explains the Ese Ejja obsession with abstaining from dancing and drinking. But what also seems to appeal to them is the cessation of conflict contained in the language of brotherhood used by the

²⁹ Some years ago, members of the community lead by Antenor Monje threatened to expel the missionaries, but they did not, and eventually it was he who abandoned Portachuelo.

missionaries. As I have described in Chapter 7, the Ese Ejja mythical time is marked by a fission: the separation of the sky from the earth. When the jealous condor woman bit the rope that united the two worlds, many Ese Ejja remained in the sky and Christianity promises a reunion with them. Conflict and separation are themes that run throughout Ese Ejja myths and they constantly threaten the tranquil life to which the Ese Ejja aspire, while Christianity promises unity, peace and happiness.

In this chapter, I also illustrate how Ese Ejja attitudes towards Christianity are expressed in practice and I describe how, during my research, I slowly began to make sense of the contradictions that puzzled me at first. The evidence presented confirms that the Ese Ejja have taken to Christianity with enthusiasm, but being Christian is not a permanent state, rather it is a temporary condition which people choose to enter in but can also choose to relinquish.³⁰ I also argue that Ese Ejja inconstancy derives from their pragmatic attitude towards knowledge.

Early ideas of the supernatural

The Ese Ejja in Portachuelo are very reluctant to talk about their traditional ritual life and tend to dismiss questions about it declaring that they do not know and they have forgotten about it. The description that follows is taken from the findings of the Frobenius Expedition undertaken by Karin Hissink and Albert Hahn between 1952 and 1954 on the Madidi River. The authors report on the existence of ritual houses among the Chama (Ese Ejja). These were round buildings with a diameter of four to six meters. Under the house in the east-west direction, there was a tunnel with an exit in the middle of the house (see Plate 20). Here, they kept wooden statuettes representing different spirits. The most important was *Seau*, which probably corresponds to *se'ao*, *paca*, an animal that figures prominently in the Ese Ejja diet. According to these authors, *Seau* was the creator god, 'who formed the first man and the first woman from two pieces of wood. His wife [was] Moon (*Mechiji*) and his son [was] Sun. Other Chama groups [knew] *Mechiji* by the name "Biscuishi"' (Hissink & Hahn 1988: 159). The leader of the group, called Cayman, told the authors that 'during the sowing ceremonies he took the

³⁰ Talal Asad reminds us that the notion of 'authentic' conversion, opposed to a conversion which is the result of an act of will, is the product of seventeenth-century psychology and a corollary of the principle that 'belief can never be determined by will'. In the early modern era, for the first time, religious belief was isolated as a 'phenomenon of consciousness'. Asad, T. 1996. Comments on conversion. In *Conversion to modernities. Globalisation of Christianity* (ed.) P. Van der Veer. New York and London: Routledge.

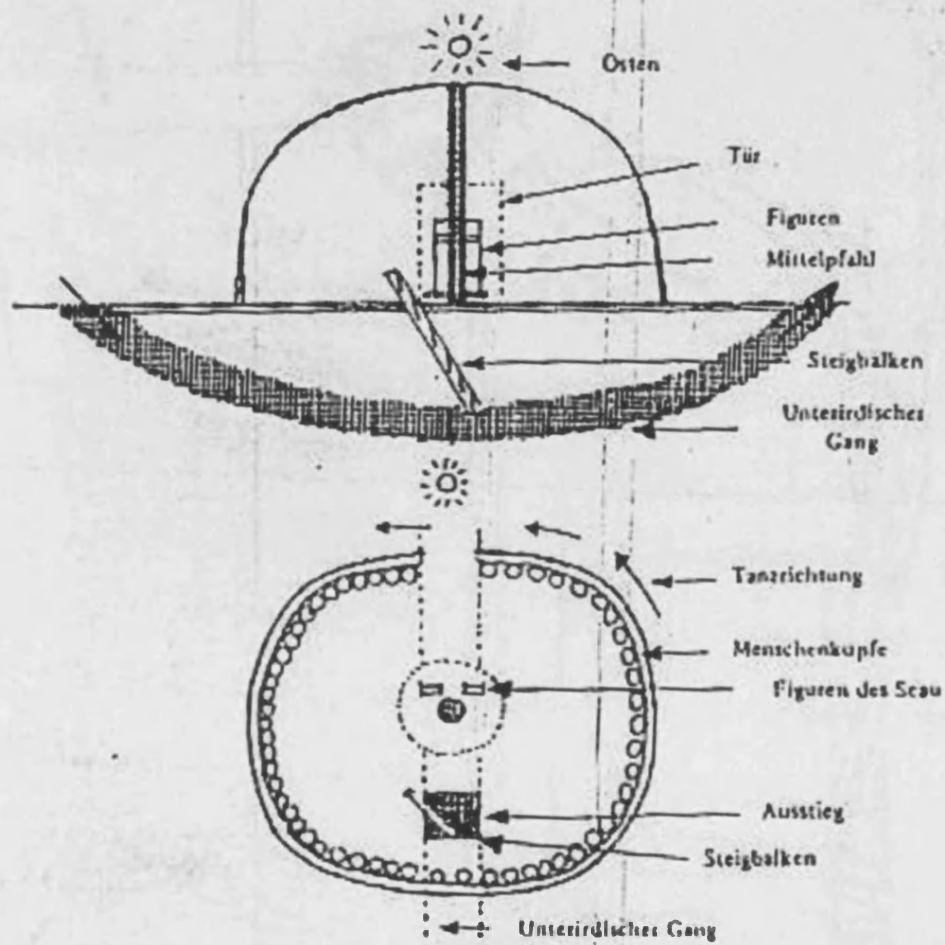


Abbildung 4 Querschnitt und Plan vom runden Kulthaus der Chama

Plate 20. Chama ritual house (from Hissink and Hahn 1988)

figures from their place in front of the central post and danced with them in front of his people' (Hissink & Hahn 1988: 159).

The description continues with a list of demons very similar to the ones described by my informants. They are black, they are ambivalent towards humans and they threaten them with cannibal attacks. They live in the forest and under water. Most of these demons have human form, something I have encountered too, and often the Chama equate to them their enemy groups such as the Araona, which is consistent with my argument that the Christian Devil is associated with the enemy other (in Chapter 9). As I described previously, in Portachuelo, the supposedly wild people called 'Iñapare' were described as demons of the forest, as large, naked, cannibals living in holes in trees or under ground. This description corresponds exactly to that of *ecuiquia* so often given to me, discussed in Chapter 9.

One of the spirits described by Hissink and Hahn is *Iqqi (ecuiquia?)*: 'You can see him everywhere, but only at night. He has human shape, he is naked, fat and black. He feeds on raw fish, which gives him his typical smell and lives in holes in trees or in the ground. His voice sounds like a peccary' (1988: 163). Another spirit is '*Idiapati* – a dreadful forest spirit – who also behaves like a man. With his wife *Euadassi*, [likely to be a misinterpretation of the word *ehuanase*, wife] he lives deep in the forest, there he grows his plantations and goes hunting. He steals women and devours them' (1988: 163). According to the authors, these are among many *ishaua*, called *eshahua* in Portachuelo, who are also the agents of sickness, who shoot the Chama with small poisonous arrows, and wear black skirts made of palm bark (note the constant reference to black). The authors also report that fighting the sorcery of these demons is the duty of the group leader, whose 'function as mediator between opposites is not limited to the everyday life, but also transfers to the metaphysical level, since he has the ability to communicate with the supernatural beings while in trance, for example to find out about the cause of illness' (1988: 159). The wooden statuettes mentioned above are said to mediate between humans, nature and the spirits for the preservation of harmony. This is an important point because, although it was never explicitly expressed in these terms by my informants, it is consistent with the sense of the desirability of peace and of avoiding anger discussed in Chapter 3. Hissink and Hahn maintain that, among the Chama, there is a widespread 'philosophical concept according to which the sick can only recover in a condition of general well being, when all live in harmony with their

environment' (1988: 159). As I discuss, this is a useful setting in which to understand the reception of Christianity, with its promises of happiness and of the end of all conflict.

As late as the 1950s, Hissink and Hahn found vestiges and memories of a ritual life in decline, 'about to be forgotten' (1988: 153). But it seems that, four decades earlier, the ritual complex had all but disappeared – or was completely hidden, in the region of Maldonado in Peru. Father Aza, a Dominican, who became acquainted with the Huarayos in the first decade of the twentieth century observes:

Nothing do I find amongst the Huarayos to reveal the belief in the existence of God; one doesn't observe amongst them any kind of cult and adoration for the supreme maker creator of all things. This atheism, which is rarely found in any people living in society, is very frequently found in those groups that live roaming, isolated and independent of all authority and all law (1930: 50).

Two decades later, Father Álvarez, after listing the names of 'the demons that people the beliefs of the Huarayos', declares:

These savages lack completely of more or less precise formulae to give [these spirits] an external cult; hence the often-heard idea that they do not believe in anything, because, not understanding what they say, one can only judge them from their external actions, which, in their religion, are totally absent (1932: 232).

The evidence given by Hissink and Hahn contradicts Aza's opinion that cults emerge under certain circumstances, namely, settled life, and would suggest the propensity of indigenous people to hide their ritual life from foreigners in situations of more intense contact. This phenomenon is not an isolated one, and it was recently observed among the Bolivian Yuracaré (Vincent Hirtzel, personal communication). This hypothesis is endorsed by Maria Chavarría who asserts that 'the *eshasha poi* [ritual] is not reported in the chronicles of the missionaries. Possibly it was practiced in secret, hidden from them.' (n.d.: 4)

Comparing Hissink's and Álvarez's data, it seems that the Madidi Ese Ejja (Bolivia), who remained relatively isolated for a longer period of time, carried on a ritual life

which involved terrestrial beings such as Seau; the Sonene Ese Ejja (Peru) instead abandoned them, to concentrate on the celestial ones. These appear today in the stories of 'Sloth', in which the younger brother/*edosiquiana* travels to the sky, in 'The descent from the sky', in 'Deer and the vultures', in which Deer is rescued by his winged father, and in 'Bocao', in which a bird takes the sad old man to the sky world. This suggests that, gradually, the world of the sky has become more interesting. This may have lead Álvarez to declare that:

Although the savage Huarayos have no knowledge of a creator and saviour God, who rewards the good and punishes the bad, nevertheless they have a deeply rooted idea of a benevolent being called 'Eyacuiñaje' (inhabitant of the heights) to whom the attribute in the highest degree the virtues and qualities of true friend and protector; hence, when one speaks to them of the true God, they always take it to be an Eyacuiñajji ... They imagine it human, dressed in white and with beautiful wings, of wondrous origin, descended, like their ancestors from another planet, to which he returned (1998a: 231).

The Madidi Ese Ejja may have arrived in Portachuelo before this transformation took place, which would explain the Shoemakers' claim that 'the word ... missionaries use for God, "Eyacuiñajji", meaning "Sky-keeper"' was not used by the Ese Ejja before they arrived, 'because they did not have anything to do with God' (1983: 191).

Being Christian

The day I arrived in Portachuelo in early November 1999, three teenage girls took me to their garden and fed me papaya. As we tried to communicate as best as we could, they enquired whether I was a believer, meaning an Evangelical Christian, or if I was a Catholic. When I mumbled something to the effect that I was neither, they laughed and said I was crazy and I was going to burn in hell. In the early days, people took every opportunity to tell me they were Christian and to inform me that they did not dance and they did not drink. When I asked what it meant to be Christian, Shoma, a boy in his late teens said: 'It means that you don't drink, you don't dance, you don't smoke and you talk to God.' Everyone I asked shared this opinion. Shoma also told me all Catholics would go to hell, because they did not believe, and that the ancient people had gone to hell too. He told me he had become Christian three months before because he wanted to

go to the sky, which was a 'very beautiful place', where he wouldn't suffer from hunger.

As I described in Chapter 7, the Ese Ejja cosmos is composed of layers of water, earth and air: there is the river and the forest and where the two meet, there are villages. Under the river is the underwater world and above the earth, there are three skies and more land and rivers, where other Ese Ejja live. Very far from the world of the living is the land of the dead, *cueijana*; some say it is under the ground and some just far. The journey to *cueijana* is very dangerous, and *edojjoshahua* must fend off many enemies who try to kill them. For this reason, people should be buried with some kind of weapon, although in the two burials I witnessed, the deceased were only given white canvas-bags filled with their few possessions. It is on this stage that the Christian heaven and hell find a place, and rather than replacing the traditional cosmology, they sit side by side with it. Ejapa, who says he is has stopped being a believer, told me Christians only die once while the (non-Christian) Ese Ejja keep appearing again and again in the land of the dead. Generally, when I asked Christians about death, the question of the afterlife became more complicated, because for some the Christian heaven and hell co-existed with *cueijana*, while others, like Shoma above, identified *cueijana* with hell and they said that all those who were not Christian, including the ancient people, would have gone there. Some thought that ancient people used to go to *cueijana* but new people did not anymore, and that both hell and *cueijana* existed but they did not see a contradiction in it. They just said: 'Ancient people say the dead go to *cueijana*, but I am going to heaven because I am Christian.' To my surprise, even the most devout Christians, when asked about *ño*, white-lipped peccaries, would say 'Ño are dead Ese Ejja.' This ambiguity is summed up by Peno's comments. He had been telling me about the death of Jesus, who was killed by the Jews (men with long hair who come to the Beni *a pasear*, to walk around, from Cochabamba, Trinidad, from far away).

They made him carry his cross, then they nailed him well, with his feet nice and straight and then they wounded him with a spear. Then they took him down, to a cave of stone, but he lived again. Then, forty days later, he was there in a temple, with his disciples and then he went to the sky, on a cloud. A cloud lifted him up. And now he sits there and in the end he will judge the

good and the sinners. The chosen will go to heaven and the sinners to the fire.

I asked him what would happen to *emanocuana*, the dead ones, and with some surprise he replied that that was another matter all together: 'It is dead people. They are like us; my uncle [who is a shaman] can call them and talk to them.' I asked him whether they will be judged and he looked at me in astonishment. 'No, no' he replied, 'they have got nothing to do with it. They can cure. Now these people they can't cure anything. But *emanocuana* can.'

Shoma's recent conversion referred to above did not strike me at first as particularly interesting, but I soon realised that most people seemed to have 'accepted Jesus' over the last year or two. Eventually, I learned that what people referred to as '*jashahuabaquiacua*', literally 'I have seen the *eshahua*' – in Spanish, '*he creído*', I have believed – was the last time they had given up drinking and dancing and that these were regular occurrences throughout people's lives.

Another important prohibition mentioned as a part of the Christian life was that on promiscuous sex (*Ese Ejja, piacojocani*, 'he/she has sex with another'). But even those who declared themselves to be Christian had extra-marital affairs, which were the most common subjects of gossip.³¹ Believers were also expected to go to church on Sundays, but even the keenest Christians missed the service if there was an important football match to be played or if the chance of a good hunt arose. After a few months, I began to realise that men gathered and drank at night, and, a little later, parties became a regular occurrence, in which men and women drank and danced. In March 2000, only a few men took part, while women refused to dance, drink and even to enter the houses where parties were held, instead they stood outside for hours, in the dark, nursing babies and waiting to drag their drunken husbands home. But by September 2000, six months later, more and more people, including young women, joined the parties, drank and danced and older women declared they were too tired otherwise they would have participated. But while all this was happening, and the missionaries became more anxious and

³¹ Some of these affairs gave the impression that the culprits wanted to be discovered: often letters were found in which generally women declared their love to married men and their desire to run away with them. The letters, written half in *Ese Ejja* and half in Spanish, appeared in very obvious places, where the offended spouses easily found them.

publicly condemned the drinking, people, including the 'fallen' ones, continued to attend the church.

Sunday service

Apart from the prohibitions mentioned, being Christian consists of a set of practices which contribute to the impression of being 'civilised', that is, different from the savage ancient people. Throughout the twentieth century, these practices involved the adoption of western-style clothes, a shift from nomadic to settled life, moving from communal to single family houses, the decline of polygyny, the disappearance of shamanry and the use of hallucinogenic drugs, and the introduction of literacy and biomedical treatment. Today, one of the most evident aspects of Ese Ejja Christianity is the participation in the Sunday services and prayer meetings.

On Sundays, the church bell, a large lump of metal hanging on one side of the church in Portachuelo Bajo, rang at nine o'clock for the service to start around half past nine. The people most involved in the service were a few young men who aspired to becoming church leaders, and who occasionally accompanied the missionaries on their evangelisation trips to distant communities. They straightened the benches and distributed the hymnbooks, while an old tape recorder croaked in a corner, playing worn out tapes of Christian songs in Ese Ejja and Spanish. In summer of 2000, the missionaries renovated the church, adding a transept and a brand new public address system, with a loudspeaker hanging from the ceiling. The newly refurbished church attracted the attention of those who never went and even Tacana people from Medio took part in the first service. The church had walls made of wooden planks, painted in white, a corrugated iron roof and concrete floor. At one end, there was a wooden lectern, and on either side of it hung the Bolivian and the Departmental flags. On the left side of the back wall, stood a large picture of the Creation, identical to the one I had seen in the Chacobo community of Alto Ivon, probably produced in the Swiss Evangelical Mission in Riberalta. In the middle of the wall, there was a blackboard used for preaching, and, above the blackboard, a clock. In front of the lectern, there were ten rows of three benches and two more rows on the sides of the transept.

After the bell rang, people slowly began to make their way to the church. The men wore long trousers, clean shirts and shoes or at least flip flops, and carried Bibles under their arms. Married women, with few exceptions, wore the usual stained and tattered clothes

and carried babies in slings, while adolescent boys and girls looked carefully groomed. The girls had their hair in plaits and wore their best skirts and t-shirts; the boys with their hair combed back, wore trousers and, if they had them, trainers or football boots. The children were the first to arrive, and ran around making noise, enthusiastically banging on a drum, shaking tambourines and singing loudly after the tape recorder. They sat on the front benches and on the floor; men too sat at the front, while women sat at the back, especially the older ones and the ones with small babies. It was not a strict division, and women could go and sit at the front if they wanted to, but they preferred the back, where they had more freedom of movement. Some of the older women looked bored as they squatted on the floor, staring out of the door, occasionally turning to look at the speaker. They seldom stayed for long, but went in and out of the back door. On the middle benches sat couples or parents with older children. Alto people arrived a little later, they sat at the front and to the left of the lectern, and they did not mix with those of Bajo.

On the whole the congregation was unruly, and for the first half hour people chatted and moved around. The service began with the singing of hymns, church songs translated from Spanish or English, sung to the tune of jingles I recognised, ranging from 'London Bridge is falling down' to 'John Brown'. The missionaries had collected and printed over one hundred hymns, but the congregation always opted for the same three or four, which spoke of the happiness of being with Jesus. Towards ten o'clock, children over the age of six went to Sunday School, in the wooden house adjacent to the church. There, the missionary woman told them Biblical episodes, showing them pictures of bearded men, veiled women and kings with crowns and flowing robes. The children were mildly interested in these stories, but what they liked most were the songs which they sang at the top of their voices, making noise with drums, tambourines and maracas.

Meanwhile, in the church, male members of the congregation, once they obtained the silence of those present, took it in turns to read passages from the Bible, and the more confident ones commented upon them; otherwise they just read them and then the missionary delivered a sermon in Ese Ejja. During his speech, which lasted half an hour, he discussed everyday events in the light of the scriptures, or he commented on selected passages, stressing that what was in the Bible was *ejojonei*, the truth, and what the ancient people said were *siajje*, lies. He often referred to Genesis, the book of the Bible the congregation was most familiar with, and to the Epistles, especially Chapter 13 of

Saint Paul's letter to the Romans in which Christians are told they should respect the authorities because they are given them by God (13,1-6). The sermon was followed by a prayer, which concluded the service. Prayers were spontaneous utterances, made in turn by male members of the congregation asking God for his help, protection and blessing for the community and for particular named people, who may be ill or travelling or undergoing some difficulty. When these words were spoken, people closed their eyes and bent their heads, an act they described as 'talking to God' (Ese Ejja, *eyacuinajjiinijje mimiani*). That was how the service ended.

During the service, ritualisation was kept to a minimum. The missionaries presented Christianity as a personal, spontaneous and individual relation with God and criticised 'other religions', such as the Pentecostals in the neighbouring community of Candelaria, where people held their meetings at dawn and shouted their prayers. They condemned their behaviour as excessive and unnecessary. The music came on again and people started to walk out and gather under the trees outside the church. As soon as the service ended, the missionaries retreated to their houses, while Ese Ejja women squatted on the ground and men stood around, talking about the events of the week, commenting on disputes, complaining about the schoolteachers, speculating on sorcery accusations and on adultery. Young people gathered on the football benches where they talked and joked, or they got ready for a game. This was an important moment of socialisation, and even those who did not participate in the service, came to join the talks that took place outside the church.

Appeal of Christianity

As I have mentioned, one of the most common reasons Ese Ejja men and women put forward for why they become Christian is the promise that, when they die they will go to the sky, to the house of Jesus, where people will not need anything and they will be happy (Ese Ejja, *queabihui*). Instead, they say, if one drinks and dances, God will punish him or her (Ese Ejja, *cuiacaje*, lit. 'he will beat them'). He will make them ill and they will not recover, and when Jesus comes, they will burn in the great lake of fire. As early as the 1980s, the SIL missionaries noted how:

Before, every Ese Ejja wanted to be friend of Jesus in order to have good health themselves and for their children, and for material benefits. Now they accept the Lord (which to them means praying, stop drinking and attending

church) out of fear of hell and wanting heaven's benefits (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 275).

But a strong attraction also derives from the prospect of a tranquil, happy life in the present, accompanied by the possibility of acquiring goods. Shope, who was in his sixties, and who in his youth had been trained as a bilingual teacher at the SIL missionary base in Tumichucua, told me how he used to be a heavy drinker but had decided a couple of years before to stop. 'Christians don't waste money in alcohol and cigarettes and they can afford better clothes, shoes, gringo clothes. They can look after their family and have a tranquil life. They don't get into fights.' Fighting, often associated with drinking, is a reoccurring theme when people deplore the non-Christian life, but this discourse is not new, on the contrary it is consistent with the Ese Ejja tendency to avoid confrontation discussed in Chapter 3. But the peace and plenty associated with the Christian life is more a fantasy than a reality. Even when they become Christian, people do not seem to work any harder and nor is there a visible abundance of food.³² Some are able to buy clothes, but they are only a few, and the strong imperative to share and to be equal (Chapter 3), discourages them from displaying any wealth that may make them stand out from the rest of the group. Furthermore, adulterous affairs continue to exist and people talk about them all the time. Finally, the bloody raids and wars of the past may have stopped, but young men still want to fight, which they do during football matches. These symbolic battles are acceptable ways of dealing with former enemies, but often, real fights breakout as a consequence of uneven scores, accidental clashes, accusations of cheating and sorcery threats.

