

# Saint Christopher in the Amazon: Child Sorcery, Colonialism, and Violence among the Southern Arawak

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*For reasons that baffle anthropologists, Asháninka shamans consistently blame children, especially young girls, when life-threatening illnesses strike adults. In the past, these sorcerer-children . . . were attacked with what an observer otherwise sympathetic to Asháninkas calls “merciless fury.” (Brown and Fernández 1991: 72)*

**Abstract.** The killing of alleged children sorcerers has been widely reported among the Arawak of eastern Peru. Accusations of child sorcery multiplied at junctures of increased outside pressures marked by violence, displacement, and epidemics. Mythical foundations for this belief are found in the legend of Saint Christopher and the Child Christ. Appropriated through mimetic image in colonial times, the tale of this “plague saint” was transformed into the myth of a cannibalistic giant and his evil infant son. The notion that children could become potent witches was reinforced in postcolonial times by epidemics affecting mostly adults. An example of mimesis gone wrong, the belief in child sorcery is one of those unforeseen and tragic products of the colonial encounter.

Child sorcery—meaning sorcery as practiced by children—and the killing of alleged children sorcerers have been widely reported among four of the six Arawak-speaking peoples of the Selva Central region of eastern Peru: the Yanésa and the three dialect groups known by the collective term *Ashaninka*, the *Ashaninka* proper, the *Asheninka*, and the *Nomatsiguenga* (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article I shall use the term *Southern Arawak* to refer collectively to these four groups. The Yanésa and the Perene *Asheninka* abandoned the killing of children sorcerers around the 1950s (Smith 1977: 104); the *Nomatsiguenga*, around the 1960s (Shaver and Dodd 1990: 102). Among the *Ashaninka* and the *Pajonal Asheninka*, the

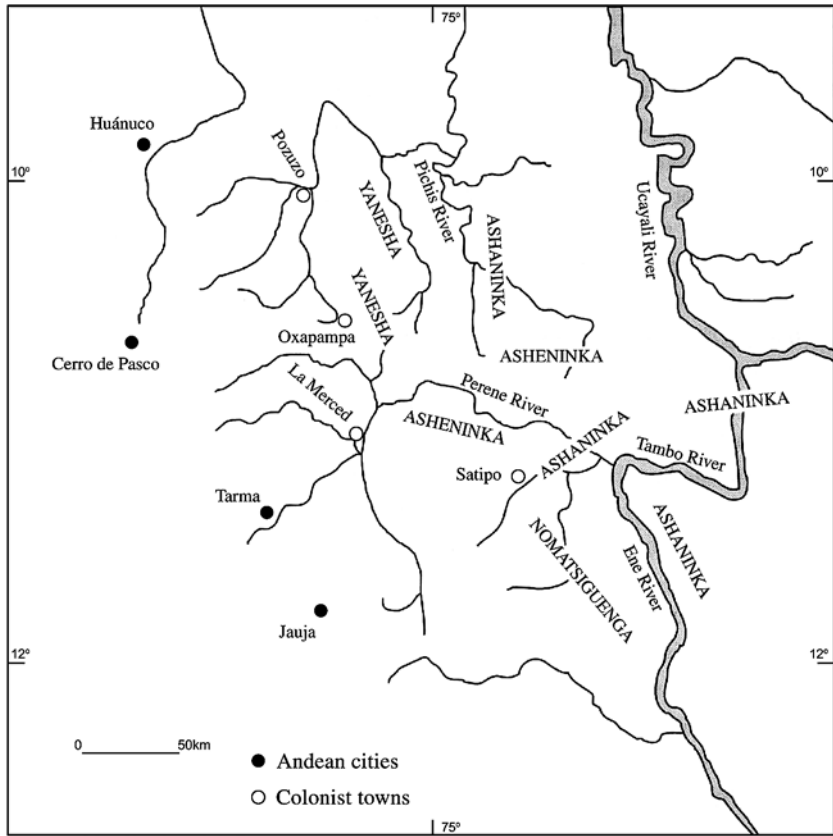


Figure 1. Map of Arawak-speaking peoples of eastern Peru. Drawing by Fernando Santos-Granero.

execution of children accused of sorcery was still practiced until the mid-1960s (Eichenberger 1966: 122; Weiss 1975: 293), but later on, accusations seem to have subsided, for this practice is scarcely mentioned, if at all, in the ethnographic literature of the 1970s and 1980s.