Men and women

Christianity appeals to men and women for different reasons. For men, being a 'brother', as the church leaders call each other, represents a radical rise in status, by the standards of the outsiders' society. This rise is desirable but also dangerous, because it leaves them open to the criticisms of the other members of the group. During Sunday

³² This is in contrast with the accounts of the Piro given by the SIL. 'Within a few years, Piro headmen were asking [Matteson, the SIL missionary] to reform their *patron*-dominated villages in a burst of enthusiasm for the Protestant Ethic. A government official was amazed by the sudden change. He needed food supplies for the penal colony of Sepa, but the Piro never had anything because they were usually drunk. Soon he was shocked to see sobriety, new houses and gardens. The Piro had surplus to sell and wanted to produce more. Gow, P. n.d.b. Forgetting conversion. The Summer Institute of Linguistics in the Piro lived world.

services, the 'brothers' sat on the front benches, wearing immaculate white shirts or clean, colourful t-shirts, long trousers and shoes. The young ones appeared confident and smiling, pleased with themselves when they took to the lectern to deliver a reading of their choice from the Bible, under the benevolent eyes of the missionary. Women were not actively involved in the church, they never spoke or read, nor did they become preachers, which is probably a possibility only open to men, since the missionaries' wives never preached either. Ese Ejja women, however, took part in weekly Bible study hours; they seemed to be more consistent in observing the prohibitions and did not 'fall' as much as men did. This is perhaps because for them, the attractions of being Christian outnumbered those of not being. Those who were not did not drink much anyway, certainly not in the institutionalised way that men did; they went to parties and danced, but, especially the older ones, did not seem to enjoy themselves and said they were tired. Moreover, I never heard women speak with nostalgia of the time when they were not believers, as some men did. When I asked them why they had become Christian, the most immediate answers were: 'because I want to go to the sky', 'because the gringo says that only believers go to the sky and Catholics go to the great lake of fire' and 'because my children are going to be ill and die otherwise.' They did not like their husbands to get drunk, because when they did, they and their children would go hungry, and they often declared that being Christian was good because other women did not try to steal their husbands. On the whole though, women did not have much authority over their husbands' Christian behaviour, and they seemed to follow their decisions. If the husband became a believer, so did his wife, but if he fell, the wife too stopped saying she was a Christian.

Illness

The SIL missionaries observed that, traditionally, the Ese Ejja 'lived appeasing the bad spirits in order to keep well and out of harm' and that their 'animistic views seems to have carried over to their view of the Christian life. They seem to feel they need to live appeasing God in order to keep well and keep from harm' (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 191); 'they figure by appeasing him, they shouldn't ever be sick as long as they keep from sinning' (1983: 187). Today, for both men and women, Christianity is closely connected with health and the fear of illness and death. Illness is one of the main preoccupations for the Ese Ejja, because it is inextricably associated with death. The root word '*mano*' indicates both conditions, which are aspects of the same process. *Quea-mano* means: 'I am ill' and 'I am tired', but *e-mano-cuana* are the dead, and *mano-yo-naje* means: 'he

or she died', where *-yo-* indicates the definitive aspect of the verb (once and for all), and *-naje* the perfect tense. At the level of prohibitions, there are striking continuities between *eyacuiñajjija esohui*, the words of God, and *etiiquianaja esohui*, those of the ancient people, which provide techniques for dealing with the dangers that surround the Ese Ejja, especially malevolent spirits who bring illness and death. In both cases, these techniques consist of prohibitions on the ingestion of dangerous substances and of the control of sexuality.³³

As I described in Chapter 7, plants and animals, as well as humans, are thought to possess *eshahua*, an active principle that has effects on other beings. When fruits or animals are eaten, people must take precautions because their *eshahua* can harm small children and cause them to die. But adults too are in danger, especially from *ebinatta* food, that is, food that is consumed after those who killed or picked it have had sexual intercourse. When this happens, the *eshahua* of the plant or fruit attacks the person, eating him or her from inside; this cannibalism is manifested in various pathologies and can cause death. Moreover, people are at risk from the attacks of *edosiquiana*, the forest and water demons, when they do not behave properly, as in when they are found stealing their cattle, the wild animals of the forest, and their crops, the fish, or when shamans do not observe abstinence. Shamans must abstain from promiscuous sex and must also observe restraint in drinking alcohol – although they drink *epohui sese*, the fermented plantain drink. In the 1980s, the missionaries reported that a baby's sickness was often attributed by the Ese Ejja to the mother's unfaithfulness to her husband, and that *edosiquiana* 'hates adultery' (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 175). Shiaejjame, the shaman who was living in Sonene, told me that if either he or his wife were to commit adultery, they would both die and that he could not dance either, and Sapa Ai, my 'brother', explained how his grandfather had been a shaman, that he had to abstain from having sex with other women than his wife, and that he died because his wife had many lovers and angered *edosiquiana*.

The fundamental reason for the relevance of these prohibitions lies in the dangers that are associated with the ingestion of substances, which always carries the possibility of a sorcery attack on the part of other Ese Ejja or of the *eshahua* of the plant or animal that

³³ Other continuities exist between the origin stories and the Biblical ones: whether this is due to a re-invention of the ancient people's stories, to coincidence or the universality of certain themes is not my concern here, but the fact that these continuities exist, reveal once more how Christianity is incorporated by the Ese Ejja in their own terms.

is ingested, and with sex. This shows how the Evangelical prohibitions did not introduce any radical change in the existing logic of preventing disease and death. And even the abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, supposedly introduced by the missionaries, finds a resonance in Ese Ejja pre-Christian custom. In the early 1920s, Nordenskiöld observed that the Chama he encountered on the Madidi River, in Bolivia, did not smoke or drink (1924: 320). Moreover, Ejapa told me how the ancient people did not know alcohol, by which he meant commercial sugarcane alcohol, and they learned to drink it from Bolivians. The dangers associated with dancing may derive from the fact that, according to Ejapa, traditionally, dance was a practice reserved to shamans. But both Burr (1997) and Chavarría (n.d.) describe how young men are actively involved in the dance during the fermented plantain ritual (*eshasha-poi*). The two positions may not be contradictory, and perhaps Ejapa meant that the Ese Ejja dance was not recreational, but was performed during curing rituals, which always carry an element of danger. The Enxet people of Paraguay believe that foreign pop music has ‘a spiritual master that can take hold of the *wáxok*³⁴ of those who dance ... They could, perhaps become excited, talk in an unacceptable or insulting manner, have sex with other people’s spouses, or even become angry and fight’ (Kidd 2000: 124). Similarly, in the Ese Ejja Christian discourse, dance is perceived as an action in which people may lose control of themselves and is considered dangerous because it induces people to seek other sexual partners than their spouses and fight.

Dancing and drinking

The Ese Ejja attitude towards dance is one of the most puzzling aspects of Ese Ejja Christianity. Earlier, I reported that Penó told me with nostalgia how they used to have parties all the time, he said they played music and danced in pairs, ‘like the Bolivians’. When I arrived, the people who insisted they had given up dancing, at the same time, seemed obsessed with it: they constantly asked me if I danced, if my mother and my father and even if my grandmother did. They laughed or they looked amazed when I said they did, presumably because they thought all gringos were Evangelical Christians and did not dance. One day I visited a house where there were two young couples and some teenage girls. An old radio was playing Brazilian music. After a while, I asked the people present whether they liked it: they said they did not and quickly switched off the

³⁴ The *wáxok* is ‘both a physical and metaphysical organ located in the body’ and ‘it is recognised as the cognitive and affective centre of the person’. Kidd, S.W. 2000. Knowledge and the practice of love and hate among the Enxet of Paraguay. In *The anthropology of love and anger* (eds) J. Overing & A. Passes. London and New York: Routledge.

radio. A few days later, there was a party at the teachers' house: there was alcohol and music. No Ese Ejja went, except Cui Má, an old bilingual teacher who says he is not a Christian, his wife Qui Copo, and Oshana, who is married to Camilo, a 'Catholic' Tacana. Nevertheless, a large crowd gathered outside and watched through the bamboo walls, all night, as they did at every party. When asked if they enjoyed watching, the onlookers said they did not, yet they stayed until the early hours of the morning. One afternoon, Quisaa, my sixteen-year-old 'sister', and Yami Bame, of fourteen, brought a radio into our house and called me 'to dance'. First they told me to dance on my own, but then they got up and joined me. They played *cumbias* and Brazilian songs. They were very demanding and kept insisting I should dance. I was curious, so I obeyed. I couldn't understand why they wanted me to dance so much. Eventually I became a little annoyed with the insistence and stopped; an older woman arrived and they quickly changed the tape and started playing Christian songs. This was not a one off episode and, sometimes, when I listened to music on my own, little girls came and said: '*majamajacue!*', 'dance!'. Occasionally I did and then they laughed and said: 'Jesus is going to burn you!' or 'Look! You are dancing with the Devil.' At first I felt there was malice in their asking, but then I realised it was a mixture of excitement and fear. Over the last forty years, in Portachuelo, the ritual dances described by Burr and Chavarria have been prohibited by the missionaries and when people dance to commercial music, they are aware they are infringing the prohibition.

Nevertheless, as the months went by, the number of parties increased and, by January 2001, there was one almost every week. People gathered in the communal house, a large building to one side of the village that for many months had remained empty; someone brought a cassette player and others provided the batteries. At first, they all sat along the walls on beams on the floor or on logs, in semidarkness, the men, who formed the majority, on one side and the women on the other; some couples sat together. They played Colombian and Brazilian pop songs and for a long time everyone sat quietly, the men smoking, talking or staring blankly, as if waiting for something. Then, alcohol began to circulate: the men drank *cachassa*, commercial sugarcane alcohol, mixed with water and women drank beer, either homemade with manioc or maize, or bought in the market. Suddenly, one or two men stood up and asked the women to dance. The men were quite competent dancers, and performed elaborate movements, which presumably they had learned during their visits to bars in Riberalta, while the women tended to oscillate from side to side, their feet parallel, shifting their weight from one foot to the

other, and, after a while, they looked tired and bored, partly because they did not drink as much as the men, who became more animated as they got more drunk. Generally the men outnumbered the women, so female dancers were never allowed to sit down, but as a song finished, they had to take up the next with another partner. They were not allowed to rest and if they sat down, men dragged them once again to the middle of the house. As time passed, the men got more and more drunk and talkative. Occasionally one collapsed, or a fight broke out, sparked by jealousy between spouses; in these cases, the fighters were quickly separated and the people present tried to calm them down and helped wives carry their husbands home. If a man got very drunk and became rowdy, it was not uncommon for his wife to tie him up and leave him lying in the mud until the next day.

According to the missionaries, in the past, in Portachuelo, there used to be drinking parties which lasted several days. Men got hopelessly drunk and were unable to function for weeks on end, letting their wives and children go hungry. They described how the parties degenerated into communal fights, in which all the men were involved and women stepped in defending their husbands with long sticks. The missionaries proudly described how, over the last few years, these collective events had ceased due to the influence of their teachings and the ban on drinking and dancing. However, I suspected they exaggerated the epic proportions of these events as well as the extent to their success in persuading the Ese Ejja not to drink, as my subsequent observations confirmed. Perhaps, they were unaware of the extent of the alcohol consumption, because everyday drinking took place in a very discrete way, precisely because people feared their anger. When someone obtained a bottle or two of *cachassa*, from the market in Riberalta or from passing traders, a few men gathered in a house. The host mixed the liquor with water in a large plastic bottle and provided a mug; the guests sat silently on the floor, with their backs to the wall and drank, as the host passed the mug around. In a short space of time they got very drunk and they began to talk. Women never took part in these meetings and I only witnessed one as a participant once, but I often had a glimpse of them, passing by a house, when they carried on until the following morning and sometimes, into the next day. Generally, the men remained quiet, but occasionally someone burst out crying or became violent and stumbled home hitting trees and kicking the walls of houses. On some such occasions, the drunken man's family members became very nervous, fearing he might damage the house or harm his wife or

children, but violence of men against women, or of adults against children was extremely rare.

The ambivalence towards drinking and dancing suggest that the Ese Ejja consider both activities as dangerous and it is clear that the missionaries' prohibitions found fertile ground in the their concern for a tranquil life. Dance, closely associated with alcohol consumption, is seen as a disruptive activity, because, as people often pointed out, at parties men got drunk, they lost control and they danced with the wives of other men, who then challenged them. When fights break out, people may get hurt or killed and sometimes, drunken men fall in the river and drown. But, at the same time, some people attribute medicinal properties to alcohol. Ejapa told me he couldn't drink because of a stomach condition caused by sorcery, but he said his brothers drank all the time and never got ill. He said the missionaries had prohibited alcohol because they wanted to sell their medicine, and if people drank they would have no need for it. According to Ejapa's brother, Dejjá O'o, the missionaries had forbidden the use of hallucinogenic drugs for the same reason, and so had the Government in Peru. Moreover, people only feel really vulnerable to the damaging effects of alcohol when they have small children and feel that they should be Christian in order to protect them: Erlinda, mother of six, told me as soon as her youngest children grew up, she would have started going to parties again.

This ambivalence confirms the impression that among the Ese Ejja, Christianity is seen as a powerful form of shamanry, which can be employed to deal with the dangers derived from the harmful beings lurking in the forest, under the water and surrounding the village. People say God is *queacaa*, strong (lit. hard), and demons are afraid of him. As Noonina, Alecio's wife, told me: 'They don't come close to the village anymore because we are Christian.' However, in the time I was in Portachuelo, several sightings of *ecuiquia* occurred. Clearly, people have not stopped thinking about of these beings, but some say they are no longer afraid of *edosiquiana* and *ecuiquia* because God protects them. The missionaries report that, in the early days of Evangelisation, the Ese Ejja went to church *en masse*, expecting that they would never become ill nor die, but when they realised that that was not the case, they all stopped at once. Eventually, they gradually returned to the church, but the expectation shifted and people were worried that if they 'fell', they would become ill. In particular, they feared for their children. I was often told that Cacujehua, a man of forty, used to be a believer and, when he

started to drink again, his daughter died. This was also the reason given to me by a young man called Lego of why the Ese Ejja in Sonene (Peru) were not interested in Evangelical Christianity. He said they 'liked their vices too much' and went on to explain that only if a man became a believer he was in danger. Becoming Christian was like entering a game: one had to obey the rules or he would be penalised.

Contrasting ethics

On the whole, forty years of missionisation have had little success in instilling Christian ethics and in replacing Ese Ejja ideas of the proper life. The missionaries themselves are conscious of this fact and they lament that even the most devout Christians never recognise their faults, that they commit adultery, they constantly lie and gossip, and they steal, relegating sin to the sphere of drinking and dancing.

When the Ese Ejja think about sins they always mention drinking and dancing. Many mistakenly view their salvation at the time they stopped drinking. If a Christian should drink or dance again he's not saved. Other sins of gossip, pride, covetousness aren't viewed this way. Many pray telling God how long they've kept from drinking and dancing (Shoemaker et al. 1983: 193).

But lying, gossip and stealing play a crucial role in everyday strategies to avoid confrontation and anger, which, as I have shown, constitute a strong imperative in the lives of the Ese Ejja as well as of many Amazonian people (c.f. Overing & Passes 2000: 20-24). People lie if someone asks them for something which they do not want to give away, because if they admitted to having it they would be expected to part with it, and bad feelings would arise were they to refuse. Gossip is a pleasurable pastime but it is also used to solve or diffuse tensions without resorting to direct confrontation. Finally, as I discussed in Chapter 3, theft is not considered a crime, not even by the victims, and because of the strong imperative not to accumulate, people feel somewhat entitled to help themselves with what is at hand, even when it happens to be inside the padlocked wooden case of a neighbour. As I reported, there is no sanction against thieves and the only thing the offended person can do is to retrieve their property, if they can, or to complain about the thief in gossip, but they are unlikely to confront the thief directly, because it may cause a fight. According to Tamy Comstock, one of the missionaries,

when people steal, they must share what they have taken; if they do so the action is not condemned by the others, while they would be criticised for not sharing.

The reluctance on the part of the Ese Ejja to espouse Christian moral principles is not a novel phenomenon. Farther Álvarez described the process of 'civilisation' as a gradual gaining of confidence through assistance and gifts, until they were convinced 'that we love them with true fatherly affection' (1998a: 285). In his view, religious instruction would follow, as well as the conversion to the ethics of methodical work, of saving, of reciprocal love and help. One of the greatest difficulties Álvarez encountered was that of teaching Christian universal and disinterested charity, because, as I described in Chapter 6, the Huarayos only cared for their close consanguines and they were not concerned with the life or death of anybody else, even in their own tribe. He was horrified to discover that someone had buried alive a malformed child, but infanticide is still practised in Portachuelo, where undesirable children die of neglect, and even a supposedly very Christian couple, a few years ago, abandoned a baby who had a harelip and a cleft palate. The child was rescued by a distant relative, who always stressed how the boy's parents had not given it to her, but had 'thrown him away'.

Pragmatism and inconstancy

In spite of the dangers associated with sinful behaviour, people, especially men, constantly 'fall', which suggests that something about Christianity and the rules it imposes, has not succeed in having a permanent effect on the Ese Ejja. Although Ese Ejja lives have changed as a consequence of missionisation, this change is not uniform nor unidirectional, and Christianity has been incorporated in the Ese Ejja worldview, giving the impression of inconstancy. This phenomenon is very common in Amazonia and has lead missionaries since the sixteenth century to characterise the soul of 'the savage' as 'inconstant' (Viveiros de Castro 1993a). The notion of inconstancy is also held by the New Tribes missionaries, who often complain that the Ese Ejja have taken to Christianity enthusiastically, but their conversion is superficial, that they perform the acts but have not changed 'in their hearts'.

As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1993a) points out, this 'savage inconstancy' represents a challenge, not only to Christian notions of conversion, but also to commonly held anthropological ideas of culture and acculturation. In these formulations, a culture is described in theological terms as a 'system of beliefs' – with a direct reference to Geertz

– ‘to which individuals would adhere almost religiously’; from this point of view, it becomes impossible to understand ‘the mixture of openness and stubbornness, of docility and inconstancy, of enthusiasm and indifference with which the Tupinamba received the Good News’ (1993a: 370-71), as well as other forms of cultural borrowing and exchange. But if we accept that a society/culture is a system of dispositions, rather than beliefs which inform their own reproduction and are open to transformation – ‘a mechanism for the potential structuration of experience, capable of preserving some of the traditional contents and of absorbing new ones’ (1993a: 380), then indigenous attitudes to Christianity, their apparent inconstancy which is the product of their pragmatic appropriation, cease to be surprising.

Clearly, what makes an Ese Ejja a Christian is what he or she does, especially whether he or she dances and drinks. This fact is particularly significant for the Ese Ejja because, for them, ‘to be’ is first of all ‘to do’. Essence is determined largely by action, as is also demonstrated by their notions of kinship and identity described in Chapter 6. Little concern is given to thought or belief, but when a person stops dancing and drinking and goes to church, they say he or she is a Christian, even though this state may last only a short period of time. When asked directly about their beliefs about the world and about God, the dead and the ancient people, my informants gave a vast array of answers, which presented apparent contradictions. This may be explained by the fact that the Ese Ejja are living a transition and they have not discarded the knowledge of the past, while they are assimilating Christian ideas as well as scientific ones. But they have been exposed to foreign ideas – Christian ones at least – for a century, which suggests that the situation is long standing rather than a temporary one. I argue that their attitude towards Christianity, and their insistence on behaviour, derives from a pragmatic approach to knowledge.

In Ese Ejja, belief, knowledge, thought and memory are expressed in terms of action, that of seeing, and they share the root of the verb *ba*, to see. ‘I see’ and ‘I know’ are the same verb: ‘*ecuea e’bá*’. To believe, to think of something or someone and to remember share the same root, with the addition of the word (*e*)*shahua*, spirit, shadow, double, demon, as in ‘*jja-shahua-ba-quiani*’, ‘I believe’, and *shahua-baña*, ‘I miss (someone)’. To know is to see, and therefore the ultimate truth derives from vision. Other ideas are held because someone has expressed them: people say that the dead become white-lipped peccaries because ‘the ancient ones said so’, that Christians go to heaven

'because the gringo says so' and that Moon is an Ese Ejja, but they do not 'believe it because the word of God does not say it.' But people are not committed to these second-hand ideas. They pick them up when they are more appealing, but they easily drop them; and they may hold them at the same time without any contradiction.

As I mentioned in Chapter 7, when I enquired about the origin of animals, people often declared that they had all been created by God (Ese Ejja, '*eyacuiñajjiya oopana cacua*') and in the same sentence they described how it was the wife of Deer who created animals by transforming her husbands. But the ancient people are either dead or very old and have little direct influence on the actions of the young ones. Instead, the missionaries, who are constantly present, exercise a strong influence over them. However, the part of their message that is really relevant to the Ese Ejja is that which prescribes practical behaviour; when they refer to abstract principles, that have no relevance to their direct experience, the message loses its force, as was often clear during Sunday services, when people did not understand what the missionary was talking about. This contributed to them getting 'tired' and falling. As I became more proficient in the Ese Ejja language, I began to observe the incongruences between what was being said and what people understood. One Sunday, the missionary talked at length about God's gift of eternal life. He read verse 23 of Chapter 23 of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans ('For the wage of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord'), which in the SIL Ese Ejja translation reads:

*Ojjañacuana queamimishi epo manoje 'yo queamimishi poanaje sosejje.
Ojjaña eseya joya Emeshimesenei Jesosa Quitoja po 'yani cuana ca
Eyacuiñajjiya ba 'etiitiimecaje 'yo Eyajo jamatii sosema 'jayojja ese
queapame ba 'epoquianijo pojijama.*

All the people who will die in sin (literally, 'having behaved badly'), sin will be their price to pay (*sosejje*). All those of us who are the people of the Lord Jesus Christ, God ('the inhabitant of above') will make them live in the sky just like that, for free (*sosemá*) we will live well.

Then he wrote on the blackboard, in Spanish, '*REGALO*', gift, and '*PREMIO*', reward, and asked: 'A football trophy, is it a gift or a reward?' The congregation gave him a blank stare. Eventually they agreed with him that it was a reward. 'And the clothes from

the Mission, are they a gift or a reward?' More silence. Later I learned that the Ese Ejja do not make this distinction: I asked Ino Tahua what the Ese Ejja word for 'present' was, and she said '*sosemá*', which means 'gratis', 'for free'. 'And what would you call if, say, your son did well in school and you wanted to give him something to make him happy?' 'Sosemá.' Mike spent the next half hour explaining the difference between gifts and rewards and about the generosity of God, and how his will is not affected by human actions, but he gives them salvation out of love. Then he asked: 'So, the Holy Ghost (Ese Ejja, *edojo-shahua-pame*, literally, 'the good *eshahua* within'), is it a gift or a reward?' Silence and blank stares. He proposed a vote by raising of hands. 'How many for a gift?' He put his hand up and only Biumajja, the nurse, joined him; everyone else looked puzzled and did not vote either way. This was a common event, which perhaps partly explains why people's attention span was so short. As soon as something happened outside the church, everyone rushed out or stared from the windows: whether a fight had broken out or simply don Andres, a Bolivian neighbour, come along with bread for sale.

This episode shows once more how the message of the missionaries fails to reach the Ese Ejja when it expresses ideas that are irrelevant to their experience of the world. According to Allyn Stearman (1989), who worked with the Bolivian Yuqui, also missionised by the New Tribes Mission, this gap is due to the Evangelicals' 'blank slate' approach. She observes:

The missionaries do not accept the premise that culture is integrated, that belief is simply part of a larger system and does not exist in isolation. [They] operate with the expectation that at some point in time each Yuquí will 'receive the Spirit', experience salvation and become a new person through the intervention of God (1989: 137).

Traditionally, Catholic missionaries have endeavoured to find continuities between local cosmologies and their religion, producing the various syncretic practices which can be found throughout South America. Evangelicals, instead, condemn such mixing, and uphold the purity of the message which they assume can be translated unproblematically. As I discuss in Chapter 9, this translation is indeed problematic and missionaries are bound to fail to eradicate existing ideas, which inevitably inform the reception of the new ones. Ideas that are irrelevant to the everyday experience cease to

be interesting and people become 'tired' with them, as they often said and, consequently stop observing the other rules which are associated with them. Yet, these practical rules do not seem to lose their importance permanently.