Although missionaries, travelers, and government officials have reported child sorcery, no one has attempted to explain it or inquire about its origins. It has simply been assumed that the killing of children witches<sup>2</sup> constitutes an expression of the savageness of Amazonian Indians and should be vigorously condemned. Anthropologists working in the Selva Central region, homeland of the Southern Arawak, have generally avoided the subject; they have been of little help in understanding this phenomenon.

When doing fieldwork among the Yanéssha, I myself opted not to inquire about a practice that had already been abandoned and that seemed to be so much at odds with a society consistently described as “peaceful” and “docile” (Santos-Granero 1994: vii–viii). While suspecting that it was not a “traditional” precontact practice, I was as baffled as my predecessors as to how it might have originated and how to explain it. In this article I attempt to answer these and other related questions.

This essay has been organized in three parts in order to reproduce as faithfully as possible the different stages in my inquiry. First, I present what we know about this practice. On the basis of the scrutiny of historical sources, ethnographic literature, and oral information, I attempt to answer four basic questions: (1) How do children become sorcerers? (2) How does child sorcery work? (3) What kinds of children are more often accused? And (4) How are children sorcerers punished? Second, I try to identify the origin of this practice through an examination of the historical documentation on the Southern Arawak. Here I address two questions: (1) When and in what context was infantile sorcery first reported? And (2) Under what circumstances did accusations of child sorcery proliferate? Finally, I analyze the ideological referents that sustain the belief in infantile sorcery. I shall argue that the Arawak myth that provides the ideological foundations for this belief may have originated in the violent context of colonial encounter but that it took shape in postcolonial times. Let us start, then, by examining the ethnographic background.

### **Ethnographic Background**

The Southern Arawak believe that witchcraft is related to the activities of an evil chthonic personage known as Yosoper by the Yanéssha (Smith 1977: 103) and as Korióšpiri by the Ashaninka (Weiss 1975: 283–4), who is conceived of as “father” and “ruler” of all demons.<sup>3</sup> They distinguish two types of sorcery: that produced by human beings and that produced by non-human agents (Weiss 1975: 284–98; Smith 1977: 102–7; Santos-Granero 1991: 98–102). Predominant among the latter are demons, evil spirits, and the malignant spiritual essences of trees, of rocks, and of certain animals, particularly ants, termites, bees, and wasps. Demons, spirits, and essences cause illness by corporeal or eye contact, whether during vigil or in dreams. Ants, termites, and wasps, generally considered to be the helpers of demons and devils, cause it by burying or taking to their nests leftovers of the food consumed by their victims, such as small bones, manioc fibers, and fishbone, or bodily substances, such as hair, scabs, sweat, or excrements. Human beings, irrespective of gender and age, can also practice

witchcraft. However, until the 1960s, persons accused of being sorcerers were mostly children, both tots and teens. Known as *amaseñeñ* among the Yanেশa and *máci*, *machi*, or *matsi* among the Ashaninka, children become sorcerers when they are very young. The Ashaninka believe this happens when the children are approached in dreams by the soul of another human witch or by a demonic bird or insect, who appear in a child's dreams in human guise (Weiss 1975: 292–3). These evil beings place a bone, thorn, palm-leaf sliver, or the like in the child's hand and then knock it off. The object falls and becomes buried in the ground, at which point someone falls ill. Teachers of witchcraft visit their innocent disciples again and again. With the passage of time the child takes a more active part in witchcraft activities. Their demonic teachers tell them to kill specific individuals, likening the victims to game animals, particularly, agoutis. They also give the children human flesh to eat until they develop a taste for it. In time, children sorcerers begin to dream that they bury things to make people ill, thus becoming conscious of their powers to bewitch. Children can also learn sorcery through contact with other children who have already become sorcerers. Similar beliefs are reported for the Nomatsiguenga, whose children, it is said, become witches after receiving secret instructions from *tsiricóti*, a sparrow-like bird, or from other malignant spirit birds (Shaver and Dodd 1990: 103).

According to the Yanেশa, a child becomes a sorcerer when another adult or child witch rubs him or her with a special plant or when a child paints him- or herself with the juice of that plant (Smith 1977: 103). The juice penetrates the child's heart, endowing him or her with powers to bewitch. A second way of becoming a witch is when a curved-billed hummingbird, considered to be one of the mystical auxiliaries of practicing evil shamans, flies over or in front of a child. Some authors have suggested that children sorcerers “may be innocent of evil intentions and may bewitch unwittingly” (Weiss 1975: 292) or that they are used by the chthonic ruler and his earthly demons as “innocent victim(s) to propagate their evil” (Smith 1977: 103). However, all of my informants insisted that this is not the case: that even though children do not become sorcerers of their own free will, once they do and become aware of it, they use their powers consciously, to cause harm, illness, and death.

Like evil ants, termites, and wasps, children witches cause harm by burying scraps of food and bodily excrescence from their victims. The Ashaninka say that this is done in the child's dreams (Weiss 1975: 293). The Yanেশa claim that children sorcerers meditate angrily about their victims, prompting their animal helpers, such as ants, to do the burying for them (Smith 1977: 104). Herbalists—*apartañ* (Yanেশa) or *shipokantaseri* (Asha-

ninka)—or shamans—*pa'llerr* (Yanesha) or *seripiari* (Ashaninka)—are the only specialists that can identify children sorcerers. They do so by performing a divinatory ritual involving the chewing of coca leaves and the sucking of tobacco juice, or by inducing patients to dream about their mystical aggressors (Sala 1975 [1893]: 438; Batlle 1905: 248; Navarro 1924a: 24–25; Uriarte 1982 [1938]: 223; Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 93).

A great deal of agreement exists about what kinds of persons are more likely to be accused of sorcery. According to some sources, among the Ashaninka the accused were mostly young and adult women and very exceptionally a boy (Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 93; Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 240). Other sources claim that although both girls and boys could be accused of being sorcerers, more often than not the accused were little girls (Pérez Marcio 1953: 166; Brown and Fernández 1991: 152). In general, sources on the Ashaninka agree that the accused was “the most defenseless member of the community, usually a girl-child, especially if it is an orphan or captive taken in a raid” (Weiss 1975: 292; see also Palomino Arana et al. 1936: 513; Uriarte 1982 [1938]: 211). Another source specifies that orphan children accused of sorcery were generally fatherless rather than motherless (Navarro 1924a: 24). In turn, among adults, those most vulnerable to accusations of sorcery were young women without husbands to defend them (*ibid.*; Torre López 1966: 64; Weiss 1975: 292).

Early reports about the Yanesha present a similar picture: diviners and shamans tended to accuse “orphans, widows and destitute” (Batlle 1905: 248). They generally blamed someone “weak and defenseless, a poor orphan, who had nobody to defend him or look after him” (Navarro 1967 [1924b]: 394). However, these sources do not establish that girls were the most prone to be accused of sorcery in as clear-cut a way as those on the Ashaninka. Some suggest that boys and girls were equally accused (Sala 1975 [1893]: 438); others claim that the accused was a girl child or a woman more often than not (Smith 1977: 104; Bullón Paucar 1976: 152). I was told that both boys and girls could be accused. Given that among the Yanesha wrath is considered to trigger a person’s capacity for evil, grumpy children were primary targets for accusations of sorcery. Children who were mischievous, disobedient, or disrespectful toward adults were also suspected of witchcraft, as were children who stood out because they were particularly “nice” or “bright” (Sala 1975 [1893]: 438). In short, both among the Yanesha and the Ashaninka the accused were mostly children—and in some cases adult women—with a more marked preference for girls among the Ashaninka than among the Yanesha. And among both groups, the most defenseless were the most commonly accused, to wit, those who had no man to defend them: fatherless orphans, children captives, and widows. How-