The missionaries

Although they occasionally get tired with it, the Ese Ejja feel that they benefit greatly from being Christian and from the missionaries' presence. The god of the gringo protects them from the attacks of *edosiquiana* and *ecuiquia*, but their acceptance of Christianity is also affected in an important way by their material interest. This impression was confirmed to me by Elico, a man in his forties, Vice-President of Portachuelo Alto, who repeatedly asked me to remain and live there, to bring my family and stay *misionera jayojja*, as a missionary. I reminded him that I wasn't even a proper Christian, but that seemed to be beside the point. He was trying to convince me that Alto people lacked what Bajo people had, that is, a gringo to look after them. This reflects the sense of vulnerability and powerlessness which is often expressed by the Ese Ejja in relation to outside world as well as to the powerful beings. The missionaries appear to offer protection on both accounts and are sometimes referred to as parents. Other indigenous people and the Bolivians often scorn the Ese Ejja, calling them the children of the gringo: they themselves do not like it, but they value the relationship.

The Ese Ejja are fascinated by these powerful strangers who come from the sky, with aeroplanes, and live among them, but live in a way so different from theirs. They say they are beautiful because they are 'big and white', and some even fantasise about marrying a gringo. But the strongest motivation to obey the gringo is fear: of disease, of the death of children and of suffering after death. In this sense, as was noted above, Christianity is consistent with wisdom of the ancient people, which speaks of a world full of dangers that must be kept at bay with the careful observance of food and sex taboos. It is therefore not surprising that people should insist on the practices which make one a 'believer', nor that the missionaries, like the powerful beings that control animals and plants, should be seen as both beneficial and dangerous.

Over the last forty years, the Ese Ejja in Portachuelo have become totally dependent on the missionaries for medical help. Medical assistance has always been the primary instrument of conversion, both on the part of Protestants and of Catholics. In Peru, during the five decades of Álvarez's mission work, what appears to have been drawing

the Ese Ejja to him was illness, for which they appealed to his healing powers in the form of medicine and the sacraments. In Portachuelo, one of the main preoccupations of the Ese Ejja, with regards to the missionaries, was not to anger them because the health of the village depended on the gringos' medicine and benevolence. As Elico put it: 'If the gringo becomes angry, our children are going to die.' Some said that if a man drank, the gringo would refuse to give him medicines for himself and even for his children. I have never seen evidence to this effect, but to date, the New Tribes Mission is the sole supplier of remedies for the medical post, and it gives patients indefinite credit. This unfortunately accounts for the failure of Biujajja's attempt to set up a rotating fund for medicines, supported by the local Health District, which depended on the medicines being paid out front so that he could purchase new ones.³⁵ Furthermore, the missionaries' house doubles as a shop, where people can buy basic necessities, from rice to bulbs for torches, to fishhooks and cotton, at very reasonable prices, instead of paying twice or three times as much from traders. But one of the consequences of this situation is that the missionaries have a tight control on consumption: they discourage merchants who bring alcohol from alighting in Portachuelo and they limit the sales of batteries to weekdays, to stop people using them to power cassette-players and have parties. But if the missionaries become angry, they suspend sales, as was the case on the two occasions when someone broke into their house and they closed the shop for several days. In these situations, people feel they are being treated unfairly by the missionaries and that they do not comply with their expectations. When they do not give goods for free and when they give the impression of controlling or owning the village, people become resentful.

During the period of pacification, Catholic and Evangelical missionaries approached the Ese Ejja with gifts. In Portachuelo, the SIL continued to provide free goods and medicines, but the New Tribes Mission adopted a different policy. Trying to instil the notion of the monetary value of the goods they received, they began to charge the Ese Ejja, even if only symbolic amounts. This decision created the impression that the missionaries were profiting from their relationship with the Ese Ejja. Peno complained that, when they first arrived, the missionaries used to give many gifts to the people, but now, although they still brought goods, they sold them and gave nothing for free, 'not

³⁵ He aspires to becoming independent from the missionaries' monopoly and could get medicines at an even cheaper price than those sold by them, but has not been able to start the scheme because people were not prepared to pay.

even to old widows.’ He said they accumulated money and bought more things, but the people had no money to pay for them. Criticisms arise because the missionaries fail to perform their role of benevolent protectors, and come to be perceived as greedy exploiters, a role associated with other kinds of foreigners, namely the Bolivian owners of rubber plantations of the past, and the traders of the present. Over the months I observed that this resentment went hand in hand with the men turning away from the church and drinking.

Conflict, separation and movement

As I mentioned, one of the most appealing aspects of being Christian is the prospect of a tranquil, happy settled life and of a journey to the world in the sky after death. In this sense, Christianity promises to reunite the Ese Ejja with their lost kin, who were left in the sky in the mythical past, as is told in the stories of ‘Sloth’ and of ‘The decent from the sky’. As I have described, these stories depict conflicts, separations and metamorphoses. They also describe an attempt at reuniting the split world by the throwing a cotton rope, but this is thwarted by the jealousy of the old woman who causes the definitive separation. Conflict is attributed to uncontrolled sexual desire: as in the case of the jealousy of the older brother who kills Sloth, the younger brother’s lover, but also that of the old vulture woman who becomes angry because the young girls refuse to paint her face – to share their sexual partners. Bad life is also caused by uncontrolled sexuality and the people who commit incest become ill.

Conflict and killing cause metamorphoses and humans become animals. As people travel, they forget their knowledge, as the ones who came down from the sky, but they also learn about new things as they go to the end of the world, like Deer and Anteater. As I have noted, this is also a recent historical experience, because over the last one hundred years, the Ese Ejja have gradually moved from the headwaters of the rivers Tambopata, Heath and Madidi, towards larger rivers and the commercial centres of Puerto Maldonado and Riberalta. The reason given for having done so is that they wanted to be closer to the market, where they could obtain foodstuff, utensils and clothes. During this time, they entered in much more regular and peaceful relations with the ‘people’, but not without an initial and prolonged struggle, in which many of them perished, and, in this process they became alienated from their own sense of self worth. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the Ese Ejja associate the time of contact with a shift from savagery to civilisation, by the Bolivian soldiers who ‘civilised us with their guns.’ How

does Christianity fit into these narratives? Christianity promises the end of conflict, which is always lurking among the Ese Ejja, threatening peaceful life. God is 'the one who lives up above' (*eya*, above, sky; *cuiñajji*, inhabitant), he is kin, he is *ecue chii*, our father. The Ese Ejja insist that those who are Christian, when they die, will go to the sky, to live with God in his beautiful house, as one of the most popular hymns, sung every Sunday, reminds them:

Yani equi eyajo queaquemo nee nee // Jesosa nijje
There is a very large house in the sky // with Jesus
Jesosa Quito, eya minijje anijeyo // Eyahua sijje
Jesus Christ, I will live forever with you // in the sky

In the sky there will be no hunger, no fatigue, no pain, no need for light or warmth and everyone will be happy; there will be no sin, which in Ese Ejja is called *queamimishi*, wrong doing, which is what causes conflict. Instead, those who are not Christian will burn in the great lake of fire. On many occasions they expressed concern with the possibility of going to hell, but it seems that, at a deeper level, the Christian story appeals because it promises a reunion with the kin lost in the split between sky and earth, the beautiful ones who were left in the sky. Indeed, in the version of 'The descent from the sky' told me by an old woman called Mi' Ai, the Ese Ejja who are left in the sky live in a very large beautiful house, which suggests a two way mythopoetic process in which on the one hand the stories of the gringos are made to fit into existing narratives, but also the old ones are modified according to the new.

Conclusion

In the light of the evidence presented in this chapter, it is clear that it would be misplaced to speculate on the extent of Ese Ejja conversion. Conversion, in the received sense of a radical change of belief, is not a concept the Ese Ejja express or are interested in.³⁶ What they do talk about is: fighting the Devil, associated with *edosiquiana* (see

³⁶ Conversion is not a unitary phenomenon and this is simply a gloss. On the problems of defining this conversion and related issues, see Talal Asad especially on the genealogy of the modern concept of 'belief', Asad, T. 1993. *Genealogies of religion. Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
— 1996. Comments on conversion. In *Conversion to modernities. Globalisation of Christianity* (ed.) P. Van der Veer. New York and London: Routledge and Robert Hefner. Hefner, R. W. 1993. Introduction. World building and the rationality of conversion. In *Conversion to Christianity: historical and anthropological perspectives on a great transformation*. (ed.) R. W. Hefner. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chapter 9), becoming friends of Jesus, talking to and thinking about God, but, above all, about proper behaviour. In this chapter I have described how the Ese Ejja, over the last century, have taken enthusiastically to Christianity. The ethnography shows how being Christian is a condition which is entered through particular practices, some of which are consistent with pre-Christian techniques of healing and defence from the attacks of powerful beings. But this condition is not permanent and people enter it and abandon it at different times, especially when it fails to provide the effects it promises or when people get 'tired' with it.

Ese Ejja attitudes towards Christianity are characterised by a pragmatic approach to knowledge, in which knowledge derives from direct vision. Beliefs are second-hand ideas to which people are not absolutely committed, and whose credibility depends on the authority of their source. Most of the time, missionaries are in a position of authority, due to the empirical evidence of their success in curing and to their wealth, and Christian practices are thought to be particularly powerful, but they do not always succeed, and then people seek help elsewhere. The missionaries also represent a source of goods as well as medicines, and of help against outsiders. The fact that, unlike in other parts of Amazonia, they remain the only form of external help to the indigenous people, partly explains their continuous presence.³⁷ But Christianity has a further appeal for the Ese Ejja, because it promises a life without conflict, which matches the ideal of the tranquil life, as well as the reunion of worlds that came apart. In this sense, it provides an answer to the cosmogonic dilemma illustrated in the stories of the origin of the people.

The Ese Ejja see themselves as destined to becoming 'civilised', of becoming *dejja*, people, distancing themselves from the savagery of the forest and of the past. Becoming Christian is a powerful manifestation of this change, of becoming like or better than the Bolivians, who, in the words of the missionaries, are sinners because they are Catholic, and will go to hell. The Ese Ejja say Christians live a happy and tranquil life: they can afford clean new clothes and goods, they can read and write and share the knowledge of the powerful gringos; supposedly, they do not drink, do not have extra marital affairs, and work harder – although this is more a fantasy than a reality; moreover, Christians

³⁷The Wari dependency on the missionaries declined as the presence of Funai became more effective' Vilaça, A. 1997. Christians without faith: some aspects of conversion of the Wari' (Pakaa Nova). *Ethnos* 62, 91-115.

have access to the powerful medicine of the gringos. The pragmatism towards knowledge described above accounts for the ease with which the Ese Ejja stop being Christians, when *Jesosa*, Jesus, fails to perform. Then, they revert to non-Christian practices, especially visiting shamans to discover the causes of illness and to find a cure. Sometimes, people become dissatisfied with the missionaries and they become 'tired' with their prohibitions, as some put it, and they 'fall'. After a while, a few years or a few months, or when the need arises, for example if someone is ill, they may stop drinking and dancing, until they get tired once more, then they say they had been 'resting' and drink and dance again. Falling is especially common when the authority fails, as in when the missionaries leave the community or when people are unhappy with them. The same attitude is held towards the ancient people. Young adults stop observing traditional taboos when their parents die and they are no longer around to tell them what they should and shouldn't eat, as my friend Cuaene (Chapter 7) explained. However, some revert to them when they reach old age and teach their children about them. When the missionaries leave Portachuelo for a few weeks, prayer meetings and services continue to be performed, if less assiduously; but many people are adamant that, were the missionaries to leave for good, even the most fervent believers would start drinking. Among the Ese Ejja Christian practices and discourses, the most persistent are those concerning the Devil, to which I turn in the next chapter.

9. The Devil and other cannibals. The dangers of alterity.

In Portachuelo, people constantly spoke of the Devil, referring to it in Spanish by the names of *diablo*, *demonio*, *Satanás* and *cocoi*, occasionally *Lucífero* or *Lucero*. In Ese Ejja, they used the names of *edosiquiana*, *eshahua* and *ecuiquia*, the names of powerful beings of different kinds. As was mentioned in Chapter 7, *eshahua* was also referred to in Spanish as spirit, soul, and shadow. In discussing these terms, I have often encountered semantic problems, especially when Ese Ejja words are translated into Spanish, even by the Ese Ejja themselves. Spanish and English words such as *espíritu* or spirit, and *demonio* or demon, devil, are heavily loaded, for this reason, although I am aware that the fact that the Ese Ejja themselves use them is not irrelevant, I have adopted the more neutral term of powerful beings (c.f. Basso 1985; Gow 2001).

In Chapter 8, I discussed the Ese Ejja acceptance of Christianity and how the message of the missionaries articulates with Ese Ejja ethics and cosmology; I argued that the enthusiasm with which the Ese Ejja have taken to Christianity is due predominantly to their concerns with illness and death, caused by the powerful beings that inhabit the world in which they live. In this chapter, I discuss their fear of the Devil, as a prevailing feature of Ese Ejja everyday life, and I argue that it is closely related to a deep-seated fear of the other and of its cannibal attacks.

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, in Amazonian philosophies, otherness is seen as a necessity which is always associated with danger. The greatest danger posed by others is that of predatory cannibalism (Overing 1986). In our received knowledge, cannibalism is perceived as the ultimate anti-social practice, but several studies have demonstrated that anthropophagy in Amazonia performs a regenerating role in terms of social relations: Cecilia McCallum (1996) for the Cashinahua and Beth Conklin (1995) and Aparecida Vilaça (1992) for the Warí, have shown how funerary endo-cannibalism, contributes to the reaffirmation of social ties. Among the Cashinahua, the consumption of the deceased is 'one last act constitutive of kinship. Instead of offering game and fish to the community, thereby caring for and feeding them, he offers his own body for consumption' (McCallum 1996: 72). According to Conklin, cannibalism was 'a primary obligation of affinity' (1995: 81) as consanguines, including spouses, who shared the

same blood as the deceased by virtue of sexual transfers of bodily fluids,³⁸ were prohibited to consume the dead. 'Adult men were obliged to eat their close affines; refusal to do so would have insulted the dead person's family' (1995: 81). But the Warĩ also practiced exo-cannibalism, which was clearly a form of aggression. They killed enemies in revenge for deaths, recent or past, and they ate parts of their bodies. This act had nothing of the reverence and containment described for the consumption of dead relatives, instead the flesh of enemies was eaten voraciously, 'with rage' (Vilaça 1992: 102). Eating required the absence of any relationship between the eater and the eaten, and the killer was prohibited to take part, because killing was said to establish consubstantiality with the enemy: the *jam* (double, 'spirit') of the enemy became the 'son' of the killer (1992: 104). For the Araweté, cannibalism is a form of aggression on the part of the *Maĩ*, the gods, enraged by the stinginess of the recently dead, but it is also aimed at creating an alliance with them, and it is a means by which forsaken humans are transformed into superior sky beings (Viveiros de Castro 1992). As was mentioned, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro shows how humans are to the *Maĩ* what children are to adults, how the destiny of humans is to become gods and to do so they must be eaten by them. In these cases predation, a prerogative of affines, is a necessary part of sociality. Joanna Overing shows how, for the Piaroa, 'social relationships in their origin were cannibalistic' and that 'the primary social relationship in mythic time was that between predator and prey' (1986); this relationship is potentially reproduced in marriage, where the wife-takers stand to the wife-givers as predators to prey, beneficiaries of an unreciprocated exchange. The Piaroa avert this danger by marrying endogamously within a multiple-family house.

Among the Ese Ejja this notion of predatory cannibalism as constitutive of sociality seems to be absent. The Ese Ejja normally accuse distant others of cannibalism, such as Cavineño and Tacana Indians, as well as white foreigners, although not Bolivians. It is not clear to me why the Bolivians should be exempt: it may be a coincidence that I have never heard them accused of eating Ese Ejja, or, taking the argument of this thesis a little further, if cannibalism is anti-sociality, given that they want to have peaceful relations with Bolivians, its possibility must be excluded.

³⁸ This is confirmed by Vilaça, who states that the 'devouring of a consubstantial, who is physically identical, is auto-cannibalism and can result in death' Vilaça, A. 1992. *Comendo como gente. Formas do canibalismo Warĩ*. Rio de Janeiro: EditoraUFRJ.

I have very seldom heard talk of contemporary Ese Ejja being cannibals, with the exception of powerful, evil sorcerers. However, on two occasions, I was told that in the past, always at least two generations removed from the speaker, the ancient people used to steal enemies' children and eat them and sometimes they even ate their own, but no one ever explained to me why. This may be another way of distancing themselves from the ancient people by attributing them mindless savagery. However, even those who denied that the Ese Ejja ever practised cannibalism were surprisingly familiar with the taste of human cheeks, which they candidly maintained to be very sweet. I do not wish to speculate whether or not the Ese Ejja practice cannibalism or have done so in a recent past. What is important is that this notion of is very familiar to them, and cannibalism is feared because it is irredeemably anti-social, but it is not condemned *per se*. In other words, eating people is not so much a taboo, as being eaten is a present danger. The most feared and most talked about form of cannibalism is that of the powerful beings, which I will discuss.

This chapter shows how the figure of the Christian Devil found a fertile ground in a cultural context where the attacks of these cannibal enemies are a deep-seated concern, which explains the Ese Ejja's interest in him.

Whose Devil?

One of the main difficulties one encounters when writing about the conceptualisation of the Devil among Amazonian peoples must be that of resisting the temptation to see this phenomenon from the point of view of the missionaries, which is inevitably closer to that of the Western anthropologist. In what follows, I discuss what I think the Devil means to the Ese Ejja and why it has come to occupy such an important place in their everyday talk. Satan is a Christian import and the Ese Ejja have been exposed to the Christian notion of the Devil and the discourse of good and evil, for at least century. The Devil is central to the message of the missionaries and, as it was introduced to the Ese Ejja, it was superimposed to indigenous notions of the powerful beings, *edosiquiana*, *ecuiquia* and *eshahua*, which were lumped together under the same name. In this process, the Devil came to share the qualities of such beings. For this reason, indigenous notions of the Devil can only be understood in terms of Ese Ejja cosmological ideas and their notion of the relations with the powerful beings, who own the rivers and the forest, who provide game and fish and inflict cannibal attacks on

people, but who also, like *eshahua*, are vital forces which inhabit the bodies of people, of animals and of plants, as described in Chapter 7.

By the very process of translating Christian imagery into the local language, and of trying to ban the thoughts of powerful beings from the Indian minds, or hearts, the missionaries have reinforced the place of such beings, whose names they borrowed, in a process very similar to that observed by Birgit Meyer (1999) among the Ewe of Ghana. Meyer shows how translators are bound to using indigenous terms and in doing so they are obliged to allow the meanings attached to those terms to infiltrate the meanings they are trying to convey. To recognise this, one must accept that the relationship between word and meaning is not arbitrary, and that, once a word is used with a certain meaning, it becomes impossible to dissociate them. Since the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries conceived that the central task of their calling was the translation of the sacred texts into the languages of the missionised. This would have made the texts directly available to them, in accordance with the notion of the unmediated access to the word of God. This conception was based on the assumption that translation was unproblematic, that a God-given meaning just existed and it was simply a matter of finding suitable words to express it in different languages. Meyer shows how, in the translation, new Ewe Christian meanings were created of which the missionaries were quite unaware. Indeed this phenomenon has been recorded throughout the history of Christianisation of indigenous Amazonian peoples. As Taussig observes, 'in struggling to erase these memories [of idolatry, of sorcery and paganism], the Church was in fact creating them and strengthening them as a new social force, thereby ensuring the transmission of myth into reality and memory into the future' (1987: 143). The same phenomenon has been at work among the Ese Ejja where, after a century of missionisation, powerful beings are still the central concern in people's everyday life.

Anthropological literature on conversion to Christianity often analyses the impact of this phenomenon according to Christian standards, asking the questions missionaries would ask, trying to establish whether indigenous people have or have not converted, and their motives, in terms of costs and benefits, be their material, social or cosmological. Meyer's excellent work on the limits and contradictions that are inherent in the vernacularisation of Biblical Scriptures, following Vicente Rafael (1993), and on the demonisation of indigenous beliefs, is a useful historical document, but it still approaches the issue from the point of view of the translators. As I mentioned in the

previous chapter, exceptions to the rule are the works of Hugh-Jones (1994), Gow (2001), Vilaça (1997) and Viveiros de Castro (1993a), who consider the issue from within the framework of indigenous moral philosophy and cosmology. In this chapter, I explain why the Devil should be regarded with so much interest, by considering the Ese Ejja relationship with powerful beings and their everyday concerns. Paraphrasing Viveiros de Castro, I intend to find an Ese Ejja explanation for Ese Ejja interests and not speculate about historical vicissitudes (1992: 12).

Edosiquiana

One of the most used names for the Devil is *edosiquiana*. The suffix *-quiana* characterises collective nouns, as in *eshoiquiana*, children, and *etiiquiana*, old/ancient people; therefore *edosiquiana* (*edosi* people or the *edosi* lot) is a category of beings rather than a specific one, but as Chavarría points out, ‘the plural form has been lexicalised and, in Spanish, the Ese Ejja accept to say “el edosikiana” [singular]’ (1987: 263).

Edosiquiana own forest-animals and breed them in corrals, like cattle, and they kill people who venture in the forest *alone* by shooting them with invisible arrows, which make them ill and eventually kill them. They cook people in large pots and eat them, thereby transforming them into animals. Clearly, between people and *edosiquiana*, sociality is impossible. However, *edosiquiana* also make shamans, teaching exceptional victims how to cure. When a man or a woman has been attacked, he or she suffers excruciating pains, but if they can endure them they go back to the forest to meet *edosiquiana* who discloses to them the secrets of shamanry and turns them into *eyamiquecua*.³⁹ (*E*)*yami* means body or flesh and *-quecua* is a verb that conveys the action of piercing, with an arrow, but also of making a hole in the ground to plant, and of sexual intercourse. The body of the future shaman is pierced by *edosiquiana*’s arrow, but he or she also learns to see and to extract the arrows that cause illness in others. Shamans are the only people who can be *edosiquianaja epeejji*, friends of *edosiquiana*, whom they can call upon to discover the causes of sickness or the origin of sorcery. ‘*Edosiquiana* can tell you who the sorcerers are’ Peno told me. They also summon the dead, *emanocuana*, for this purpose. The Ese Ejja agree that there are many *edosiquiana*,

³⁹ People say that women cannot endure the pain as much as men, which is why shamans tend to be male.

male and female and that there are also children *edosiquiana*, but, according to Peno, they do not have sex, instead children are conceived with words.

At the time of my fieldwork, there were no shamans in Portachuelo, and the last was said to have died thirty years before. As I discussed previously, shamanry had been strongly condemned by the missionaries, who took over the treatment of disease and it seemed to have been all but eradicated, as was the use of all medicinal and hallucinogenic plants. Among the Ese Ejja, there was a widespread view that shamans were disappearing. As Peno told me, once Shiaejjame – the Sonene shaman – dies, ‘everything will end.’ Yet it is not impossible that, under different circumstances, new shamans will come along. Even the people who call themselves Christians occasionally visit shamans in Peru or in the Upper Beni region, either when modern medicine fails or simply to ‘talk to the spirits of the dead’. But in the everyday talk, the curing powers of *edosiquiana* are overshadowed by their propensity for cannibalistic attacks on the Ese Ejja. Yet, in spite of the ‘diabolisation’ (Meyer 1999) of powerful beings on the part of the missionaries, *edosiquiana* remain morally ambiguous characters, as is shown by the figure of Deer introduced in Chapter 7. In the myth, Deer appears as a righteous man, who condemns lazy men who let their children go hungry, and he plants a garden, initiating agriculture; however he is also a cannibal, he eats the vulture grandmother, who had intended to eat him. But cannibalism is the mode of treating enemies, who try to eat you and take away your children as spouses. Deer is killed and left to rot by the vultures, who eat him, but he comes back to life, he transforms them into carrion birds and he takes Condor’s daughters as wives, turning enemies into affines.