ever, there is plenty of evidence that nonorphans were also accused of being sorcerers, especially when it was suspected that they were bewitching their parents or one of their relatives (Sala 1975 [1893]: 438; Torre López 1966: 65; Bullón Paucar 1976: 96). Sometimes adults were also accused of sorcery; in such cases, however, the Southern Arawak believed that the accused were children sorcerers who somehow escaped detection while they were children (Weiss 1975: 292).<sup>4</sup>

Accused children were harshly punished in order to oblige them to disclose where they had buried their deadly charms. Among the Yanesha, they were beaten, confined in a small cell, suffocated with smoke, and starved. Once a day, amid insults and blows, they were forced to excavate the dirt floor of the victim's house in search of the mystical objects they had buried (González 1880: 400; Sala 1975 [1893]: 438-9; Navarro 1967 [1924b]: 395; Uriarte 1982 [1938]: 224; Smith 1977: 104).<sup>5</sup> The Ashaninka beat them, placed them on a smoking platform, or submerged them under water until they almost drowned, to make them confess (Pérez Marcio 1953: 167; Eichenberger 1966: 122; Weiss 1975: 293; Shaver and Dodd 1990: 103). It has also been reported that accused children were tortured until they cried, a response that was thought would make them forget what they had learned from the demonic teachers who had taught them sorcery (Rojas Zolezzi 1994: 240). However, the Southern Arawak believe that, because of their extraordinary powers, children witches cannot be killed through torture (Shaver and Dodd 1990: 103). They also believe that children witches cannot starve, for they feed on the flesh they obtain from the victims of their mystical attacks. These beliefs serve to explain the extreme cruelty of the punishment delivered to accused children. From the point of view of the Southern Arawak, accused children are not real children but evil and invincible sorcerers in disguise.

If a patient improved, the accused child could be ritually cleansed and released. If the bewitched person died, the perpetrator was invariably condemned to death. The type of execution depended on the wishes of the victims, their relatives, and the acting shamans. Children sorcerers could be bludgeoned (Sala 1975 [1893]: 439), strangled (Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 93), drowned (Pérez Marcio 1953: 168; Bullón Paucar 1976: 70), shot with arrows or burnt alive (Navarro 1967 [1924b]: 395; Izaguirre 1922-9, 12: 114), buried in an armadillo hole (Weiss 1975: 293), or covered with honey and tied up naked to a tree close to an anthill (Pérez Marcio 1953: 168). Their bodies were burned or disposed of by throwing them into a river.

These very cruel, and otherwise unusual, forms of execution, were intended to prevent the "shadow" of the dead child sorcerer from staying

around and teaching the art of witchcraft to other children. The Southern Arawak believe that human beings possess two incorporeal essences: the soul and the shadow. The shadows of individuals who die violently are believed to stay around and haunt the living. The Southern Arawak feared that the shadows of executed children sorcerers might join those of their demonic teachers, becoming one of them and eventually teaching other children the art of sorcery (Weiss 1975: 293, 437). To avoid this, they not only disposed of their bodies, they also destroyed all their belongings (Uriarte 1982 [1938]: 212).<sup>6</sup> It should be noted, however, that children sorcerers were not always killed.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in the 1920s, it became common for accused children to be sold as servants to white colonists or traders. This practice had the advantage of removing their dangerous presence while at the same time obtaining much-desired Western goods (Palomino Arana et al. 1936: 513; Weiss 1975: 293; Brown and Fernández 1991: 152). Having provided an overall view of Southern Arawak child sorcery, I will now turn my attention to the origin of this practice.