Enaedosiquiana

Another category of powerful beings often referred to as ‘the Devil’ is that of *enaedosiquiana* who inhabit the world under the river (*ena*: water). They are said to be ‘like Ese Ejja’, living in houses similar to the ones Ese Ejja live in, breeding pigs and cultivating plants. *Enaedosiquiana*’s pigs are caymans and fish are their maize, manioc and pumpkin: when the Ese Ejja fish, they are taking from *enaedosiquiana*’s gardens. Like the forest *edosiquiana*, *enaedosiquiana* provide the Ese Ejja with an essential part of their diet by growing fish-crops, but if the Ese Ejja fish too much they become angry because they are stealing from their gardens. This is one of the reasons why they may kill them, by capsizing their canoes and drowning them. Occasionally, they emerge from under the river, they lure people into their world to make them their spouses and

never allow them to return to the dry land. Finally, *enaedosiquiana* are thought to attack children who swim in the river. Many people, especially young adults, in their twenties, associate *enaedosiquiana* with mermaids, *sirenas*, described as *gringas*, foreign white women, with long blond hair and blue eyes, with large breasts and painted lips. They are half *gringa* and, from the waist down, half fish. Some say *sirenas* live in Brazil, a foreign place downriver; others say they just live in villages under the water. Like other *enaedosiquiana*, *sirenas* prey on humans, enticing them to follow them into their world to marry them and never let them return. The figure of the mermaid is widespread in Bolivia and is found in the Andes as well as in the lowlands. As I mentioned in Chapter 7, Nathan Wachtel describes how the Urus call ‘*serenos*’

beings of human appearance, small in size, which they describe as imps, naked, with long blue hair ... they live in rivers and water holes and they play either a silver flute or a drum that ‘shines like bronze.’ Their encounter is very dangerous, especially if yielding to a kind of fascination, one stares at them: then one is hit by a deadly disease, manifested in stomach and head aches and fits of madness (1990: 203).

Wachtel’s contribution is doubly enlightening because it reveals a continuity between the Andean and the Amazonian vision of the supernatural, in which foreign figures are incorporated, but he also reports on the existence of aquatic figures, half human and half fish in the pre-Colombian pantheon, suggesting a superimposition of foreign and autochthonous beings (1990: 549). In the lowlands, this imagery is clearly related to the *bufeo*, the river dolphin. Percy Fawcett mistakenly identified it with ‘a mammal of the manatee species, rather human in appearance, with prominent breasts. It follows boats and canoes as porpoises do ships at sea ... It is neither helpless nor inoffensive, and will attack and kill a crocodile’ (1953: 85). I have never seen or heard of a *bufeo* in the stretch of the Beni between Portachuelo and Riberalta, but there are reported to be many down river, below the waterfalls of Cachuela Esperanza towards Guayaramerin, where the Beni meets the Mamoré to form the Madeira River. Fawcett’s report also suggests the presence of manatees, which fit the description given of *sirenas*.

In the Ese Ejja representation of mermaids, there is a strong sense of the danger and the attraction of the outside world. *Sirenas* are definitely not Ese Ejja: they are like white

people. They come from the end of the river and, like other *edosiquiana*, they want to marry the Ese Ejja, but this union causes death.

Ecuiquia

As I mentioned in Chapter 7, *ecuiquia* appears when a person dies and it is associated with the person's shadow. However, it is not a ghost, but the body of the dead person, and maintains the characteristics it had the time of death. So, for example, when the body of a young Tacana man was recovered from the river, for weeks people said they saw him walking through the village at night, swollen and eaten by carnivore fish.

Ecuiquia live in the forest, in trees and wander at night, from dusk until dawn, looking for Ese Ejja to grab and eat. They are also said to spend time near water pools and eat raw fish-heads. One can tell they are present because they whistle.⁴⁰ *Ecuiquia* sometimes is called *cocoi*, a word used by the Spanish-speaking Bolivians to refer to the 'bogey man'. This is how I was first introduced to it by a gang of young boys sitting on the football bench. They told me there were many *cocoi*, male and female, and they lived in the forest. They were 'like us', but completely black, even their eyes, but on this point they could not agree: some said they were white. 'They are all naked, they don't even wear knickers. They are dead people.' They warned me to be careful in the dark and in the forest, because *cocoi* would eat me.

People have very strong ideas about the appearance of *ecuiquia*, but while adults agree that they are tall and black, very hairy and with red eyes, large teeth and sharp nails, children give different descriptions. I asked eighteen children between the ages of six and thirteen to draw *ecuiquia* (see plates 2, 3 and 4).⁴¹ I was encouraged to ask about this after seeing girls of six or seven, in the school, spontaneously drawing *ecuiquia* and *eshahua* on the blackboard. The drawings immediately show that devils look like human beings, except when they are very hairy, which is not always the case. They are not monsters; they do not look threatening and some even smile. Out of thirty-five *ecuiquia*, only two are described as cannibals ('they are going to eat people') – one of which is depicted as a jaguar, while the others are said to be doing nothing or to be going to eat fish by the lake.

⁴⁰ This resonates with Gray's description of the Arakmbut *toto*. Gray, A. 1996. *Mythology, spirituality and history* (The Arakmbut of Amazonian Peru 1). Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

⁴¹ It was not a planned sample. Ese Ejja children are very independent and unruly. Not wanting to impose this activity as a task, I contented myself with those who were willing to come and draw for me.

COSSA QUINI (m) 12yo

Draw ecuiquia

13/9/00³

BOY AGED 12



cuji))i

Who is it? Ecuiquia

What is it doing? Nachwo i))i'a (eating fish)

EJAHUAJA (f) 10yo

Draw ecuiquia

13/9/00 35

GIRL AGED 10



Who is this?

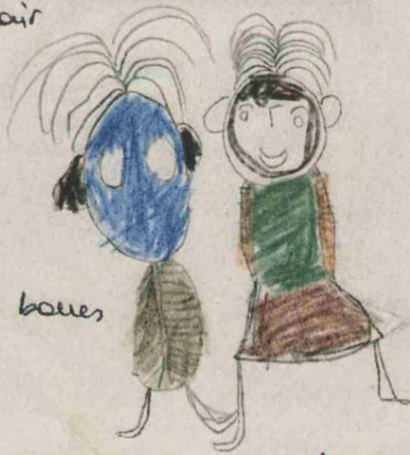
ecuiquia. They are all ecuiquia

what are they doing?
working

Plate 21. Drawings of ecuiquia

HUAO SAHUI,
GIRL AGED 10

hair



bones

ecuiquia

depa (epau)

What is ecuiquia doing?
Dejja)))ie (eating quwe)

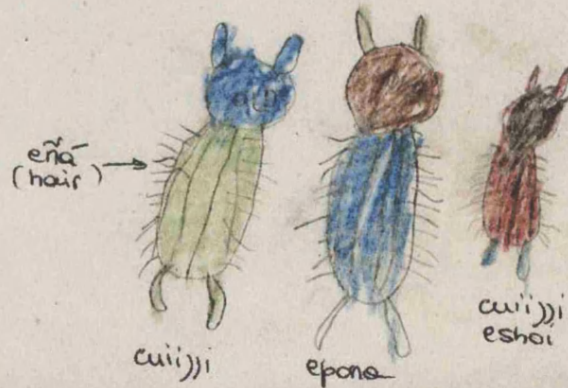
HASHIA(F)9

Draw Ecuiquia

5/9/00

GIRL AGED 9

Are they all ecuiquia? yes.



cuijji

epona

cuijji
eshoi

Plate 22. Drawings of *ecuiquia*

PEAO (F) 1340

Draw Ecuiquia

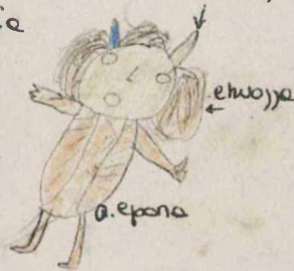
5/9/00

16

GIRL AGED 13

ecuiquiaye esteane (noms of ecuiquia)

What is this? Ecuiquia
opane lse.
What is it doing?
Nahwo ijja, nahwo sapa
ijjiasenje cwequi
Where? Baka sijje (lago)



What is this? michu
nahwo ijja cwequi
ebio ja
(goes to eat fish in
the forest)



cuiiji saoma, miu colello, force hombre

Plate 23. Drawings of ecuiquia

In the drawings, there are families with female and male devils; there are children and cat and dog *ecuiquia*. Sometimes they are completely black and other times they are very colourful. Eighteen is possibly not a sufficient number to justify more than a speculative observation, but the exercise confirmed that children are very familiar with *ecuiquia*, although their attitudes towards them are ambiguous, as they do not seem to find them as horrifying as adults do. Sometimes they walk around at night laughing and saying *ecuiquia* do not exist, yet at other times they burst out crying if they are left to walk alone in the dark. Like in Erwin's case above, especially after a recent death, many people see *ecuiquia* wondering around the village at night, but they rarely admitted it to me; yet, occasionally, adults described how they became aware of *ecuiquia*'s presence. Ino told me how, one night, as she washed the dishes, she had heard an *ecuiquia*, whistling in the trees and making a rasping sound. Immediately she had felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

In myth, *ecuiquia* is a negative character, because he always tries to eat his brother-in-law, by luring him into the forest. He wakes him at night and tells him to go fishing, and once at the lake, after poisoning fish, he tries to grab him. However, the man always unmasks him, because *ecuiquia*, who hides his face not to be recognised, gives away his nature by eating raw fish. The man ends up scalding him and chasing him off. In the second narrative of this kind, *ecuiquia* follows a man who is hunting in the forest and steals all his game, then tries to capture him too. However, the hunter is cleverer and succeeds in killing *ecuiquia* by impaling him with a spear. Thus one can see how this devil is made a fool of and eventually eliminated. These stories cause merriment among the listeners, who laugh at the misfortunes of the clumsy creature. In the ancient people's stories, *ecuiquia* is an affine, 'prototypical figure of alterity' (Viveiros de Castro 1998a), who tries to eat his brother in law; he is a cannibal and he is dangerous but he is not powerful, and ultimately, humans outwit him. This is consistent with the ambivalence towards good and evil which characterises Ese Ejja social philosophy. The clash with the dualistic view held by Christians is apparent in the early characterisations of *ecuiquia* by missionaries. In 1931, Father Álvarez describing Huarayo beliefs wrote:

Above all demons, we have put Ecuikia, as infernal chief, for his sad fame, like another Lucifer of Genesis, because he is the most talked about, even by the savage children in their puerile games; when they want to scare each

other, you hear them say time and time again: '*Ecuikia pueje*', here comes Ecuikia (1998a: 234).

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the Devil is indeed a very common topic of conversation, but there is nothing to justify his characterisation as an 'infernal chief'. He is but another player among the multiple forces that control the cosmos which must be reckoned with.

Duende

The Ese Ejja have also added to the number of the powerful spirits the *duende*, a foreign demon, imported from the interior of the country. His foreignness is exemplified by his attire: he is fully clothed, with long trousers and boots and he wears a hat. He is small, 'like a child' and has a long tail which he wraps around his victims. He comes out of a hole in the ground at night, during holidays, when it is raining slightly. Interestingly, the *duende* of the Ese Ejja displays characteristics associated with non-Indians, such as clothes, and especially boots and a hat, moreover his tail is like whip. This suggests a reference to *dejja*, perhaps to slave raiders, which, as was mentioned, are very rare in Ese Ejja narratives. This may be another instance of the demonisation of foreigners, as was described in the representation of mermaids as blue eyed and blond haired *gringas*.

Table 4 illustrates the 'devils' that inhabit the Ese Ejja world, their attitude towards humans, the elements and the beings they are associated with.

<i>edosisiquiana</i>	<i>enaedosisiquiana</i> including <i>sirenas</i>	<i>eshahua</i>	<i>ecuiquia</i>	<i>duende</i>
ambivalent			malevolent	
cannibal				
forest	water	death		
animals, birds	fish, potential affines, foreigners	humans, animals, birds, fish, plants, affines	foreigners	

Table 4. Ese Ejja 'devils'

Attitudes towards powerful beings and the Devil

In myth, powerful beings do not appear as absolutely good or absolutely evil, but they are considered to be very dangerous. Nevertheless, some people, especially young,

school-educated men are sceptical about them, and say they do not 'believe' in them, although they may admit having seen them. That was the case of Sehua, who told me how his parents used to tell him about *edosiquiana*, the master of the forest animals, to whom he had to ask permission before he went hunting. He said he did not believe in *edosiquiana* and he was successful in hunting because he had a good aim. He did not believe in *ecuiquia*, but he had seen one when he was in the army, nor did he believe in shamans. However, he declared he would have believed in them if they could say something about him, about the people in Portachuelo. He regretted that he had no money to test them, and told me that the shamans in Riberalta were very expensive. Here he referred to the many mestizo shamans or medicine men that can be found in the town. Once he also questioned the fact that *ecuiquia* ate raw fish. 'Can it be?' he wondered, 'when one is dead, one is dead: one can't eat.' Sapa Ai too was sceptical and sometimes joked about the ancient people's beliefs.

One night, as we sat in the kitchen, Sapa Ai parodied a shaman, by breathing in the smoke from a match and blowing it out and pretending to pick an invisible arrow out of his friend Quecua's arm and everyone laughed. Their scepticism was summed up by Sapa who said that old people believed many things, 'but we think. We want to know what is true and what isn't.' Some times, even when people are not sceptical, their ideas about demons become confused with the superimpositions made by the missionaries, who speak of the Devil in rather abstract terms, rejecting what they see as folkloric icons, which are part of the Catholic imagery. The first time I asked Quisaa about *edosiquiana*, she told me he was 'the Devil', but when I asked her what or who it was, she said she did not know. 'They say it is the wind, that's all.' 'They' being the missionaries. 'And what does it do to you?' I continued. 'It makes you do bad things, like homosexual, lying and gossiping.' The extent to which the missionaries message is misinterpreted due to problems of translation was made clear when she explained that 'doing homosexual' meant having sexual relations, with no reference to same sex.

Denial

As with myths and cosmological ideas, when I asked about powerful beings at the beginning of my research, many people denied that they existed, even when it was obvious that they feared them profoundly. That was often the case with my 'mother', Ino Tahua. One day, walking home from a visit to her sister-in-law in Alto, I asked her what *edosiquiana* was. Without hesitation, Ino declared it was Satan, '*el Satanás*'.

Without any further prompting on my part, she added that he lived in the forest and that when people walked in the forest alone, he grabbed them and ate them. She began to sound uneasy with my questioning, so I abandoned it until we were safely in the grounds of the school, then I asked again and at that point she told me that it was a story of the ancient people and that she 'did not think like that' (see discussion on thought and vision in Chapter 8). However she never went to the forest on her own, and once we became closer, she started to tell me about *edosiquiana* and admitted that she never went out at night, not even to the latrine on her own because she was afraid of *ecuiquia*.

The same attitude I found in her daughter Quisaa. Sometimes she told me she did not believe in *ecuiquia* nor in *edosiquiana*, but then she gave me detailed descriptions of the habits and the dangers of these beings. She was the one who explained to me why people did not sleep on their own, because if the Devil – she used the Spanish '*diablo*' – found some space in the bed, he would come in and attack them. She also told me how *eshahua* lived in the forest on the branches of a very tall tree, the *mapajo*, where he had his house, and there were roads and lorries running on them. He had shops and bars and lots of food. 'At midday he opens his door and lets you in. He keeps you there for a week and then kills you. Sometimes he sends you home and when you get there you die.' She was particularly concerned by the fact that *duende* attracts young girls who go alone to wash at the pool in the forest. He offers them candy, then he captures them and takes them to his den in the thicket and keeps them there for three or five days, then he kills them. He changes his appearance to look like a familiar person so the girls trust him.

One day, as I was sitting in Alto, chatting on the bench, I heard Shona, a young woman, say something about *edosiquiana*, but did not understand what. I asked what she meant by *edosiquiana* and two adult women hurriedly replied: 'Nothing. We don't know *edosiquiana*, she is just saying'. Yet, months later, one of the two women gave me a long description of her own experience of *edosiquiana*. Once more, I interpreted this reaction as an attempt to hide from me ideas that for a long time had been labelled as ignorant superstitions. However, I later began to understand that this was not the whole explanation, because avoiding speaking about dangerous demons is also a strategy to keep them at a distance.

The presence of demons affects people's behaviour in many ways: not only women and children refrain from venturing in the forest alone, but people take special precautions when they are particularly vulnerable as in when they go to sleep. At night, Ino and Dejja Oshie would lock the door, and eventually they admitted they did it to keep *ecuiquia* out. They also explained that there were two ways of resisting an *ecuiquia*: either by flashing a torch at it or by shooting it with a rifle. However, when, for a while, I was sleeping on my own, Ino made sure I had a knife with me, suggesting that that too would have been useful to defend myself from possible attacks.

Quite suddenly, after many months of denial, Ino began telling me stories about *ecuiquia*, before we went to sleep. One evening, she told me how Canono had recently been in his garden in the evening and he had seen one, but the *ecuiquia* had not spotted him and he ran away. A few days later, I asked Canono's wife about the encounter. At first she looked surprised and suspicious, she turned to look at her daughter and then denied it. I pushed her a little, saying I had once seen an *ecuiquia* myself and then she launched in a long and animated description of how *ecuiquia* looked, pulling at my black t-shirt, saying he was like that, *tehue*, black. Another time, Ino Taha told me how, when Canono was much younger and had no children, he had gone fishing on the lake and he had seen naked *ecuiquia* children. She also described how, one night *ecuiquia* had grabbed her heel. Her husband was away and she had gone to sleep with her two small children, in the house of her adoptive father Cui Má. As she lay asleep, someone started pulling her foot; she called out to her son, Sapa Ai, but he did not wake up, instead, Cui Má spoke asking what was happening. She described it and he said it must be an *ecuiquia*. Then Quisaa joined in the story and, stroking her thigh and her cheek, she said sometimes *ecuiquia* touches you 'and it is very cold.' Ino went on to describe how her brother once had to struggle because *ecuiquia* was pulling at his door: he was trying to close it and the other wouldn't let him. Eventually he scared it away.

Cannibalism

One day, I was on my way to visit a young man who had suffered from an epileptic fit, when a woman, hearing where I was going, stopped me and warned me not to go and see him, that he would eat me. Later on, his father told me how a devil had entered his head. Another time, Peno said: 'If you meet *edosiquiana* on your path you become ill and you die. He goes round with his pot. He cooks you and eats you and transforms you into an animal. Once you get home, you die, because he has cooked you and eaten you.'

Dejja Ai told me how his brother-in-law's father was killed by *edosiquiana*: 'He was working in his garden alone, when *edosiquiana* attacked him. He came home looking fine but he told what had happened and after two days he died. *Edosiquiana* had taken his *yami*, his flesh/body, and left him his *eshahua*.' According to Dejja Ai, *eshahua* is like another body, like another flesh that you can touch. Basi, Dejja's wife, told me *edosiquiana* cuts his victims open and takes their insides, then sews them back. He cuts the insides in small pieces and cooks them in his large pot.

From the examples I have given above it is clear that killing by the powerful beings is always a form of cannibalism, as is also visible in the description of *eshahua* of carnivore fish who eat at the body from inside and cause leishmaniasis. The Devil is also a cannibal insofar as he embodies the cannibalistic side of powerful beings. But what does cannibalism mean for the Ese Ejja?

Edosiquiana kills and cooks his prey in a large pot, in which, some say, the water boils without fire, and transforms them into animals. But this cannibalism is not of a celestial kind as in the case of the Araweté (Viveiros de Castro 1992), where the souls of the dead are cooked in effervescent water – boiling without fire – in order to become gods and find celestial spouses. Nor is the effervescent water the medium of initiation as among the Warí (Vilaça 1992). *Edosiquiana*'s cannibalism is not constitutive of sociality, instead it is experienced as an aggression. At first, I interpreted it as a form of reciprocity, since the Ese Ejja constantly raid *edosiquiana*'s corrals to kill deer, armadillo, paca and so forth and *edosiquiana* may be seen as replenishing their stock by transforming Ese Ejja into animals. The notion of reciprocity between humans and animals is considered by Conklin to be a 'common cross-cultural concept, especially among native American peoples' (1995: 89), but I doubt the Ese Ejja would see it this way and I have never heard anyone refer to their cannibalism in these terms.

Gringos, who are far removed on the scale of sameness-otherness, are also seen as potential cannibals, as I learned when I became the object of a very serious accusation.⁴² During my stay, Gerardo Bamonte visited Portachuelo and brought presents for Alecio, a young man from Alto with whom he had worked some years before. He promised to

⁴² In an insightful discussion of the history of the Arakmbut, neighbours of the Peruvian Ese Ejja, Gray points out how foreigners, Spanish *conquistadores*, Inca and nineteenth century rubber colonists are represented as dangerous cannibals. Gray, A. 1996. *Mythology, spirituality and history* (The Arakmbut of Amazonian Peru 1). Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

the people of Alto cables and light bulbs to set up an electric lighting system; and he suggested that Alecio should send his daughter to Italy the following year. The gifts and promises ignited the envy of the community of Bajo, who started spreading rumours that the anthropologist had bought the girl in exchange for a mosquito net, sheets and blankets, and he was going to take her to his country and eat her. A few weeks after the anthropologist left, the leader of Bajo, who owed me some money, spread the rumour that I intended to go back to my country and return to Portachuelo with my people to take the land of the Ese Ejja, to kill them and eat them. He also said he wanted to expel me from the community.

The rumour spread quickly, and I started to see children darting past my door giggling. I was not sure of what was going on, until a close friend took me to one side and said it was Bajo people who wanted me to leave and they were 'talking ugly', but here in Alto people wanted me to stay, and no one was going to throw me out. Then she paused and timidly she asked: 'Is it true that your people eat Ese Ejja?' This happened fifteen months into my fieldwork, just as I was about to travel to Europe for a month. Fortunately, I had planned a large farewell party, to which the whole of the community of Bajo was invited to share roast pork. I fed them instead of eating them and perhaps it did the trick because, upon my return, the rumour had died down and no one ever mentioned it to me again, except in joking.

Another instance of gringo cannibalism came to my attention when Dejjá Oshie told me how he had once worked for a foreign logging company. The workers received tinned meat with the rations that came with a helicopter, but one day, when they opened the tins, they found they were full of human ears, which they refused to eat.

Finally, I mentioned that some people complain that the missionaries have banned the use of hallucinogens and prohibited curing rituals in which shamans call upon the dead and the powerful beings to cure the sick, because they want to sell their drugs. The missionaries provide protection and material goods, but they can make people ill; and, as I have shown, illness is attributed to a cannibal attack on the part of an *eshahua*. In this sense, by making people ill, they too are performing a cannibal act.⁴³ These

⁴³ The Arakmbut also say that some white people are cannibals. Gray reports how 'several people remarked that they had seen white visitors visiting the community licking their lips while looking at children' Ibid.

references to cannibalism from gringos, as well as strangers in general, however powerful, were isolated instances, and not a common topic of conversation; predatory attacks from powerful beings, on the other hand, were constantly talked about.

Conclusion: fear of irredeemable otherness

For the Ese Ejja, the Devil is the locus of the fears associated with different beings, people and spirits. As I discussed in Chapter 6, the other is everywhere outside the group of one's close kin and all others are potential enemies; therefore, the Ese Ejja are surrounded by enemies. But the condition of other is neither given nor permanent, and depends largely on relative position. People can move in and out of these positions throughout their lives, through their practices and especially through marriage and childbirth. The category of other includes affines who, in the Amerindian social philosophy are widely considered a necessary evil: they are 'dangerous but necessary' to 'the perpetuation of the social group' (Overing 1986: 151). As I have shown, the Ese Ejja who speak a different dialect and live in a different place, referred to as 'those who live/sleep somewhere else', stand at a further level of otherness. Further still are other indigenous people, non-indigenous people, Bolivians and gringos, as well as the dead and powerful beings.⁴⁴ But the otherness of the powerful beings is irredeemable and it cannot be turned into sociality. On the contrary, any contact with them, except for shamans, results in death.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how fear of the other is central to Ese Ejja life, where others are the beings that belong to the opposite Ese Ejja community, to the town, to the forest and to the underwater world. Portachuelo Alto and Bajo are full of reciprocal enemies, who gossip about one another, and are ready to send sorcery at the slightest offence; the town of Riberalta is the object of attraction and of fear, because it is a source of goods, but it is also full of *maliantes*, criminals, who kill unarmed people, and the forest and the river are dangerous because they are inhabited by predatory creatures, jaguars, anacondas, caimans and powerful beings. But while distant Ese Ejja, *dejja* and even gringos can ultimately be domesticated, powerful beings cannot.

The words 'Devil', 'Satan' and 'demon' have such a central place in Ese Ejja thought because they embody all the dangers associated with these ultimate others. I was

⁴⁴ The Arakmbut associate *toto* (harmful spirits) with *Taka*: non-Arakmbut indigenous people considered 'old enemies who used to attack the maloca in dawn raids to kill men and capture or steal women' Ibid.

puzzled by the fact that beings that once were neither good nor bad could become identified with the essence of evil, until I realised I was not considering the issue from the point of view of my informants. What is important about the powerful beings, and about the Devil, is not their moral status, but the effect they have on people: that they are dangerous, that they may make them ill and eat them, and measures must be taken to prevent them from doing so through shamanry, food prohibitions and counter-sorcery, as well as through the avoidance of alcohol and dance. However, sometimes measures are not sufficient, when somebody else's carelessness in separating food and sex, or somebody's desire to harm one through sorcery make the attacks from powerful beings inevitable. The possibility of death is constantly present in Ese Ejja everyday life, in the form of fatal diseases, especially for small children, of accidents on the river or during hunting expeditions, in the form of attacks from animals, such as jaguars and anacondas, and of sorcery attacks, which are all caused by the ill will of enemies.

People constantly talk about the possibility of death, often giving the impression that they are exaggerating. The Ese Ejja hasten in declaring someone dead, even when the person is still alive and recovering from an illness, and often people announced a death and described it in great detail, before it had been confirmed. This was the case of Fredi, who had gone to collect Brazil nut with his wife far from the village. One night the calm was broken by the mournful lamentations of his in-laws, and people gathered around their house. His mother-in-law cried and his father-in-law described how he had been hit by a heavy shell, his head had split open, and his brain had spilled out. The next day, the news came that he was alive and well. This episode was by no means exceptional. Another time, a little girl came running up to me saying that a young woman called Ote was dead. When I reached her house I found her exhausted with fever, but recovering.

The preoccupation with death is transferred on to the Devil and partly explains the enthusiasm with which the Ese Ejja took to Christianity. The missionaries play on the concern for safety from evil and constantly use the language of protection. This is revealed in translation, where God's love is translated as *queanahue*, which means 'to be jealous' as well as 'to protect' and 'to refuse to give away', and also in metaphors, in which God is compared to a torch that lights the path so people will not step on snakes (electric torches are effective weapons to scare away *ecuiquia*). In Peru, Father Álvarez taught the Ese Ejja that after baptism they should not fear "*Ecuikia*", the Devil, because he no longer had any power over them (Álvarez Fernández 1998a: 101). Today,

Christians ward off their fears by saying that God is more powerful than the Devil and, as long as they are Christian, they are safe from his attacks, but they have certainly not lost interest in the powerful beings. On the contrary, Christianity is consistent with the logic of the powerful beings and provides a new powerful shamanry with which to keep them at bay.

This overwhelming fear of irredeemable others can also be explained in historical terms. I have shown how the Ese Ejja speak of the past as a violent time, when they were always at war and under threat by enemy attacks. In the literature, however, they are described as savage and barbarous, plaguing travellers and other indigenous people with their raids (see for example Armentia 1976). Today they live a 'tranquil' life, no longer at war with their neighbours, but the fear developed in centuries of flight and aggression remains and it is embodied in these powerful beings.

10. Conclusion

So there I was, after a year and a half that felt like a century and a half, waiting to go home. My questions had started going around in circles and I understood it was time to leave. I set a date and suddenly I couldn't wait. The last week in Portachuelo was unbearable. I had to keep busy, talk to people, collect information, but as soon as I stopped, I asked myself: 'what's the point?' I felt incredibly sad, not because I was leaving, as I had expected, but because it had been so hard. How had I managed? Was it really over? Suddenly I felt the weight of it all.

As I find myself repeating again and again, it was not the practical side of life I found difficult: since I was a child I dreamt of living in an Amazonian village, catching my own food, cooking it on the a fire on the floor, washing in the river and sleeping under a roof of leaves. I loved every minute of it – except perhaps the omnipresent mosquitoes that feasted on me. The real hardship was psychological. First of all, I had to come to terms with the fact that the Amazonian village I had come to did not correspond to my romantic ideas, built up through novels, films and the like. It was not mysterious and enchanting, but quite dull at first. And the Ese Ejja were not the heroic, wise, proud and knowledgeable people I had expected, but, as I have described all along, they appeared drab, self-effacing, subservient to the missionaries and to the Bolivians, constantly denying any knowledge of anything. For many weeks after I arrived, I felt I had come to the wrong place and I couldn't imagine writing anything remotely interesting about these people.

I found particularly hard to deal with the statement which was to become the main focus of my thesis, that the Ese Ejja were not *dejja*, not 'the true people'. As I explained in Chapter 1, both my moral and aesthetic senses were offended by it. How could a people say about themselves that they were not the true people? Deny their own humanity? And an Amazonian people at that; with all I had read about Amazonians considering themselves 'the real humans'. Once more this confirmed the unbearable feeling of having come to the wrong place, to the wrong Indians. As time went by, I began to understand how important that statement was, and how necessary it was to come to terms with it as an indigenous concept, not as the expression of colonial ideas about Indians, silencing the horror that it stirred inside me. The process of understanding took a long time and only now, almost two years since I left Portachuelo, I am beginning to make sense of it. The Ese Ejja are not the wretched victims of an extreme form of moral

and intellectual colonisation, nor are they a freak occurrence among Amazonian peoples. They have indeed suffered the brutal impact of European colonisation, but they are voicing that impact and their current situation in their very own terms, in the language of transformation and of movement, of the transition from the forest to the river's edge, from savagery to civilisation. But the values attached to the terms 'savagery' and 'civilisation' are not the same for them as for Bolivian nationals. Savages in Ese Ejja are simply '*daqui-má*' those with no clothes, but they are also strong and brave, like their ancestors. Civilised people own desirable goods and knowledge, but they are potentially dangerous, therefore one must take precautions not to anger them.

For the first seven or eight months, people in Portachuelo Bajo, except my host family, seemed to avoid me and I began to feel extremely lonely and to lose sight of my goal. Loneliness and lack of purpose are a deadly combination, but I carried on, going through the moves, doing what I was supposed to do: learn the language, talk to people, listen, go fishing, sit and watch football games. What haunted me was the loss of my sense of purpose. Why was I putting up with all this? Purpose is what drives us on, what makes us endure hardship, but when that fails it becomes very difficult to carry on. Sometimes I still ask myself what kept me going, whether it was my commitment to the PhD, my obligation to the ESRC, to the University, to my supervisors, I do not think so. I suspect it was the need to prove to myself that I could do it. Fieldwork was the test of tests. The story of my life has been to put myself to the test, whether it was getting on a horse, when I was terrified of it, or whether it was getting on a stage, to overcome my shyness, but this time I did it big time!

As I got closer to the Ese Ejja, particularly when I moved to Portachuelo Alto, thankfully, I stopped feeling lonely and I began to feel at home. However, at that point, another difficulty set in precisely because of the intimacy that was building between me and them. An ethical problem emerged. I was being accepted, I was becoming one of them, *uapapojiamá*, non-other, *shehue*, little sister, *epeeji*, friend, but I felt I was lying to them. I knew I was being friendly because I had to write about them and I wanted them to be open and honest, but, on my part, I was not. When they asked me if I would stay forever, I often said 'maybe' and perhaps, sometimes, I considered it a possibility, but I knew that, eventually, I would leave. Perhaps my friend Bajjima knew that too, when she told me: 'When you leave, we will burn your house down', which is what

people should do when someone dies. I used to tell myself that somehow they would benefit from my thesis, but deep down I suspected they probably would not. I wonder if that feeling ever goes away. But I did not cheat them, I did not take advantage of them, I promised I would buy a microscope for the medical post and I did, and in the end, they might even have enjoyed having me around. Occasionally, I hear from someone who has been to Portachuelo. They say that the Ese Ejja speak fondly of me, that they remember how I liked living like them, eating like them and fishing like them, and they ask when I am going back.

As I described in Chapter 1, what I found particularly hard when writing about the Ese Ejja was that, in trying to make sense of my data in theoretical terms, I lost sight of the people I got to know so well, and that too felt like cheating them, because they were just a prop which I used to write my own story. So I resolved to write about the incongruences of what I observed, rather than trying to smooth over the discrepancies for the sake of my argument. This was the least I could do to be true to them and to myself, because, after all, why on earth had I put myself through that if I was going to re-invent the Ese Ejja? I have done so to an extent, although inevitably I have made generalisations. I guess this is the problem of ethnography: we write about people, with all their idiosyncrasies and we write in a particular moment in time, and yet we are constantly tempted to make grand statements about general rules. But if general rules exist, they do not emerge from the daily lives we describe, they can only be gauged on a much larger comparative scale. Therefore, the role of the ethnographer, and what I have tried to do here, is to collect the data that can make the ongoing comparative project possible.

As I also mentioned in Chapter 1, lowland Bolivia is an under-researched region, but the growing number of scholars interested in it promises interesting comparative work in the future. The purpose of my thesis is precisely to contribute to that enterprise.

The thesis

My aim in this thesis has been to produce an ethnographic account of the reality I encountered in the Ese Ejja community of Portachuelo between 1999 and 2001 and to illustrate some of the phenomena of social reproduction and change I observed there. The focus has been on indigenous perceptions of otherness. The case of the Ese Ejja confirms what has been observed elsewhere in the Amazon region, that is, the centrality

of otherness in social reproduction (Overing 1984a; Overing Kaplan 1981) and in the construction of the self (Erikson 1986; Viveiros de Castro 1992; 1996; 1998a).

In a seminal review article, in which she compares ethnographies from the Guianas, Central Brazil and northwest Amazonia, Joanna Overing observes the existence of 'a very similar philosophy of society' among peoples who organise themselves in highly heterogeneous ways (1981: 161). The author argues that what the Guianese Piaroa, the Central Brazilian Gê and Bororo and the people of the northwest Amazon have in common is the notion that society can only exist on condition that 'the proper mixing of things' is maintained (1981: 161). The logic underlying this principle is that difference is necessary but dangerous and it must be regulated. She also observes that, while Guianese people constantly strive to eliminate differences, these differences are constantly emphasised by the other groups.

Among the Ese Ejja, both the principles of creation and elimination of differences can be observed. In this thesis, I have shown that alterity is a significant concern for the Ese Ejja and that it informs their everyday life, their cosmology and their sense of history. I have also shown that they share with other Amazonians the notion that difference is dangerous but necessary and that sameness is safe but barren and can become lethal, if for example the same kind of people have sexual intercourse. It is desirable to marry close in order to minimise the dangers that come with otherness, but marrying too close causes death. But alterity is not a given and it must be made through the distinction between cross relatives, who are *uapa*, other, different, and parallel ones, who are *uapapojiana*, non-other, the same as me. This distinction begins within a set of cross sex siblings, whose children are considered to be different from each other and therefore potential spouses.

The logic whereby one must create otherness among close kin, brothers and sisters, to make marriage possible is consistent with the suggestion, on a wider scale, that alterity is the condition for the construction of identity and therefore it must be created and maintained. This explains why members of different Ese Ejja groups constantly stress how unlike the others they are, appealing to geographic origin and to language. But difference is also constantly eliminated and transformed into sameness, through conviviality and procreation. Spouses are other to one another, but they are the same to their children and this logic is mirrored in the use of teknonymy in kinship terminology,

where parents-in-law refer to their children's spouses as 'mother/father of my grandchildren'. While this is the case at the formal level, in practice hostility towards others often prevails and at critical moments, in the case of illnesses, of deaths or of sorcery accusations difference is remembered and stressed. The hostility is more likely to affect others who have come from distant communities and cannot rely on the support of their own close kin, as was the case mentioned in Chapter 6 of Sabina, a young woman who came from Peru after marrying Quecua, a youth from Portachuelo. She was constantly harassed by her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law, who were said to want to kill her.

In Chapter 6, I have demonstrated that, for the Ese Ejja, identity is more contingent than absolute. Relations are not fixed, and they can change through time; nor are they exclusive and one can entertain the same kind of relationship with what seem different categories of people as is the case in relations of adoption.

All the above confirms the constitutive nature of alterity, which is also evident in the relations with more distant others such as other indigenous peoples, Bolivian nationals, North American missionaries and European anthropologists, since Ese Ejja attitudes change in each of these encounters. To describe this phenomenon I have borrowed Caiuby Novaes' metaphor of 'the play of mirrors' (1997). I have argued that, in the ongoing play of mirrors, the Ese Ejja continue to see themselves as inferior when faced with Spanish speakers, be they Tacana, schoolteachers, traders, soldiers or townspeople, as they have done for decades, and this relationship is epitomised in the *chama-dejja* opposition. But this relationship is not static since constitutive alterity allows for the possibility of transformation of other into the same as me, but also of becoming like the other. Which is why the Ese Ejja can say that they are almost *dejja*. Caiuby Novaes' metaphor is consistent with the notion that identity is multiple and mutable – of which more below.

In presenting my ethnography, I have stressed that while there clearly exists a dominant discourse which characterises the Ese Ejja culture, the progressive shift from savagery to civilisation, from the forest and the headwaters to the villages on the lower reaches of the river, from hostility to amity towards Bolivians, nevertheless it is far from shared by all people at all times. This might seem a trivial point, and on one level, no anthropologist would disagree with the fact that different people have different ideas at

different times. Martin Sökefeld (1999) claims that anthropologists deny self-consciousness to the people they study. I think this is an exaggeration, but when it comes to theorising about people, in Amazonia at least, the focus tends to drift on to the collective at the expense of the individual. In this thesis I have not suggested that we abandon the collective view and start writing biographies, after all what we write about is culture and society. Nor have I argued for a radical independence of the individual as Nigel Rapport would have it, when he states that 'it is in individuality that the roots of the social and the cultural lie' (quoted in Sökefeld 1999: 419). Society and individuals are mutually informed and cannot be considered separately, nor can it be assumed that society is just the total sum of individual wills, nor that it acts independently of individuals imposing on them some disembodied principles. What I have stressed is the need to give voice to contrasting and contradicting ideas that in the literature may be silenced for the sake of clarity and coherence.

This selectivity is tempting because, as social scientists, we are often pressed to produce scientific evidence, exact figures, trends and patterns, and we are made to reject the indeterminacy and unpredictability of human facts. This may be due to the growing number of requests for accountability, as funding bodies increasingly demand practical justification for research, in terms of its impact on users and policy makers. However, I trust we can rescue individuality without sacrificing generalisations by continuing to question the relationship between individual and society and rejecting the model in which the individual passively absorbs what society feeds it. Recent feminist studies and studies on children's knowledge acquisition show that this model is inadequate.

Feminist scholars have made a strong case for the multiplicity of gender identities, which are constantly contested, while they are also reproduced, and have shown how people have some choice in conforming to or resisting dominant ideologies (Moore 1994). Throughout this thesis, I have shown that the Ese Ejja take on different roles or positions at different times. In the village, they can act like Ese Ejja when they go fishing, digging for fish eggs, when they weave mats, when they go to the forest to gather and hunt; when they visit shamans; when they refuse to work for the schoolteachers or for communal projects, when they make polygynous unions or marry their cross cousins; when they tell ancient people's stories and observe food prohibitions; when they mourn the dead and call their names slapping their thighs and stamping their feet on the ground. Or they can act like 'civilised' *dejja*, when they go to

church on Sunday and they don clean white shirts and trousers or blouses and skirts; or when they play football, wearing the colourful football kit offered by local politicians, and shout at each other in Spanish; when they go to school or to the medical post to receive treatment instead of using plants from the forest; when the girls have their hair permed or bleached by a passing merchant's wife and for days the village smells of peroxide. In Riberalta, they may revert to their 'savage' position and avoid contact with *dejja*, wander around wearing dirty tattered clothes and beg for food or scavenge in rubbish bins. Rarely, the braver ones will become *dejja* in town too, although generally only those who have spent considerable time there can do it. Ino Tahua, who had spent a few months in Riberalta as a teenager, could confidently go to a hairdresser or walk to the market on her own, wearing clean clothes and she could be mistaken for a town dweller, as long as she remembered not to pick things up with her toes. Bahuapoggi, a bright bilingual schoolteacher who had been sent to school in town as a child, moved confidently around Riberalta and so did Maquini, who had become the Vice-President of an indigenous organisation, but as I explained at length in Chapter 5, he had acquired such confidence at the expense of his acceptance among his own people.

Finally, the Ese Ejja have now the chance to take up new positions, such as the one offered to them by the State, of the 'traditional Indian', who sells handicrafts and performs 'traditional dances', but they seem to reject it because it runs counter to their desire to become like *dejja*. Likewise, they are reluctant to take up the political role of 'Indians' which challenges their sense of history, their desire to be 'civilised' rather than 'savages' and their desire for peaceful relations with Bolivians. However, in different circumstances, they may have a vested interest in adopting one or the other position. I have argued that what at first sight appeared to me to be incongruences and inconsistencies, were really only the manifestations of the multiplicity of identities that are all equally authentic and all contribute to what it means to be a person among the Ese Ejja.

Christina Toren's work on Fijian children has shown how social roles and categories are not passively absorbed, but they have to be re-made anew by individuals (1990; 1999a; 1999b). Among the Ese Ejja, the pool of potential identities is acquired and refashioned by children and adults in the daily interactions with elders, peers and younger people, with teachers and missionaries in the village, in the forest, on the river and in the town. As they grow up, people establish themselves as more of a kind of person, as good

hunters, as gardeners, or as fishermen or women; as good weavers or as lousy ones; as hard workers or as lazy scroungers; as teachers or as church leaders; as Ese Ejja or quasi-*dejja*. But none of these attributes are absolutely fixed and unchanging.

That Ese Ejja identities should not be fixed may be a truism. When is identity ever fixed? Anthropologists have observed that, throughout the world, there are peoples for whom identity is processual and performative, but is it not also the case in Europe? I have a sense of who I am and perceive a continuity in my being me, but that does not make me immutable. I was born in Italy and that makes me an Italian, that is what my passport says. I have lived in England for over a decade, and if I ever have children they may be English children. When I visit Italy, people say I speak like a foreigner (to my shame). I am a woman. I am also an academic. I am a teacher. I am a wife. I am an anthropologist. I am a daughter. I am a sister. I am what I do and, to an extent, what I chose to be, though part of me is inevitably given by the condition of my birth and upbringing.

On another level, the same logic of constant creative re-invention of reality should be applied to the analysis of the so-called 'assimilation' or 'acculturation' of indigenous people, to the values of non-indigenous dominant culture. Peter Gow, discussing the Piro use of clothing, suggests that, rather than a loss of culture, as it appears to non-Piro observers, "acculturation" is an indigenous Amazonian understanding of ongoing historical processes' (n.d.a: 17). When the Ese Ejja say they are becoming *dejja*, it does not mean that they are passively absorbing an external rhetoric. On the contrary, they are appropriating it in their own terms, even if the end product may look very similar to its model. In this thesis, I have shown that the Ese Ejja notion that they are becoming *dejja* cannot be understood as the result of the assimilation of the national ideology of making Indians into mixed citizens. Rather, it is the manifestation of the Ese Ejja sense of history characterised by spatial displacement and physical movement towards *dejja* towns. As those who live together become the same kind of people (*enije-jaajji*, 'those who live/sleep with me', in Chapter 6), of living nearer to *dejja* means becoming more like them.

The idea that there is a dynamic interaction between individual and society and between dominant and subordinate ideologies, where dominant cultural constructs must be refashioned by individuals, is also useful to understand Ese Ejja relations to

Christianity. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1993a) has observed that there exists a correspondence between the Western notion of religious conversion as a change of heart and the notion of acculturation, which rests precisely on the idea criticised above, of culture as a whole that must be embraced in its totality. In this thesis I have shown that the Ese Ejja of Portachuelo, at the turn of the twentieth century, were Christian, but they were so in their own terms, which were very different from those of the missionaries. But unless we understand their Christianity in their terms, as part of the ongoing historical process of transformation of their culture, we are left with a series of negative classifications ranging from inconstancy to hypocrisy.

A particularly good case in point is the Ese Ejja conceptualisation of the Devil. The Satan of the missionaries has come to embody the irredeemable alterity of powerful beings which surround the Ese Ejja and constantly threaten their well being with illness and death. The Devil, therefore, is a powerful being with all the moral ambiguities attached to this kind of entity. As I have repeatedly stated, powerful beings have both positive and negative qualities, they provide for the Ese Ejja but they wage cannibal attacks on them, they make them ill and they help shamans to cure them. But in the historical sense, they too have to some extent been left behind, both in time and space. They belong to the stories of the ancient people, who live in Cueijana, the land of the dead, which is far away. However, ancient people and powerful beings have not been left behind for good, as they are still seen wandering around at night, haunting the village and the gardens.

Hardship aside, fieldwork was a spectacularly beautiful and fulfilling experience and, in the second half of it, I had become so comfortable and happy in Portachuelo, I seriously considered staying there for good. As I explained in Chapter 1, I suspect that this was a normal stage in the process of accepting where I was and making the most of it. But as soon as I returned to Europe, even just for a few weeks, the spell was broken and upon my return in Portachuelo, I was once again the anthropologist, in a hurry to conclude her research.

Back in England, two years on, I realise that not everyone goes through fieldwork in the same way as I did and that a psychological endurance test is not the prerequisite for the award of a PhD. I suspect that most people who work in similar conditions undergo some kind of trauma, but often that gets written out of fieldnotes and, perhaps, relegated

to personal diaries. If I write about it now, it is because I believe that ethnography is not just about the people described, but also about the ethnographer, who is not a fly on the wall, but a very large presence in the life of the people he or she studies. In the field, time and time again I wondered whether it was worth it, whether it was necessary. With hindsight, I am very glad I did it, not only because I proved to myself I could, but because had I not spent so much time with the Ese Ejja, I would not have learned as much as I did.

Appendix 1. Transcripts and summaries of myths

These are some of the stories I collected between 1999 and 2001 in Portachuelo. The versions given below in English are my translations from Spanish. When the myths were told to me in Ese Ejja, I have reported the original in a different font. The questions in bold are mine.

Sloth

told by Peno Machuqui

They say there was a young man, a bachelor. He had a brother and a sister-in-law. He lived with his brother, and his sister-in-law gave him food. And then this young man, he was *eyamiquecua*, *curandero*, and his brother too, *curandero*, and, what happened to him? He grew up and grew up and, one day, or rather one night, he dreamt about Sloth. In his sleep, he dreamt about this young lady, and he thought she was in his bed, but she wasn't, and he looked for her, but nothing. He wanted to embrace her, but she wasn't there. And because she was so pretty, he saw her and wanted to hug her but she wasn't there.