### Historical Origins

The Southern Arawak were among the first Amazonian indigenous peoples of Peru to be contacted by the Spaniards. For this reason, the colonial documentation on them is more complete than for other Peruvian lowland peoples.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, none of the colonial sources covering the period between the first contacts with the Spanish around 1635 and their expulsion in 1742 mentions that children were accused of being sorcerers and executed for this reason. The absence of references about this practice during colonial times is particularly notable given that the Franciscans who missionized the region were anxious to detect and eradicate all practices considered pagan, barbarian, or immoral. Polygamy, sorcery, ritual anthropophagy, sodomy, and other practices came under their unequivocal condemnation and repression. The Franciscan missionaries were undoubtedly aware that the Southern Arawak believed in witchcraft and that they had specialized sorcerers, or *brujos* (see, for instance, San Antonio 1750). If infantile sorcery were practiced during colonial times, they would have detected and reported on it. They, in fact, did so later on, after Peru's independence in 1821. Thus, their earlier silence suggests that child sorcery was not a pre-Hispanic practice but that it appeared and developed later, during postcolonial times. The question, then, becomes when and under what circumstances child sorcery emerged.

References on child sorcery among the Arawak-speaking groups of the Peruvian Montaña appeared for the first time in the late nineteenth

century, during the short period between 1880 and 1895 (González 1880: 400; Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 92–93; Carranza in Ortiz 1978: 136; Hernández in Izaguirre 1922–9, 12:113–15). What, then, was going on in this region that could explain the appearance of such a practice at this time? In 1847, the Peruvian government undertook the reconquest of the Selva Central, which the Spanish had lost in 1742 as a result of a multiethnic messianic and anticolonialist Indian revolt. It was during this period of political autonomy that the Southern Arawak developed their own metal industry centered on numerous temple/ironworks (Santos-Granero 1988). Between 1847 and 1867, the government managed to displace the Southern Arawak from those areas closest to the Andean Highlands, founding a fort and several small colonist towns in the region. All attempts to penetrate further into indigenous territory, however, were met with fierce opposition. The colonization of the hinterland was at an impasse.

In 1868, the government renewed its efforts to occupy the region. During the following ten years, it organized six large military expeditions to clear the land from its native inhabitants and make way for new waves of national and foreign colonists (Barclay and Santos-Granero 1980). The spread of foreign epidemics contributed greatly to the Southern Arawak's defeat.<sup>9</sup> By 1880, the military had subjugated the Arawak living along the Andean piedmont, putting an end to a century of freedom from foreign domination. Devastated by epidemics, and forced to abandon their settlements, their ceremonial centers, and their ironworks, many Yanasha and Asháninka opted to withdraw to the hinterlands.

After their defeat, the local government was transferred from military to civilian authorities. New waves of colonists, including large landowners, settled in the region, and Franciscan missionaries began to work in the area, founding several missions. In addition, in 1891 the government granted half a million hectares to the British holders of Peruvian government bonds. The British company promptly founded the Perené Colony in their vast holdings, devoting them to the production of high-quality export coffee.

Notably, then, the first references we have to child sorcery appeared in a context of accelerated change characterized by military defeat, territorial despoliation, technological impoverishment, epidemics, social disruption, and demographic decline. Analysis of the historical sources indicates that periods when accusations of child sorcery proliferated alternated with periods when accusations decreased or subsided. Accusations of child sorcery intensified at times when renewed colonization pressures coincided with the recrudescence of violence, accelerated economic and ideological change, and the spread of epidemics. In most cases, these occurrences were also associated with the emergence of indigenous movements of resistance,



frequently with messianic undertones.<sup>10</sup> Since it would be out of the scope of this article to discuss in detail these diverse junctures, I will only discuss two of them very briefly.

The first juncture took place in the 1880s, affecting firstly the Yanéscha of the Chorobamba Valley and, later on, the Ashaninka of the Ucayali, Pichis, and Palcazu rivers. Among the Yanéscha, it all began with combined epidemics of yellow fever and measles that attacked them in 1879 (Smith 1974: 55). The Chorobamba Valley had not yet been colonized, but in 1880 the Franciscans settled in the valley and founded a mission. Weakened by the epidemic, the Yanéscha offered no resistance to the Franciscans' presence. But in 1881 a second epidemic of measles decimated those who had agreed to live in the mission (Ortiz 1967, 1: 320). The first reference to infantile sorcery among the Yanéscha was reported precisely in this context (González 1880: 92–93).

The Ashaninka were affected a few years later, when in 1885 an epidemic of smallpox swept the upper Ucayali River (Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 133). Not coincidentally, the first reports of child sorcery among the Ashaninka appeared that same year (*ibid.*: 92–93). Three years later, in 1888, news of the arrival of a divine messenger, described as a white man dressed in indigenous attire, spread along this same area. The Ashaninka of the upper Ucayali, Pichis, and Palcazu rivers flocked to meet the messiah, who was said to speak Ashaninka and to proclaim that “Father Sun had sent him with a message, that the errant tribes should live like civilized men, forming villages each with its own church” (Brown and Fernández 1991: 62).

A second juncture, related to the emergence of a religious transformative movement among the Ashaninka of the Perené River basin, took place in the 1930s (Bodley 1970: 111–5). Inspired by the messianic discourse of the Adventist missionary Ferdinand Stahl, who had arrived in the area in 1921, hundreds of Ashaninkas gathered in 1928 into nucleated settlements modeled after Stahl's mission post. Movement leaders proclaimed the imminent transformation that the existing order was to undergo: “the dead were to arise, all evil would be destroyed, and the believers and risen dead would be taken to the house of God in the sky where there would be no more sickness, death, or growing old” (*ibid.*: 113). The movement was strengthened by an epidemic of measles that swept the area, having a devastating effect on its followers (*ibid.*: 115).

A second epidemic of measles affected the Ashaninka of the Perené River five years later, in 1933. Nearly half of the three hundred converts of the Adventist mission of Sutziki died (Barclay 1989: 126–7), producing an expected reaction against the missionaries who had inspired the previous movement. Asserting that the white men had brought the epidemic, non-

converted Ashaninkas threatened to kill the missionaries and the British settlers of the Perené Colony if they did not abandon the region. Predictably, accusations of child sorcery proliferated throughout 1933, as a result of which numerous children and adolescents were obliged to seek refuge in the Adventist mission (Pinto in Ortiz 1978: 197).

Similar junctures of mounting colonization pressures, combined with outbreaks of epidemics, gave rise to a frenzy of accusations of child sorcery during the 1890s, 1910s, 1950s, and 1960s. At such critical times, the number of accusations increased so much that the Yanesha held collective ceremonies in their temples to purge children, both boys and girls, suspected of being sorcerers. They were given tobacco syrup to drink, which made them vomit profusely, and were then secluded for a week, during which time they had to fast, keep vigil, and abstain from sexual relations. The ritual cleansing being over, the children were returned to their parents and gradually reincorporated into everyday life.

In summary, the evidence indicates that child sorcery was not a pre-Columbian Arawak practice, but a post-colonial development. Accusations of child witchcraft multiplied at junctures of violence, epidemics, social disorder, and messianic mobilization and diminished significantly in times of peace and demographic recovery. The section that follows addresses how these beliefs might have come into existence.

### Mythical Foundations

Indigenous societies frequently address their social institutions and customs through their mythologies. Indian mythologies often narrate the origin, or discuss the pros and cons, of significant social institutions and customs. The practice of child sorcery is no exception; it is founded upon the myth of a gigantic divinity and his evil infant son that occurs, with slight variation, among the Yanesha and the various Ashaninka dialect groups. This is the only myth I know of in which a child is held responsible for using mystical powers to kill people. It is a widely known myth. Adults frequently tell it to their children and grandchildren in order to illustrate the dangers posed by lack of self-control over negative emotions, such as anger and wrath, which the Yanesha and the Ashaninka always associate with the potential for performing sorcery (Santos-Granero 1991: 102). The following is an abridged version of the Yanesha myth.<sup>11</sup>

Ayots was one of the sons of Our Grandfather Yos, the supreme creator. He was a gigantic evil divinity, who used his mystical powers to transform people into stones, bees, termites, and other animals. He

had a son, named Poporróna', who looked like a child but was actually an adult. As Poporróna' could not walk, Ayots always carried him on his shoulders. It was Poporróna' who made his father angry and caused him to transform people. Whenever they saw someone, he would start asking his father "Who is that one over there? Who is it? Tell me. Tell me who is it?" Angry at his son's insistence, Ayots would tell him that the person was a stone or an animal, and by the power of his words would transform the person into whatever he said it was.