'Damn! Where is she?' He thought about it until morning and then his sister-in-law said to him: 'Come and eat.' He went and he ate. 'Well, now I'm going hunting said the young man. 'Fine, go' said the sister-in-law, since he always went and hunted everything: birds and monkeys, and he brought everything back. And that day he went, looking up at the trees above. They say she whistled to him, from up above. She was up on a tall *mapajo* tree, high above; there she had her little house, Sloth's; there were her father, her mother. So the girl whistled to him and he started to look but he couldn't see her. Then she whistled again. 'Where is she?' he said. So he didn't see her and he was already on his way, so she spoke to him. 'Where are you going?' she said. So the young man looked up and there she was standing, the young lady, pretty, her little eyes, her little face, round and pretty, well combed, and then she came down to where the young man was. 'Ah, where do you come from?' he said. They kissed and embraced and they sat together, embracing. She looked at him, Sloth, and the young man looked at her. 'How pretty she is' he said, 'her little face, her little nose (Peno laughs). How pretty!' And then, there they were, sitting almost all day. Then, it was already one o'clock. 'Listen. I'm going hunting' he said. 'Yes, go then' she said. And he came back with a heap of monkeys, birds, everything. He was a hunter, the young man. And then, the woman said: 'Leave

it here. Tomorrow, you will come and eat' she said. So the young man left it there. So it was late already and the girl gave him food and he said. Well, it is night already, I'm going.' 'Fine. Tomorrow you will come again, you will come here to eat' she said. And he went. He arrived at his brother's and his sister-in-law's house and they asked: 'What did you hunt?' 'Nothing. I didn't hunt anything.' He did not bring anything back, for the first time, nothing. The next day, he went again. 'Don't you want to eat?' 'No, I'm going to eat plantain there' because the girl was waiting for him with roast monkey and everything. He arrived there and ate well and went hunting. And what happened? All he hunted, he left it there, at his wife to be. So, after the third time, the sister-in-law said to her husband: 'Listen. Your brother doesn't want to eat.' 'Why?' 'I offer him food and he doesn't want it, he says he is full, and he doesn't bring the animals he hunts, doesn't bring anything.' Well, so the brother said: 'I'm going to spy on my brother; he has something this brother' and he went. 'Well, I'm going hunting' he said to his sister-in-law, and the brother followed him. The brother went, and the other brother went behind, hiding, until he arrived where his wife was. They say he beat the trunk, toh! toh! toh! 'Ah, you have come early', they say she said. And she came down to receive him, with his food: roast plantain, roast meat. He ate. 'Ha, ha!' his brother caught him, 'ha! That is why my brother doesn't bring anything.' So then he went: after eating, he went hunting. After a little while, his brother came out, he whistled to her. Nothing. He banged the trunk. 'Hey! You have come back already' she said. 'Yes.' And because the brothers were identical, she came down, she received him, and so he sat there. As they were playing, he was taken by the desire for his sister-in-law and so as he bent forward, as he kneeled, because he had this ... before the ancient ones used like a little sword, they had it here a hole in the nose, there they wore it, and it was here in his ear. And as he moved, it fell on Sloth's chest, the little shell fell, it was made of shell and it shone like gold and therefore the girl saw that this wasn't her lover, and there, with a lot of strength, threw the man away. This Sloth was very strong. Uh! No one could win her. 'Relax' he said, 'I am better than my brother' he said. No way, no matter how much he grabbed her, who would beat her? He didn't overcome her. She was very strong and he said: 'I'm going to kill you.' 'Kill me' said the other one, Sloth, 'kill me.' So much struggling, the man tired; no matter what, he struggled, but no one could open her, no one could win her. So that in the end he became angry.

'I'm going to kill you' he said. So he grabbed a stick and pah! In the nose. That was it. And then he had a bamboo stick. And he killed, he undressed her, he put this stick in her anus. And that was it, left her like that, with the stick in her anus. Well, the man went, the woman died there and then the husband came back, after a little while. He whistled to her. Nothing. He whistled. Nothing. 'Oh dear, what happened this time?' he thought. She wasn't there. She was further away, dead. 'Damn! She must have fallen, this woman, damn!' He saw her. 'The jaguar must have eaten her.' And he saw her there, dead 'Damn! She must have fallen' and nothing. He turned her around. She had her stick in her anus. 'Ah! My little wife!' And he began to cry. Crying, all day and all night he cried and so his brother went. He arrived where his wife was and said: 'If my brother comes, you will comfort him. I'm going hunting' he said. And they went hunting, in order not to see his brother crying. And so then he arrived where his sister-in-law was, and they heard him coming, crying this young man, and the sister-in-law asked him: 'What happened?' 'Uh! My brother killed my wife.' Well, so they were sitting down, all the women, they surrounded him and he cried and he jumped. So then, what happened? They say that the earth was hanging, was hanging on both sides like a plank, and so it kept rising, up to the sky. And then the sister-in-law heard the brother-in-law who said to her: 'Sister-in-law, you are not going to see your husband. Like he did to me, the same I will do to him.' He said, crying, no? So that he paid him back, his brother. What happened? They were both left without a wife. She was left in the sky. So he, leaving his sister-in-law, came down to earth, to his house once again, and then, he was crying, all alone and the women, up there. That is what he did to his brother. And then, what happened? The hunters arrived shouting. 'Woman! I'm tired, come and take, they are heavy animals we hunted.' Nobody was in the house, not one woman. He was there alone, crying. So he heard his brother coming and he went quiet and from there, he disappeared, until now. He never came out again. The other, the older brother who killed his wife, remained without a wife. So it happened to him. They did the same to each other. He killed her and the other sent her to the sky. Until now, and those are now angels. So it is.

The descent from the sky

by Dejja Oshie Mamio (my questions in bold)

Etiiquiana oqueacua. Eyajje nequioqueacua. **¿Cómo fue que llegaron? ¿Y? ¿que pasó?** Nequioqueacua etiiquiana. Majijono. Nequioqueacua. Majoya, con un sogá no? así dice historia de este antiguo, ¿no? nequioqueacua eyajjepanequioqueacua **¿Y después?** Majoya nequioqueacua [...] mitahua, ¿no? Taapua, mitahua, había tierra aquí, taapapua: 'Queameshiani' papaua. 'Meshiqueaanil'

Ancient people came/fell down. From they sky they came down. **How did they arrive? And? What happened?** They came down ancient people. With a cotton rope. Then, with a rope no? thus says the story of the ancient people, no? they came down, when they had come down from the sky, they shouted, no? they shouted that there was land here. They shouted: 'There is land' they said, 'There is land!'

Queaaoneenee, dice, uuh! Alto! Nequioqueicapua. Majoya, edosiquiana queahuiso bacapua: antiguo Ese Ejja edosiquiana meshijo queahuisoneenee bacapua. Edosiquianahuisonee coma capua. Habia, dice, Satanás, harto.

It was very very high, they say, high. They came down. Then they saw many *edosiquiana*: ancient Ese Ejja on earth saw very many *edosiquiana*. There were many. They say there were plenty of devils.

Majoya nequioquejeyoajja aoao, cortó dice la sogá ¿no?, ijiassejacapapua. Majoya pa ya, chamá etiipapua. **¿Y? Y Después,** dice no han bajado más, cuando ya ha cortado la sogá ¿no? Ahí nomás quedaba dice. Una vieja dice, soltado. Eponatii ijiassejacapua. Ijiassejacapua majii. Majoyapa, mahuiso oqueacacua. Ahí se quedó al cielo los demás, ya no van a bajar más. Jamaya oya aca historia etiiquiana.

Then, they had not all come down from high up (not sure of this), [he/she] cut, they say, the rope, cut with teeth. Then there were no more ancient ones. **And then?** Then, they say they no longer came down when she cut the rope, no? They stayed there. An old woman had loosened [the rope]. Cut with teeth. (He laughs). Cut the cotton rope with her teeth. Then, they no longer came down. Thus the others were left in the sky; they aren't going to come down anymore. Like this says the story of the ancient people.

¿Y? Majoyapa, eponatii jiaoquijecacua, la vieja dice se formó cuando corta su sogá ¿no? cajaanajiquio eponatii se formó dice. ¿Y después? Después dice, se quedó un hueso dice, había hartó, puro hueso [...], ¿Y después? Después dice, ya apareció sucha, dice, be'o ai pojocacua, be'o ai pocacua. Así dice historia de los antigüos. ¿Y después? Después dice, miraba, ya no va a bajar más la gente de arriba ¿no?, se quedó arriba nomás. Oqueocayojjapua.

And? Then the old woman [...], the old woman they say was formed when she cut their rope, no? [...] she was formed, they say. **And then?** Then, they say, there were bones left, there were lots of bones, just bones. **And then?** Then they say she became vulture they say, she turned vulture, became vulture. So says the history of ancient people. **And then?** Then, they say, they looked, the people above are never going to come down ever; they were just left there. They did not come down.

Bueno, los que han bajado, dice, es éste, los Ese Ejja ¿no? Éste que está ahorita. Así dice ¿no? Así es la historia de los antigüos, si es la verdad no se. Antigüos nomás.

Well, those who came down they say are these, the Ese Ejja, are they not? Those that are here right now. So it says, doesn't it? Thus is the story of the ancient ones, if it is the truth, I don't know. Just ancient people. (He laughs).

¿Y donde bajaron? Allá en río Tambopata, dice. ¿En un cerro o en el río? Bueno, río Tambopata es allá, más de Madre de Dios ... Contaba mi papá. Hay dice ahí, miraba dice la sogá. ¿Él había mirada? Sí, así me contaba cuando yo era chiquitito todavía, me contaba mi papá. ¿Y donde vivía su papá? Acá San Marcos, arriba.

And where did they come down? There in the Tambopata River, they say. **On a mountain or in the river?** Well the Tambopata River is there in ..., further than Madre de Dios. My father told me. It is there, he saw, he said, the rope. **He saw it?** Yes, he told me when I was little still, my father told me. **And where did your father live?** Here, in San Marcos, up-river.

by Mei Huo'o Cejas

Mei Huo'o came to my house for beads and she had red paint on her face: a line running vertically through the centre of her face and two from the top of her nose, down across her cheeks. I asked about her face painting and she said:

Etiqiana jamaya papua, yahujajo, eoqueyojji, para bajar dice. ¿Para bajar del cielo? Eé, eé, aniajo ¿ponía jiquio dibujo en la cara? Eé oya jjajjahua piapua, oquiacua. ¿Y así bajaron del cielo? Eé. ¿Y Cómo bajaron del cielo? Paaa ... ¿achajja? O sea que oya eyajo ... Eyajo ani. Eé, oquecapapua, oya eyajo ani, etiqiana, jjajjahujaji. ¿Y quiije, como ..., primero oya estaban en el cielo, no cierto? Eé. ¿Y quiije? Quiije jiquiojo oya pa oya [...] oqueyomaje. ¿Y Cómo bajaron, achajja? Majjiijo, como jiquio [...] majji, esipi, como [...] como este nara así se lo ha [...] ¿del cielo hasta la tierra como un jono? Eé, como jono!

Ancient people did like this, before, to come down, to come down, they say. **To come down from the sky? Yes, yes [...]. They put this drawing on the face? Yes [...]** came down. **And they came down like that? Yes. How did they come down, how? Because before they were in the sky ...** They are in the sky. Yes, they came down, they are in the sky, ancient people [...] **And then, how ..., before they were in the sky weren't they? Yes. And then? Then they [...]** came down here. **How did they come down, how? With a cotton rope, [...]** cotton, like weaving, like [...] like this *nara* [...] **From the sky to the earth? Like a vine? Yes, like vine.**

Después dice lo cortó. ¿Quién lo cortó? Pia Ese Ejja dice, pia eyajo ani ti pa, eyajo aniapa ijiasejacapua. ¿Cómo lo cortó? Ijiasejacapua lo ha soltado ¿Lo soltó con diente? [...] Con diente. (a little sad) ahí nomás se quedó también los paisano como nosotros, dice. ¿Yani en el cielo? Ah, queahuiso, eya ehuisopa oquecapua, oepojinei oquepocapua jiquiacua. ¿Y allá oya tiene su casa? Ah, eé, queaaoneenee, queaao neenee. Niquecooquecapapua. ¿Osea que se han quedado allá. Pero pia bajaron? Eé, becacuanapaocacua ¿Con su cara pintada? Eé. ¿Como tenía Usted el otro día? Eé (she laughs) ejjajjahuaqui oquecacua shee [...] todo así (she touches her arms and legs) ¿Su cuerpo, su aa también, su equisse? Todo, todo, dice. ¿A'a miya banaje jiquio o chojja? Chojja bajjima, eya ecue abueloa huohuicanaje, ecueabueloa. ¿Y abuelo pintaba? O chojja? Eé, jamacuaninaje oya, attejoquianinaje ¿Con que? Urucú también. ¿A'a bajjani urucú? Apoi.

Then they say (someone) cut it. **Who cut it? An Ese Ejja, they say, another that is in the sky, cut it with her teeth. How did she cut it? She cut it with her teeth, she made it loose. She made it loose with her teeth? With teeth.** (a little sad) there remained the *paisanos* too, like ourselves, they say. **They are in the sky? Many.** [not clear] a few came down here. And there they have a house. Ahh yes, very

big, very big. [...] So they remained there. **But some came down?** Yes, some people came down. **With painted face?** Yes. **Like you had the other day?** Yes (she laughs) [...] they came down [...] all like this (she touches her arms and legs) Their body as well, their arms too, their legs. Everything, everything, they say. **Have you seen this?** No, I don't know/I don't see, my grandfather told me, my grandfather. And did your grandfather paint himself? Or did he not? Yes he did like that [...]. What with? Urucú too. What is urucú called? Apoi.

Stork and the origin of peccaries

by Cua'o Tirina

Eshe ohue dejjatii, Huajojoa dojosoquijjecua eyahuasijje ohue dejjatii, dojosoquicacua. ¿Achajja? Aves ma Issa, Huajojó bajjani. ¿El hombre se llamaba Huajojó? Chojja Issa, Jjeque el hombre. Huajojó lo llevó, este jiquio aves, huichojjicuana. Huichojja dojosoquicacua. Majoya jama acacua, ohuaya ma Jjequea, no? Jjequea ama acacua, ma Issa: 'Eya dojosoquique' acacua 'eyahuasijje. Eya queayeno' eshacuimanopa Issa, oya edejjatii, eshacuimano, majoa oya dojosoquicacua eyahuasijje. Majoya nequioque: 'A'a jiquio meshi?' acacua, Issa. 'Meshi, ya está jiquio tierra. Quishiquishicue', acani, oya nequi oquequiacua meshiasijje, cieloasijje, majoya, oya queashué sinecua cua como a las seis, queashuécua, majo oya huohuajjacacua ecojjashahua acani, ecojjashahua.' ¿Quien es ecojjashahua? Cua'a eh Issa, ache shai?. ¿Eshahua nomás? Eshahua, ecojjashahua. Ohuaya huohuajjacacua, bo'bi; 'ayache ijicajji' queashué oyacua, ma cuiiji Jjeque, eshoi nee nee! Yahuajo Issa oya Sasa jama comatii edejjatii ejjashoinequi. **A ver no he entendido. Oya era eshoi?** Edejjatii noo noo, Issa. Pero eshoi acayacua, chiquitingo acayacua. ¿Osea parece ... Sapatii eshoi acayacua Issa. ¿El, el mismo? Eé. ¿Era eshoi? Eshoi nee nee ¿Pero era etii? Edejjatii nee nee, semá Issa, eshoi nee nee acani. Majoya oya 'A'a miquiea ijiaña' 'jiquio ecuea ishiaña' Ená jiquio! Ená, sangre ohuaya ishicani ecojjashahua, sangre ishicani, Issa 'Jiquio ca ecuea ishiaña' oya acacuama cuiiji, Jjeque bajjani, oya cacua 'Jiquio ecuea ishiaña.'

An old man alive, Huajojó was going to take to the sky an old man, he took him to the sky. **How?** A bird, Issa, called Huajojó. **The man was called Huajojó?** No, Issa, the man was Jjeque. Huajojó took him, this bird, one of the birds. The bird took him up. Then he said this, Jjeque said. Jjeque spoke like this: 'Take me up to the sky' he said ' I am sad'. He was a widower, Issa, he the old man, a widower. He took him up to the sky. Then he stood. 'Is this land?' he said, Issa. 'Land, it is land already. Stamp on it' said Huajojó. He stands, gets down on the land, in the sky, then he is hungry in the afternoon around six, he becomes

hungry. Then *ecojjashahua* spoke to him, *ecojjashahua*. **Who is ecojjashahua?** I don't know, who might he be? **Just eshahua? Eshahua! Ecojjashahua.** He asked for food: 'What is there to eat? I am hungry' he says, the man Jjeque, he is a little boy! Like Sasa (her little brother). Before, Issa, he was an old man, now he is a boy. **Let's see, I did not understand this. He was a child?** He was a very old man, Issa. But he was made into a boy, he was made tiny. **You mean he looks ...** The old head was made into a child, Issa. **He himself? Yes. He was a child.** A child indeed. **But he was an old man?** A really old man, with no teeth Issa, he became a really small child. Then he said: 'Do you eat?' 'I drink this.' This is blood! Blood, he drinks blood, *ecojjashahua*, he drinks blood, Issa, 'I drink this' he said to the man called Jjeque, he said: 'I drink this.'

'Ca'aa coma' taaña, 'caa coma' taaña, ebouhiyo oya cua, sangre ishiajja oya cua, Ese Ejja manoyojjima. Manoyojjima. Majoya oya nequi cuaya quecuajo queajaa [...] Aya jo ma ejjahui queahuiso baeacacua ohuaya, eyahuasijje, ¿Eyahuasijje? Eé eyahuasijje, ejjahui queahuso! ejahua! Majoya pa 'Bocaoja coma' acacua, piama ecojjashahua, ma eshahuaa, 'Bocaoja coma, ba!' acacua. 'Eya queashué, eya poquije' 'E ma ma poquicue!' Acacua Issa. Majoya ma eshoi poquiacua, Jjequeue poquiacua Bocaoque. 'Jiquiojjetii ejjiojipoquii recto nomás, ejjiojji jaa eyahuasijje', acacua. Majoya ohuaya oja ano majjiyoapoani bacanicaua, Bocaopona, baacacua. 'Ano, a'a mi yani?' paacacua ma. Ano: 'Ée, ajio acuemi? Achejjecue acuemi?' 'Eyajjemo cueyanaje, Huajojoa ye soacananje' paacacua 'Huajojoa yesoacananje.' Majoya, bo'bi acapacua, 'Queashué eya abuela' acacua, 'Queashué, queashué eya' 'Ée ocue ijiaajja' jjemi pa ohuaya dahucacua oya bisonei pa se'ao poeacua, jjemi, se'ao (explains that jjemi is pumpkin), y yuca pa ejji coma pana ahuehui poiacua, benton papoiacua yo ama yuca. Cambiado como pescado ya popoyacua yuca (the old woman bakes pumpkin and turns it into *paca* and manioc into a fish).

'I don't want that' he cried, 'I don't want that' he cried, he vomited, he didn't drink blood. [He was] Ese Ejja not dead. He was not dead. Then [unclear] he saw a lot of plantain, in the sky. **In the sky?** Yes in the sky, a lot of plantain! Ripe! Then another *ecojjashahua*, an *eshahua* said: 'This is Stork's. It is Stork's' he said. 'I am hungry. I will go.' 'Yes, go!' he said. Then the child went; Jjeque went to Stork's. There is a straight path to the sky/going up' he said. Then he sees his grandmother spinning wool. He saw the female Stork. 'Grandmother, are you there?' he said. Grandmother: 'Yes, where are you going? Where have you come from?' 'I came from the sky. Huajojó took me up' he said. 'Huajojó took me up.' Then he spoke of food: 'I am hungry,

grandma' he said. 'I am hungry, hungry' ['...']. She roasted a small pumpkin [and it turned it into] *paca*, pumpkin, *paca*, and manioc she made into *benton*, *benton* she made from manioc. She changed manioc into fish.

Majoya pa, ijiaijiacua, eshoi nee nee. Oja abuelo pa nahuoojo ecuecua jiquiacua jiquimeshiasijje, ecuepacua oya, majoyapa quijje oya pa iquiajjajo huanasoacacua eyahuasijje Jjeque eshoi ma e pa oja baba cueyacua nahuoo, nahuooquui, nahuooquui pacueacua. Oya pa ca ehuanaquehua, ehuanaquehua, escondido oya, jjae oja abuela, iyaquehua. ¿Porque escondido? Equecuaca pa Issa, huohijima! Oja abuelo quehuajjicue. ¿Si no lo iba a matar? Ha. Ée pa, con flecha pa. Sequecuaca. Majoya pa cueyacua ojaya abuelo, oja huanasea huohuicacua pa, Issa, bobi sacucua, 'maje, ijiaacuel' pa acacua. Acuapa, ijiaacacua, majoya pa huiacua ebacua, ma Jjeque huiacua, quaeajjajja. 'Chii, achejje ena cuaiani?' Papoajjajja, oya ma abuelo no? Majoya pa, ehuanase 'Eyajo Bocao' paponi ifa echiquinicho. Majoyapa, joquama cui ma ebacua huanacacua ebacuaa caca huiacacua Issa. Joquama cui pa ebacua huanacaecua, jama cui ojjaacue paacacua, Issa (laughs) Jama cui pa huanacaecua quijje huohuicacua: 'A'a che Bocao ebacua tii mee mee ecuiñajji?' acacua. 'Yajja acue' 'Ohue eshoi Huajojoa soacanaje' acacua Issa, 'Huajojó [...] 'Ée pa' acacua, Issa. 'Tii mee capacua, tiimee ca soasoquiapacua yecapacua jiquiacua ... sijje nahuoo, nahuoojo, nahuoo jjequicuaia.' Majoya Bocao pa yecacua nahuooasijje, nahuoo jjequicuaya, yecacua majoyapa poquiacua nahuoo jjequicuaya queahuiso nee nee pa nahuoo dojjocacua, Issa.

Then he ate; he was a very small child. His grandfather [goes fishing?] in this land, he had gone fishing. Then she hid him in the roof/above, the little Jjeque, when his grandfather came back from fishing, he came back from having gone fishing. [Grandmother has hidden him]. He kills him, Issa; she didn't tell him. His grandfather didn't know [?]. **Otherwise he would have killed him? Yes.** With an arrow. He would have killed him. Then the grandfather returned. He asked his wife for food, Issa, he wanted to eat: 'Here, eat!' she said. When he finished, he finished eating the boy pissed, Jjeque pissed, because he was scared. 'Hey! Where does the water come from?' the grandfather said. And then the wife 'From above, Stork' [...]. Then right there, was hidden the little boy. The little boy had pissed, Issa (she laughs). So she hid his penis and then said: 'Would you like to have a child to raise?' she said. 'Say why?' 'Huajojó brought up here a little boy' she said, 'Huajojó [...] 'Yes' he said, Issa. 'To raise him, to raise him. [You can] take him fishing.' Then Stork took him to where fish is, he took him fishing. They brought back a lot of fish, Issa.

Majoya pa tiipapacua tiiai ahi oya Coco jayoja, Elmer, coma tinei pomaje, ohuaya abuela cojjocacua. Cojjocapacua ohuaya abuela (she laughs), Bocaoja ehuanase. Majoya pa, majiijo jama apoani, majii poapoani, ¿Aya? majii: lanal eé, lanajo sipisipi ani. El joven: 'Ano, queabesi quemo nee nee!' paacua, Issa, oya jashajjaaqui, 'Abuela, yajja mi cuani?' 'Yajjapishana' oya abuela majii sipipoanicaifacuani, pacua poanisho ma cua el joven Issa, eé, majoya pa, 'Chojja jama cacua abuela queabesiquemo nee nee' acacua. Ocuemo cojjoajja 'Cojjoque!' 'Cojjoquemo' acacua. Queapeiohuiso nee nee ojaya besijo. Vibora queahso nee nee besijo. (She laughs) Queapeiohuiso nee nee. Ecapashi nee nee pa cojjocacua, queapeiohuiso nee nee: bacuatahua, este vibora verde, comaya pa cuaya quia cua; yahue pa jjasocacua, Issa, Bocao pa jjasocacua peioa, majoya pa: 'Yajjajo aquaemi jjasocani peiaopa?' 'Emajiijo sipi, jaanitai queapaponisho. Jaanitai queacuacua, lana sipiji.'

Then he grew, very, very big, he was like Coco, like Elmer (who is eighteen). When he had become this big, he had sex with his grandmother. He had sex with his grandmother (she laughs), the wife of Stork. She is making wool, making wool. **What?** Majii is *wool*. Yes she is weaving wool. The young man said: 'Grandmother! Your vagina is huge!' he said [...] 'Grandma, what are you doing?' 'Nothing much', grandma is weaving wool [...] and then the young man: 'No [...] grandma you have a huge vagina' he said. There he wants to have sex. 'Have sex! Have sex with me' he said. In her vagina there were many snakes. Very many snakes in her vagina (she laughs). Many, many snakes. They had sex, there were many snakes: *bacuatahua*, this green snake, this one came out. (Stork sees the snake and asks how it came out) 'I was weaving wool and I sat badly, weaving wool.'

Majoya pa emano, muerto cuana, jiquio ño, muerto pa coma cueani Issa, Ese Eija capacua majoya muerto cueyani, ¿Cueyani como ño? Eé, como ño. Comaya pa taa jebiacua: 'Ecojjashahua ecuana pa jjajja ijaiija poquiá jiquio ma ese nequiacuahuasijje' pa acacua, Issa. ¿Osea que llega ño, y que dice? 'Ecojjáshahua, eshahua, ecuana poquiajo jooeuama, jiquio ese nequiacuahuasijje, queahuesha nee nee. Stamos de ida lejos a comer' pa acacua, Issa. 'Poquia ecuana queahuesha nee nee. Cua al' pa acua cuana ojjaña ecojjashahua. 'Cua'al' Oya ma Bocaoja tii me, Jjeque, poquia pia ahi cua, emanoyo nijje, ño nijje. Majoya poqiecuacua oya, 'Abuela! Ejjahui mo quiacue' pa acacua, Issa, 'Abuela ejjahui mo quiacue. Queahuesha nee nee ecuanaca poquije' acacua ohuaya abuela. 'Queahuesha nee nee ecuana ca poquije.' Ohuaya pa fosforo quiacacua pia ai Issa. Abuelaa imajepa pa oya poquiacua ño nijje ma Jjeque 'Ajo a poa mi queje' cinco shacuima ohuaya muerto cua. 'Ajo aquae mi cueje so'o?'

'Queahuesha nee nee ca ecuana poquiani' pa acacua, Issa. 'Queahuesha nee nee ca ecuana poquiani.' Oya pa shajjama nee nee cua, poquiá noma, ño jjayojja, pacacua, Ese Ejja pa poquiani, quiije pa, quiije pa emejo quani jiquiojo, quiije jiquiojo cuani.

¿Osea que antes era ño? Chojja, Issa. Ese Ejja, más antes emejoquani, quiije ño.

¿Osea cuando oya ha muerto? E'el cuando oya ha muerto. Majoya pa oya queashué cua, no? Queashué oya ma cuiiji Jjeque. 'Queashué nee nee iña po yani' ehuanase acacua, 'Queashué nee nee.' Majoya pa jjajjasie pa ohuaya hueshe acani, chõnta pa ohuaya guineo jjayojja, ñoja. Maepa oya 'Jiquio hueshe nequi' pa a cacua ohuaya yahue Jjeque. 'Jiquio hueshe' 'Coma ca jjajjasie, coma iija sapoajja eya.' Oya Ese Ejja pa manoyojjima, Jjeque. 'Comaca jjajjasie. Yohua, pojiama, hueshe pojiama.' Cuishaja, yoha, acani: ecca. Cuishajja, patuju, comaya ecca, ohuaya acani caña. Queabiquia ohuaya ishicani, ñoa. Majoya, poquiapacua jiquiojje pa cuiopiso caaca, jiquiojjo ...

¿A'ya? ma cuiiji Jjeque. Chonta maa acacua (she pulls he lips sideways in opposite directions). **¿Por qué?** Cua a e. Iija pojajji, partido yajje pa [...] su labio, jiquio ja mmh, mmh... torcido. Majoya pa poquiacua, poquiapacua 'liiii! E mo acayonaje jehuissejjajji' oopa acacua 'Jehuissejjajji, huiqueatai nee nee eijiaijajji' pa acacua, Issa. Majoya papoquiacuaa, majoyapa jjiqiuo ejjajjiaatajjaquiji, Issa, Aone bajjani coma. **¿Que le pasa jiquio?** Ijiaatajjanani acuishaa. Como ño epoji. Ma ijiaatajja jea ecuioonequiani, Issa. Jama emejo pa cuani. **¿Jjeque pia ai?** Jjeque! Quea nee nee, ohuaya eshe quea nee nee. Quea nee, daasa, iija acuisha mahuiso yojjijayojja, a ma ñojayojja. **¿Pero oya manoyoama?** Chojja, manoyojjima. Majoya oya, ma ecui ojo pacua Issa, jama jiquiojo, ecuiojo cua, ño jayojja, jiquiacua maepa, oya jiquiacua cuii huanacaecua, jiquiojo jama pa cuiija ma jama. Majoya pa 'Eh! yajja mo cuaje jiquio?' achajja huiame cuaje pa cua. 'Jamatii ohuiapoquicue pa' ehuanase acacua. 'Chojjo ejjahuoquicua!' No same pa oya cua Issa. 'Ca ja! Achajja seemo, seeje papoajjacua. Achajja seeme' no sabia pa achajja seeme, como chancho. Ejjaseequipacua. Ejjaseeapa quipacua. Majoya pa, jjacojjoquipoquiacua, oya más joven, jama poquiije tii 'Jjacojjoquequi' 'ojjequipaca' pa ca cua. 'Ca ja! Ona ebacpacua' queabicho pa oya. Queabicho pa cojjo ... **¿Pero tenia con quien cojjocani? ¿Tenia pia ño pojja?** Pia ño, Issa, pia ño; ñopa majoya cuani, majoya jiquio daquipa huijiaje ijiaatajjanani.

Then the dead, the dead ones, these white-lipped peccaries, the dead come, Issa. Dead Ese Ejja come. **They come like white-lipped peccaries?** Yes like white-lipped peccaries. They shout: '*Ecojjashahua*, we are all going to eat where we used to live.' **So the white-lipped peccary arrive. And what do they say?** '*Ecojjashahua, eshahua*, we are going to go where we used to live, very, very far. We are on our way far away to eat' they said, Issa. 'We are going very, very far. Let's go' said all the *ecojjashahua*, 'Let's go!' The one brought up by Stork, Jjeque, went too, with the dead, with the white-lipped peccaries. Then, as he was going, he said: 'Grandma! Give me plantain!' Issa, 'Grandma, give me

plantain. We are going very, very far' he said to his grandma. 'We are going very, very far.' She gave him matches too, Issa. Grandma [...] Jjeque went with the white-lipped peccaries. 'How are you coming back?' (She had five unmarried sons who had died?) 'How are you coming back?' 'We are going very far away' he said, Issa. He is very naughty, he just goes away, like a white-lipped peccary, Ese Ejja he goes away but then, then his hands are here, here (like the legs of a peccary?) **So before he was white-lipped peccary?** No, Issa. Ese Ejja, before he had hands, then [he became] a white-lipped peccary. **So when he died?** Yes! When he died. And then he was hungry, wasn't he? He was hungry, this man, Jjeque. 'I am very hungry' he told his wife, 'I am very hungry!' Then she said: 'Here is plantain' to her husband Jjeque. 'This plantain.' 'That's *chonta*! I don't want to eat that!' He was Ese Ejja, he had not died, Jjeque. 'That is *chonta*. That's not plantain.' *Patuju*, they call it sugarcane. *Cuishajja, patuju*, that: sugarcane, they say is sugarcane. It is very sweet for them to drink, the white-lipped peccaries. Then (as he eats *patuju*, something happens to Jjeque's lips, they become contorted. Cua'o speaks while pulling hers in opposite directions, which makes it virtually impossible to understand) 'Mmh, mmh ... twisted.' Then he went, he went. 'I have split my nose/snout' he said 'I have split my snout. Snout is bad for eating' he said, Issa. Then he went, and then [...] it is called A'one. **What is it?** A'one. I don't know. **What happens?** (He has eaten thorns?) He becomes like white-lipped peccary. [...] His hands become like this [like the legs of a white-lipped peccary]. **Jjeque too?** Jjeque! It hurts very much, his [...] hurts. It hurts, his back, he no longer eats thorns, like a collared peccary, like a white-lipped peccary. **But he isn't dead, is he?** No, he isn't dead. Then his penis becomes like this, like that of white-lipped peccary, here [on his belly] he has his penis, like this. And then: 'Hey! Why is this happening? How am I going to piss' 'You are going to piss just like that' said his wife. 'No, I can't piss.' He didn't know how, Issa. 'I don't want! How am I going to shit?'. He did not know how to shit like a pig [...]. Then he went to have sex, he was younger, and he was going to. [...] 'I don't want!' he was embarrassed. Embarrassed to have sex [like a peccary]. **But he had with whom to have sex? He had another white-lipped peccary?** (During the recording I had not understood that he had met his wife) Yes, another white-lipped peccary; so then he was a white-lipped peccary, then this clothing [...].

Poquiapacua nahuoo queahuiso nee nee tadjacapoquiagua, queahuiso nee 'Apiojji miquea nahuoo so'o me piaña? Ihuije!' paacagua ma Jjequea. 'Chojjo. Ecuaya jjeia dahuaaje' oya pa ijiaijiaaja, mecaje nomás, ijiaijaje. Oya pa queashué nee nee, manoajjayapacua Issa. Queashué nee nee. Majoya ecahuiaajopa, dahuaacua queahuiso nee nee yoma nahuoo, jiquio emanoyo, muerto, ñoa, queahuiso nee nee pa ohuaya dahuaacua, nahuoo. Ohuaya ishiacagua ma yahue: 'Shequicue! Shequicue! Ma'e nahuoo' pa acagua. 'Chamá cuaqui' pa oya pa acagua, ecahuia. 'Coemequihua' pa acagua 'coemequihua' ifia eshe ama acagua. ¿Que es 'miquihua'? Cuidado está quemando! Jama acagua, Issa. 'Coeamiquiyoje' acagua, jama. Majoya pa ohuaya ijiaacua nahoo, majoya poquiagua, ohuayapa fruta, bacagua, queahuiso ani yoma como ... fruta ... quehuapa, Issa, quehua. Acheshai, a'bajjanishai coma fruta, quehua. ¿Del monte? Eé, del monte. 'Jjeque! Soaquicue miya! Yoma jiquio, coboa, quehuácoboa' acagua 'quehuácoboa mi soaquicue!' Soaque cobocapacua 'Jjeeque! Ohuaya eyami sajo ani. Cobocue!' acagua. Majoyapa, jama 'Shh! shaajaca ecue ebacuaeija' pacua. Ohuaya bacuaeija al monte poquicua. ¿Porque no queria que su ebacua escucha? Oya eshe nequi, dojjosoaquicua, Issa. Porque oya ojabacua eiñacayocuanije, majoya, ojabacuaeija pa epoquicua al monte a cazar, majoyapa shajjaajjacua, ejiajji: 'Jjeque!' acagua, majoyapa oya cuajicuaaji ohuaya equiasijje poquiyopacua, ojachahua huohuiyo, majoyapa: 'Chaaahua, ma papa cua, yecanaje iñaquiocue' paacagua. Iñaquecapacua. Poquiapacuana ojjaña nee nee, ohuaya pa jama, queadaasa nee pacua, Issa, jama poqui a pa ejiojji naashehuacayacua, naashehuaca oya, ehuciana ... como ño, queabiquie, queaaja nee nee, Issa. Majoya pa, naashehua payacua, acoa, majoya pa oya, queaca nee nee pa epoquiji. Majoya pa ohuaya huanasea: 'Jjeeque! Ya cua joya baa eyacuaeque ebaa pa eyaca quiajja essé eyacuanina cuani' ojaya pa baa chii, joya sehujja, quiacagua. Ojahanase essehujjapa quiacani baa, baa sehujja. ¿Que es baa sehujja? Machete es baa. ¿Y que le hace? Baa chii, machete viejo, jiquio miquea diente. Jiquio ojaya diente pa, machete. Queashejipishana. Majoya pa ohuaya ifapacaiapacua, Issa. Y majoya oya aniacua. Mahuiso nomás Issa.

He went to catch a lot of fish, a lot. 'Why don't you [...] your fish?' 'It is going to rot' says Jjeque. 'No. Now I am going to cook mine' he didn't eat it, at night yes, he would eat it. He was very hungry. He was not dead, Issa. Very hungry. Then, while he slept, they roasted a lot of fish, the dead ones, the white-lipped peccaries, they roasted a lot of fish. The husband had drunk. 'Wake up! Wake up! Have some fish' they said. 'There is no fire' he said asleep. 'Careful it is burning! Careful it is burning!' they said [...]. What is 'miquihua'? Be careful it is burning! They said this. 'It will burn.' Then he ate the fish, then he went and he saw lots of fruit, like ... fruit, ... quehua, Issa, quehua. Who knows what this fruit is called, quehua. From the forest? Yes, from the forest. 'Jjeque, you

go up! Cut it, to cut *quehua*' they said, 'to cut *quehua*, go up!' He went up to cut it. 'Jjeque!' they said 'its flesh is [...]. Cut it!' they said. Then he went: 'Sshh! My son can hear' he said. His son had gone to the forest. **Why didn't he want his son to hear?** He is alive [...] Issa. Because his son [...] and then his son went to the forest to hunt. Then he heard [...]. 'Jjeque' he said, then he ran very fast to his house, to show [himself?] to his son, then: 'Son, father has arrived' [...] he said. [...]. They all went, and his back hurt very much, Issa, [...], it was very hard to walk. Then his wife said: 'Jjeque! [Something about his machete]. She put the old machete as a tooth. His wife puts the machete as a tooth. **What is 'baa shoji'?** Machete is 'baa'. **And what does she do to him?** An old machete, old machete, this is your tooth. This was his tooth, machete. A little [blunt?] Then [...] Issa. And then he remained. That is it, Issa.

Anteater

by Pedro Machuqui

Anteater said to his brother he was going to go around the world, where the river ends. He arrived at a town, a city, where he found wealth. There were machetes, axes, clothes, everything. He got to know the people. The people told him there were other cities, here and there, and so he went and then he came back to tell his brother. He told him that he had seen people and that they were enemies, they were going to come. They fought and they died. So it was until now.

Ecuiquia goes fishing or Ecuiquia and his brother in law

by Nona Callaú (translated with the help of Bicho Monje)

When the cock crowed, *ecuiquia* woke his brother-in-law up and then he said to him: 'Let's go. It is morning already.' And then, he wouldn't let himself be seen, the *ecuiquia* and he carried on walking. Only at the lake he let himself be seen and the brother-in-law realised he was *ecuiquia* and he regretted [coming]. 'The dead one has brought me here.' He had thought he was alive, but he was dead. Then he sent his brother-in-law to see the poison for fishing. [He told him] to go and get it. And then *ecuiquia* shouted: 'The fish are sinking'. They were already poisoned. The man, Chiqui, threw (?) and lit a fire. Then he made *dunucuavi* with the fish, to eat it. Then he said to the dead one: 'Eat the fish.' The *ecuiquia* did not want to eat and kept grumbling. He didn't want to eat and

then he ate raw. The *ecuiquia* said to the man: 'I think this fish is well cooked' and he replied: 'No, no, leave it to cook properly' so that the *dunucuavi* heated up well. He [the *ecuiquia*] said to his brother-in-law: 'I think the fish is ready. It is ready. Untie it and eat it.' *Ecuiquia* didn't want to eat anything at all and then the living splashed *ecuiquia*'s face with the *dunucuavi*. 'Eat this soup!' he said and flattened his face in the soup. His face burned. And the *ecuiquia* said: 'I was going to eat you!' and the brother-in-law ran away, all the way home. And already the *ecuiquia* could not be seen. His face hurt very much, that's why he didn't want to eat his brother-in-law. And the wind helped him, made it hotter.⁴⁵

The origin of Anaconda

by Peno Machuqui

They say there were two youths. They went together. They went fishing for shad at the headwaters, in the rocks. And as always, youths remember girls. No? One said to this friend: 'Listen friend.' 'What?' 'What would you do if two girls appeared here?' 'I would take them with me' they say he said. 'Really?' 'You'll see.' And so they went on, talking about them. 'How is it? I will take Anaconda with me, and you?' 'I will take *Jaéjanná*'. This *jaéjanná* is also an anaconda, a black one. 'I'll take her' he said. 'Fine, let's hope she appears.' 'Well, lets go.' And they went, chatting. Until they came where there is a lot of fish. They killed fish and they went back. And after they arrived to where they had talked and they saw these girls sitting in the sun, enjoying the sun. And then they said: 'Who could these girls be? Sitting there, waiting for us. They want fish.' He said. They came closer, and when they arrived near, the girl spoke to them: 'You were talking about us' she said. 'Why? We heard' she said. 'That is why we have come out, waiting for you. Now then, yes, sit down here next to me and the other one too. There, yes.' This white anaconda was a young lady, a pretty one! With long hair. The other one the same, but a brunette. How pretty! Beautiful. 'Now yes, you are going to be my husband' she said. 'Very well, I'm taking you with me' said the other, who was keen in taking her. 'Well, I'm taking you' and took her with him. 'Well, so you are going to take this fish' and they took the fish to where her mother-in-law was. She arrived there and the old

⁴⁵ Another story explains that the *Ese Ejja* were going to come out white after they died, but because of *ecuiquia*, they become black. *Ecuiquia* had turned white because of his burns, so he rubbed his face with *cuicuisho*, genipapo, and became black.

people saw her and said: 'Who is coming there, with their wives?' they said. And it was the two youths. 'Where did they catch these women? How beautiful they are! *Caracha!*' And so they arrived, they ate and after they lived like this for five days. After five days, the mother-in-law was gossiping about her daughter-in-law. She became angry and she cried. She fed her husband and said to him: 'Well, your mother is talking about me. I'm not staying here' she said 'I'm off. Back home once again, in the water, where my mother is. I'm going' she told him. And the other, Black Anaconda, left too. This one really went once and for all and never reappeared again, until now. But the other did return and said to her husband: 'You go hunting or fishing. When the river fills, you'll know that we will have gone back to the water.' And as they were there, shooting shad with arrows, suddenly, the water started to rise. 'Ah!' said the husband. He already knew. He returned, bringing a few fishes: 'Let's go. It is enough' he said. He arrived home and she was no longer in his house. She was already in the water, the wife, and the other, in the forest. He waited and waited. Nothing. Then, at night the white anaconda came out, to breastfeed her son. She came out and her husband grabbed her and talked to her. He told her she shouldn't go away. 'I'm going to tie you' he said. 'Ah! You'll see, you are going to die. If you tie me up, you know, I' going to turn into an anaconda. I'm no longer going to be the way I am now. And? Every night she breastfed, until her son was grown up, two years old, more or less. The child went to wash and suddenly she caught him, her son, picked him up, until now. Instead, Black Anaconda, the one of the forest, never came out, never, never, because she was sterile. This is what happened to the anaconda.

Maneche, turtle and tapir

by Peno Machuqui

There were two men. One is called Motelo and the other one Coto. They call him *coto* because he has this goitre. Here they call it *maneche*. At night, Turtle went to visit Maneche. He was happily asleep with his family and Turtle disturbed him, insisting he teach him to sing like he did. He said to Maneche: 'D'o – this is what we call him in my language – *d'o hui jehue jehue!*' Which means: 'Maneche dirty face.' 'What?' 'Teach me to sing! I too want to sing like you.' 'How am I going to teach you? We sing because we have a goitre, all my family, look!' Another day, Turtle went to pester him again. And where

Maneche lived, there was a mud pond down below where tapir, peccary and all other animals went to eat this mud. Once again Turtle went to pester him.

He went at three o'clock in the morning, then at five and finally, at six o'clock, he accepted to teach him. Turtle promised to come back the next day, but complained that he couldn't sing as loud as Maneche. To which he replied that he couldn't because he didn't have a goitre and God had made them like that. At midnight, the next day Turtle went again, and then at three and this time Maneche became very angry.

Turtle wanted to sit and Maneche pushed him, and down he went, in the mud and got stuck up to his waist. '*Caracha!* This Maneche is bad! What am I going to do now?' He couldn't get out. After three days, Tapir came – as he always goes to eat mud – and said: 'What are you doing there?' It is a big animal, like a horse. 'This Maneche threw me down and I can't get out' he said to Tapir. Turtle now is called *shahuecui- ijiaggi* (eats the penis of tapir). Well, so he said: 'Listen.' 'What?' 'Listen, I'm thirsty, I will die of thirst here.' Could you urinate in my mouth?' he said. 'Urinate in my mouth! I've been here three days, stuck in the mud.' And then, Tapir was not very keen in pissing in his mouth, because he was a person, and Tapir too, he spoke, just like us, and? 'Listen. Urinate in my mouth. I'm going to die with thirst!' he said. 'Well. Lets see. Open your mouth.' So he got his little penis out and urinated in Turtle's mouth. 'Listen, put your little penis further inside' he said. He did and he bit him, Turtle, his penis. 'Ah! Ah! Ah!' he said ' don't bite now!' he said 'Careful! You are going to cut off my penis' he said. 'No! No! No!' and he squeezed more and more. And then he felt it hurt and '*Caracha!* Now you'll see!' he said. Tapir started to run. He is very strong so he pulled Turtle out of the mud, *ploh!* Tapir ran along his path, and Turtle was playing with his penis, banging against the trees, *tototototo!* It didn't hurt him at all. He was hard, like the shell of Turtle is hard. Tapir ran fast, and then he jumped in the water. Turtle stuck there. It didn't drown! He didn't let go! Tapir stayed in the water for an hour and? From there, suddenly he got up and ran again. He got out on the ground. They say he had stretched Tapir's penis this much (shows with his hands forty centimetres part). Well, so, from there, Tapir thought, he was already very tired from the pain, there was a path that ran through the mountains, about this wide (fifty centimetres) over rocks, because up there in the mountains there is a lot of

rocks: 'There I am going to split him open! He'll see' thought Tapir. And suddenly he ran again. And because Turtle went behind, it was by his arse, and as he took this path, he hit Turtle against the rocks. On the rocks he split, *pach!* and only then he let go. Turtle died on the stones; he split; and that is why there are a lot of turtles. It was just one and from that which split, there began to be many turtles, from the pieces. And from there, Tapir rested. He lay down and there he was rolling around in pain: '*Caracha!* He has ruined my little penis.' He had pulled it this much. 'What do I do now?' He picked it up; he pushed into his intestines, but it wouldn't stay in. When he ran, it came out. 'What am I going to do? Someone comes to hunt me, I run and get tangled in any vine with my penis and then they say: "I killed Tapir" what do I do?' So he pushed it well in, they say, in his hole, like a horse. He started to run and it stayed in and he was fine, until now he has it like this, Tapir. And Tapir spoke, but now it doesn't; now it is an animal. Now everybody eats him.

Tapir's love

by Peno Machuqui

One day, a man had a daughter, single, and, well, her father sent her to collect plantain. 'Daughter. Go and collect plantain' he said. And she went and she met Tapir. Since it was a person. Very young Tapir. He saw her: 'Hey! What are you doing? Leave this plantain. It is mine!' they say he said. 'What? Yours?' 'You'll see. Come here' they say he said. And the girl came closer. The two sat and they embraced and embraced and the girl looked at the young man.

'*Caracha!*' he was handsome! Beautiful! 'My father told me to pick ripe plantain, quickly.' 'No, just a minute, in a minute, in a minute.' 'In a minute my father will come.' 'No, now, now.' And he wanted to do it (to have sex). The girl didn't let him. 'Well you'll see. I'm going to come at night.' 'But my father will kill you' she said. 'You'll see, you'll see, your father doesn't know, he won't see me' he said 'you'll see.' And so he went, at seven o'clock in the evening, he appeared where the girl was. He went into her house and slept undisturbed with the girl. And then, what happened? The girl became ill.

Already she wanted to die (she was about to die). 'What is it with you daughter' said the father. She didn't want to tell. 'What can it be?' she said. The girl was pale, about to die. Well, and since the father was a shaman, he said: 'Now I'm going to see what is wrong with my daughter. Go away all of you' and they

went: her mother and her brothers. I'm going to stay here and I am going to see' and he left the daughter alone. And then he hid. He was in the house, the father, and the young man appeared, suddenly, there, embracing his daughter. 'Ah!' he said. 'This is making my daughter ill! Now he'll see.' He had his arrows, the old man. There. And, *chaa!* In his ribs. He threw down the girl and went to die in the forest. He killed him, Tapir, the young man. Well, so he said: 'Daughter! He was making you ill.' He went and saw him there dead. Already it was an animal; turned into animal; he was no longer human. Then he shouted to the others who had gone to cut plantain: 'Come here! *Cueajjayo! Shahue quecuacanaje!* I have killed Tapir.' 'Where is there tapir? There is no tapir. *Chamá shahue, shahuemá*' said the others. '*Shahue quecuacanaje! Cueajja!*' 'What are you talking about? Tapir doesn't exist!' Before there was no tapir. They didn't know it. They all went to see this wonder. The girl was cured; the temperature left her, and tapir was dead. They went, each with his knife, to gut it. They gutted him, chopped him and then, when they chopped him, Tapir turned in to many, and now there are tapirs in the whole world. They roasted it and ate it. But how was the girl going to eat it? He was her lover and was going to be her husband. She knew him well when he was human. But the others ate and it was nice. 'Daughter, come and eat this tapir. His meat is so nice.' But she didn't want to and she never ate tapir.

Appendix 2 Comparative tables of myths

The descent from the sky							
Aza (1930)	Alvarez (1932)	Shoemaker et al. (1983)	Verna (1986)(Pen o Machuqui)	Burr (1997)	Firestone (1991)	Pedro Machuqui (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Deja Oshie Mamio (recorded by the author 1999-2001)
They say that the first Huarayos to appear on earth came from above, from the sky.	Our ancestors, the first Huarayos, descended from above, from another world, covered in forests and rivers, full of animals and fish, like this one. From there they saw that here too there were trees and rivers, they had the desire to know them and	People were living in heaven when they heard the plantains crying from earth that they were rotting with no one to eat them.	<i>Etiiquiana</i> appeared in a village very far, in the sky, called Shenahuajja. There he had all his products, his food, and his gardens. One day, an old man and an old woman gathered all the Esee Ejja who lived in that place and they told them to look down. They all did so and they saw that the earth (<i>meshi</i>) was very pretty. Then, the young people called their wives and	The women are in the Sky World and when they see the world below, they miss it and so	Long time before, at the beginning of everything, the ugliest, thinnest people were the first to	It is said that on this earth there was a man that now we eat, our <i>jacu</i> (accompaniment for meat or	Ancient people came/fell down. From they sky they came down. They came down ancient people.

⁴⁶ Perhaps, Quca-meje-tai: ugly hands.

			they decided to go down.			fish), the bellaco (large plantain). He was human, he spoke and he shouted. He was ripe and already he was being wasted, for he was ripe. He shouted. He said: 'I am spoiling already!' He shouted loud, so that those above heard him and they began to make a lot of noise: 'What are we going to do?'	
These were man and woman, who came down with a cotton rope. The man went straight back up to inform that here was a good place (aquí se estaba muy	tying a very long rope, the end of which touched here on the ground, some started to come down,	They decided to climb down the long vine to earth and also to bring every other kind of food plant to earth.	They made a rope of cotton (<i>majijono</i>), they put it, and they started to climb down one after the other with their wives and children. They went down holding on to the rope until the braves of them	they start to make a rope from garden fibre. After a long time, it is made, so they throw it, but it does not reach the ground. By now they have children, so	come down to earth with a cotton rope. Since it was very hard to climb down the vine, they all came down one after the other.	'Well, let's throw down a rope to reach there where he is shouting', the plantain, in Ese Ejja it is called <i>topa ai</i> .	With a cotton rope. Then, with a rope no? thus says the story of the ancient people, no? they came down, when they had come down from the sky,

<p>bien). The man returned with others, bringing in their bags the manioc plant and the seeds of everything</p>			<p>all reached the ground. He then shouted to the others: 'I have already arrived, I have already arrived.' Happy he called them. One after the other they came down and touched the ground.</p>	<p>the ugliest child climbs down first. His name is</p>		<p>Topa Ai was shouting. He said: '<i>Bishahua jjosomoji ajeca</i>', he said, that he was wasting and the bees were eating him. A little black bee. It likes ripe plantain very much. They heard him there and they began to throw the rope, made of cotton. It reached down to earth and this man on earth pulled it. 'Pull it' they said, and they saw that it didn't come loose, and they started to come down.</p> <p>First went one that was an orphan, he didn't</p>	<p>they shouted, no? they shouted that there was land there. They shouted: 'There is land' they said. 'There is land!'. It was very very high, they say, high. They came down. Then they saw many <i>edosiquian a</i>: ancient Ese Ejja on earth saw very many <i>edosiquian a</i>. There were many. They say there were plenty of devils.</p>
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			<p>Kwa-meje-tai (ugly one).⁴⁶ He climbs down with his eyes closed and when he gets to the end of the rope he opens them and he sees that the rope does not quite reach the ground. 'It is fairly close!' he shouts, and climbs up again, the rope swings a lot as he climbs up. 'How far did you get?' the women ask. 'It is not quite long enough, we have to make the rope longer!' he answers. The sky people make it longer and throw it over again and it reaches the earth with a surplus bundle that coils up on</p>		<p>have father or mother. 'Lets see if I die' he said. 'If I get there, I will shout and if the rope comes loose, I will die.' He started coming down, with his eyes shut because he was scared, no? He got to the ground. He shouted: 'It's fine! It won't come loose!' so they started to climb down, young men, girls, uuh, and that was it.</p>	
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				<p>the ground. Kwa-meje climbs down again with his eyes closed until he reaches the ground and steps on the earth. 'Here is the ground' he cries stepping on Sio'bi (Capybara).</p> <p>'Ahhh! Sio'bi is going to kill me! You must bring arrows to kill Sio'bi!' 'Before we go down let's paint our faces!' the women exclaim, and so they start to paint their faces. 'We must bring arrows to kill Sio'bi!' they exclaim. 'There is plenty of <i>sio'bi</i> on the ground down below!'</p>			
	But, when they had already almost	Before everyone had finished	But they hadn't all come down when an old	After many people have climbed	It was in that moment that a	Finally, the old woman, that is <i>babosehua</i>	Then, they had not all come down from high

reached the ground, the rope broke, causing them such a violent and painful fall that their cry could be heard by those who had remained, which gave them such a fright that the majority no longer wanted to descend. They descended at Shenauaja.	going down the vine, an old woman became angry and cut the vine. As her daughters were decorating her in a hurry, they did a poor job and that's why she became angry and cut the vine. Now people can't go back to heaven. Long ago, there was communication between heaven and earth by a vine. A woman chewed the vine, so it broke and communication was lost. The woman was changed into a vulture	woman, <i>baboe'shuahua (sucha)</i> , cut the rope with her teeth. The etiiquiana who were left up above tried many times to throw another rope, but it wasn't the same any longer: it came loose, it didn't hold. The rest couldn't come down. Until now, they are there. Perhaps they are angels. Those who managed to get to this world remained living in the place we call Bahujja. Since they had nothing to eat, they planted the seeds they brought from Shenahuajja.	down, in the sky, an old lady who wasn't painted well, cut the sky rope with her teeth. 'You didn't paint me well! You painted me badly!' she says to Babosehua o (Condor). 'You are too old to joke and play now, old lady, that is the behaviour of youngsters, ' they say, 'ano and baba (grandparents), don't do be-o be-o (play and joke) like children do.' The old woman who was not painted well was cutting the sky rope from above so that it would fall down to the ground. 'I have been painted badly. Others	grandmother cut the vine. She cut it with her teeth, she split it into two. Before the most beautiful and the prettiest descended, she took it away with her teeth. Her name was Vulture. Her daughters failed in decorating her, in the painting, and they didn't make her pretty. They tried to do it quickly and they made her very ugly. That's why she cut the vine (rope). The cut vine fell down winding itself, roll after roll, coming down from the sky. The grandmother said that some of the most	<i>ponatii</i> , that is the condor, the old woman, they didn't paint her face and she became angry. So the old woman argued with the girls: 'You have boyfriends and that is why you don't want to paint my face. So you are going to have sex on earth.' She was mad at them, so she started to bite the rope and with her teeth she loosened it. It fell down. What to do? They started again to drop another rope, until it touched the ground, but it didn't work, it came loose. They pulled it and it came loose. There was no way it	up (not sure of this), she cut, they say, the rope, cut with teeth. Then there were no more ancient ones. Then, they say they no longer came down when she cut the rope, no? They stayed there. An old woman had loosened [the rope]. Cut with teeth. Cut the cotton rope with her teeth. Then, they no longer came down. Thus the others were left in the sky, they aren't going to come down anymore. Like this says the story of the ancient people.
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			<p>have been painted properly with different colours and I have been painted only red. Those who climbed down already will play games and enjoy themselves, but I will not.' She says and she chews the rope and it falls down to earth, coiling up in a bundle on the ground. There is not sufficient length to make another so the sky rope is severed. This is why people remain in the Sky World. 'You horrible old hag! Why did you cut the rope?!' They shout, and push her over the edge of the Sky</p>	<p>beautiful were left up above before they could come down. 'What are we going to do?' they said. They were carrying plantain, sweet potatoes, sugarcane, etc., to plant. And they planted them, according to our ancestors. Thus says the grandfather and the father. The plantain cried and called the people: 'Come down here, we are rotting. Who is going to eat us?' The Ese Ejja people appeared near the river, by the Bahujja mountain, with bodies (not spirits</p>	<p>would hold. So that those who hadn't come down, just stayed there. And then, the old woman, they threw her down. And that was her death. Those who remained up there are now angels.</p>	
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				<p>World. She does not weigh much and as she falls through the sky, she turns into Be'o-ai (Red-crested vulture). She flies down and makes her home in the big dry tree. 'Here we shall stay!' shout the people from above, 'what you lot hunt and lose, we will look for and eat!' (Sky people are meat-eating birds such as vulture and condor). The most attractive people stay up in the Sky World. The ugly ones had climbed down first and so people on the ground are uglier. Condor does not live on the</p>	<p>without bodies). There was then only one tree. Animals, fish and birds could speak the language of the Ese Ejja. They had a chief or a lord called Pachihone and he didn't have a wife. He transformed all the people into animals. He told them they could play and enjoy themselves like birds. The bird <i>tajó</i> (who was a man originally), killed the leader with arrows, with the help of the other men. He did it because he had broken the incest taboo. As he was dying, the chief said that many kinds of trees and plants were going to</p>	
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				<p>ground because she stayed up in the Sky World.</p>	<p>grow. This first man then became bird, called <i>huipocua</i>. After this story, the Ese Ejja appeared near the Bahujja mountain. This time they came down from the sky, a place where people never die, nor do they become ill and it is very clean. They arrived on earth by a cotton rope. They came in order to know the earth and see how it was. They came down with their eyes closed for fear of falling. They came with plant of plantains, seeds of maize and papaya and others. The first man to come down was</p>		
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					<p>Tjio, an old man with a large beard, the archetype of an elder or God. He shouted to those above saying that the land was good and that they come down. This old man without a woman and two more men came down, also without women. The majority had women. An old woman became angry because she had hurt her nose and she had not been painted properly, when she was still in the sky. She cut the rope and fell on earth on Bahujja. They were met by</p>		
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					wicked spirits, who told them they couldn't stay in the region of the mountain and that they go away.		
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Origin of the pampa	Origin of vulture	Deer and the vultures						
Kimura (1981a)	Verna (1986)told by Peno Machuqui	Peno Machuqui (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Dejja Oshie Mamio (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Tito Mamio (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Nona Callaú (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Mi' Ai Sonia (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Mei Huo'o Cejas (recorded by the author 1999-2001)	Chini Santa Cruz (recorded by the author 1999-2001)
Condor lived on earth. Before condor was a man. Now it is in the sky.	All vultures were people.	Deer is making garden and the lazy people burn the forest around him. Deer is trapped in the middle of the flames. Deer calls for the help of his father: 'If I am your son, rescue me'. Huajojó takes him to the sky. Huajojó has wings but he is human. He burns his beard	People want to burn Deer. Deer calls his father to rescue him. Deer's father takes him to the sky.				Deer was human People had burned Deer's garden. Deer calls his father to rescue him. Deer's father takes him to the sky. Deer was Ese Ejja. Vultures too were Ese Ejja.	People burn Deer's garden. Deer is trapped in the middle of the flames. Deer calls his father to rescue him. Chubi takes him to the sky. Deer was Ese Ejja.

⁴⁷ Not in this section: Tito told me this in another occasion

<p>He takes rotten meat far away,</p>	<p>Deer is lying in the middle and vultures surround</p>	<p>He takes him where the river ends. After many years, Deer comes back. Deer meets the mother of the vultures. The old woman is preparing a pot to cook Deer. She shows him how to get into the pot. Deer cooks her and eats her. Her children come back shouting and start crying.</p>	<p>Father takes him back He is <i>edosiquiana</i></p>	<p>Deer meets the mother of the vultures. Deer and the old woman make a pot: the Devil's kitchen. The old woman sits on the pot. Deer cooks her and eats her Deer eats the old woman's hands and feet. Her children come back shouting and start crying.</p>	<p>The old woman is preparing a pot to cook Deer. Deer eats the old woman's hands and feet. Her children come back shouting and find Deer has eaten their mother.</p>			<p>Deer meets the mother of the vultures. The old woman is preparing a pot to cook Deer's belly. Deer puts the old woman in the pot. Deer cooks her and eats her. Her children come back.</p>
		<p>Vultures look for Deer, burning the forest</p>	<p>Enemies make a trap for Deer.</p>	<p>Vultures look for Deer, burning the forest.</p>				

where his daughters are	him.	He is in the middle of the flames.		Vultures make a trap.	Vultures make a trap.			Vultures make a trap.
Condor eats the dead Deer.		Vultures make a trap with wire.	Vultures find Deer dead.	Vultures find Deer dead.				Deer falls in the trap.
Vulture eat Deer.		Trying to escape he turns in to Deer.	Maggots.	Maggots.	Maggots.			Maggots.
Deer is alive. Deer is <i>edosiquiana</i> .	Vultures think Deer is dead.		Deer is not dead	Deer is not dead because he is the Devil	Deer is not dead because he is <i>edosiquiana</i> , <i>eshahua</i>			
Condor and black vulture do not eat Deer's heart.	Vultures eat Deer.	Vultures find Deer dead and rotten. Maggots.	Vultures eat Deer.	Vultures eat Deer.	Vultures eat Deer.			Vultures eat Deer.
Deer's heart was alive.		Deer is not dead because he is <i>edosi-quiana</i> , he is Satan						
		Vultures eat Deer.						
Vultures eat Deer's heart and he comes back to life.	Vultures touch Deer's heart and he comes back to life.	Vultures touch Deer's heart and he comes back to life.	Vultures touch Deer's heart and he comes back to life.	Vultures touch Deer's heart and he comes back to life.	When you kill Deer you must burn his eyes, lest he comes back to life.			Vultures touch Deer's heart and he comes back to life.
				When you kill Deer you must burn his eyes, lest he comes back to life ⁴⁷	Something about Deer's heart.			
Deer grabs condor and	Deer grabs the		Deer grabs the	Deer grabs the		Deer grabs the	Deer grabs the	

hits him.	vultures by the neck.	Deer grabs the vultures.	vultures.	vultures.		vultures' neck.	vultures.	
Deer breaks the vultures' necks.	Deer breaks the vultures' necks.	Deer breaks the vultures' necks.		Deer breaks the vultures' necks.	Deer breaks the vultures' necks.	Deer burns the vultures' necks.		Deer breaks the vultures' necks.
	Deer transforms the vultures into birds.	Deer transforms the vultures into birds.	Deer transforms the vultures into birds.	Deer transforms the vultures into birds.	Deer transforms vultures into birds.	Deer transforms vultures into carrion birds.		Deer transforms vultures into what they are now.
Deer pierces the vultures' noses with a twig.	Deer pierces the vultures' noses with a twig.					Deer pierces the vultures' noses.		
		Deer colours the vultures with different cloths.	Deer colours the vultures with coal and with urucú.	Deer colours the vultures with ashes and with urucú.	Deer colours the vultures with ashes.	Deer colours the vultures with ashes.		
The trap falls on Deer.	Deer gives the vultures their name and orders that eat dead meat.		Vultures go to live in the sky.					
Condor goes to live in the sky.								
Deer marries two of Condor's daughters.	Deer demands condor's daughters and takes them away.	He demands two of condor's daughters and takes them away.						
Condor leaves one of his daughters on earth.	Deer lives with them for two weeks.		Deer lives in the <i>pampa</i> .					
	Deer goes							

	to the forest and never returns.	He goes to the forest alone and never returns.						
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Appendix 3 Names of animals and plants

Birds

Ese Ejja	Bolivian Spanish	English	Latin
ba'ba ai	sucha	brown-headed vulture	
ba'bosehua	condor	vulture	
be'o ai:	condor	red crested vulture (Burr 1997)	
bocao		stork	<i>Jabiru Mycteria</i>
(e)cajo	taracué/garza	heron	
	tordo	thrush	
cobishahua	perdiz	partridge	
ehuf	mutun/pava		<i>Cracidae</i> family
huiá	paloma	dove	
huipa	tojo/gavilan	hawk/sparrow hawk	
jjoji	pato	duck	
shijjeje	loro	green parrot	
yecuecuc	condor	a bird who took Jjeque to the house of Bocao	

Fish

acuishajji	vagre		
bejjeji	simbao/simbado		<i>Callichthyidae</i> family
cosi	carancho, (Peruvian Sp.) carachama	armoured catfish	<i>Pterygoplichthys Multiradiatus, Loricariidae</i> family
cueshabe	blanquillo		
eccabiji	pacu		<i>Piractus brachypomus</i>
huene	pintado		
huijajji	tachacá, (Peruvian Sp.) cahuara		
huinoma	simbao/simbado		<i>Callichthyidae</i> family
huio ai	anguilla	electric eel	
jahua tehue	palometa	piranha	
jai ai	tiburón	shark	
jai siie	pintado or tujuno		
sehua	sabalo, (Peruvian Sp) boquichico	shad	<i>Prochilodus Magdalenae</i>
shemojji	yellow pacu		<i>Colossoma macropomum</i>
sióbona	tucunaré	Peacock bass	<i>Cichla ocellaris</i>

Primates

biya	marimono	spider monkey	<i>Ateles Ater. A. Marginatus</i> , family <i>Cebidae</i>
dijidiji	mono nocturno		<i>Aotus</i>
'do	manechi	howler monkey	<i>Alouatia seniculus</i> , family <i>Cebidae</i>
ichaji oshie	mono silbador	white capuchin monkey	<i>Cebus Capucinus</i>
sohushi/huisoje/siobishi	mono nocturno, silbador		
yisa	chichilo	squirrel monkey	<i>Ateles Geoffroy</i>
yisa sehue	leoncito	pigmy marmoset	<i>Cebuella pygmaea</i>

Rodents

bahuicho		mouse	
cahuoto	wichi		
chahuijjani	jochi colorado	agouti	<i>Dasyprocta Fuliginosa</i>
chipo	ardilla	squirrel	
chipoehue	ardilla	small squirrel	
hui ao ao, huisoso	tejon	badger	<i>Meles meles</i>
jjisha	cuerpoespina	porcupine	
shajjamisi		rabbit	
sio'bi	capybara	capybara	<i>Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris</i>
se'ao	jochi pintado	paca	<i>Agouti Paca</i>
so'ohui	carachupa	opossum	
tehui	tatu	armadillo	<i>Dasyus Novemcinctus</i>

Reptiles

majasha	pucarara, (Peruvian Sp.) shushupe	viper, bushmaster	<i>Lachesis mutus,</i> <i>Viperidae</i> family
jaéjanná	sicuri del monte	black anaconda	
sa'o, saona	sicuri	anaconda	
shiaejjame	cayman negro	black cayman	<i>Melanosuchus Niger</i> <i>Aligatoridae</i>
shianeí	lagarto	smaller cayman	

Crustaceans

basha		crab	
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Molluscs

sijajja	churo		
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Bears

anná	oso bandera	anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>
behuipisi	oso hormiguero	anteater	<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>

Other

behuijaja o bemasha	perezoso	sloth	<i>Bradypus Variegatus</i>
docuei	uasso	small deer	
i'bia	tigre	jaguar	<i>Panthera onca</i>
ño	chancho de tropa	white-lipped peccary	<i>Tayassu Pecari</i>
yojji	Chancho del monte	collared peccary	<i>Pecari Tajapu</i>
shahue	anta	tapir	<i>Tapirus Terrestris</i>
	bufeo	river-dolphin	<i>Inia Geoffrensis</i>

Plants and fruits

acuijjajja tehue	coquino		
anona	cherimoya		
apoi/apo'e	urucú		
cajaja piso ⁴⁸	masarandua		
cuaje	chocolate	cacao	<i>Theobroma Cacao</i>
cuaeyo	sweet potato		

⁴⁸ small round fruit, smaller than a cherry, with orange skin, a large stone and very sticky resin; very tall tree (15 m ?)

cuicuisho/acuisho	manzano	genipapo	<i>Genipa Americana</i>
ecca	sugarcane		
ejjahui	platano	plantain	<i>Musa X Paradisiaca</i>
ejji	yuca	manioc	<i>Mahinot esculenta</i>
esajo	guayaba		<i>Psidium Guajava.</i>
eshihui	motacú		
hué		tuber	
huesa	chuchillo	reed	<i>Gynerium Sagittarium</i>
hueshe	guineo	banana	
hueshe huo'o	guineo morado	red banana	
huechi/ quiehue:	mapajo		<i>Ceiba</i>
jjajjasie	chonta (fruit)		
jjashocui		purple tuber	
jjemi	joco	pumpkin	
jono	ayahuasca	ayahuasca	<i>Banisteriopsis Caapi</i>
ma'e	chonta (tree)/ chima		<i>Bacris Gasipaes or Bacris Macana</i>
picheme	tamishe		<i>Heteropsis Jenmani</i>
shi'be	ochoo/ Peru, catahua		<i>Hura Crepitans</i>
shihuijaja	almendra/ Peru, castafia	Brazil nut	<i>Bertholletia Excelsa</i>
shimomo	tomatillo		<i>Physalis Angulata</i>
	tacuara	bamboo	<i>Bambusa Spp.</i>
		rubber	<i>Hevea Brasiliensis</i>
	ufia de gato	cat's claw	<i>UncariaTomentosa</i>
	lucuma		<i>Pouteria</i>

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