Ayots had a sister, who was married to Armadillo. One day Ayots's sister sent her son and daughter to welcome Ayots and Poporróna', who were coming to visit. When Poporróna' saw his cousins waiting in the trail, he started asking who they were. Angered by his insistence, Ayots transformed his nephews into a woolly spider monkey and an agouti.

Ayots's sister and her husband were mad at him for transforming their children, and they decided to punish him. They organized a drinking party and urged Ayots to drink a lot. After five days of drinking and dancing, Ayots was exhausted. Armadillo invited him to rest in his underground house. When Ayots fell asleep, Armadillo sneaked out and locked Ayots within. Ayots tried to escape but he could not. He is still there, trapped forever, and supporting the earth. Whenever he tries to escape, he produces earthquakes.

Ayots's son, Poporróna', stayed with his aunt and a baby cousin. Although he was small and did not grow, he was already an adult and had the same transformative powers as his father. One day, while his aunt was away, he transformed his baby cousin into rotten wood and escaped. The people chased him. They found him bathing in a river that his father used to dam in order to flood the land, kill the people and eat them. Poporróna' was planning to do the same thing and referred to people as edible aquatic larvae.

Poporróna's pursuers attempted to capture him. They first shot him with their bows and arrows, but they shot one another instead. Then they attempted to club him, but instead they clubbed one another. Finally, they attempted to cut him into pieces, but they ended up wounding themselves. Poporróna' took pity on them. He told them that if they wanted to kill him, they had to build him a nice throne of balsa wood, sit him there, and nail him to the ground by hammering a spike of hardwood through his head. He also told them to come back five days later. The warriors followed his instructions. When they came back, in the place where they had nailed Poporróna', they found a tall peach palm tree heavy with fruit.

Variants of this myth are found among the Ashaninka and the Asheninka, where the main protagonists are Avírerí and his grandson Kíri (Weiss 1975: 310–43), and among the Nomatsiguenga, where Avírerí becomes Mábírerí and Kíri becomes Quèrí (Shaver and Dodd 1990: 92–93). All these versions present the evil divinity as a cannibal who enjoys making people suffer. However, both the Yanésa and the Ashaninka insist that it was the son/grandson who angered his father/grandfather with his endless questioning, triggering his transformative powers. The divinity's son, in turn, is portrayed as a child who refuses to grow but has the capacities of an adult. He is held responsible for the evil actions of his father. The child is said to have the same transformative powers as his father and to share his father's taste for human flesh. He is depicted as being so evil that he does not even hesitate to transform his cousins into animals, first vicariously, through his father, and later on directly, using his own powers.

Children witches partake of several characteristics shared by the evil child of these myths. First, both are conceived of as being pseudochildren; they may appear as children, but they are, or act as, adults. The mythical child is an adult in disguise, one who simply refuses to grow up. Children accused of sorcery generally act in unchildlike ways, either because they are more clever than average or because they are defiant or disrespectful toward adults. Second, both have evil powers. The mythical child has the power to transform people into objects and animals, some of which are considered to be agents of witchcraft, such as bees, wasps, and termites. Children sorcerers have bewitching powers, which they use in ways similar to that of evil bees, wasps, and termites. Third, they are cannibals. Both the mythical child and children sorcerers enjoy eating human beings, which in one case are equated with aquatic larvae and in the other are consumed during dreams. Finally, they are extremely antisocial and do not hesitate to kill their kin: cross cousins or potential affines in one case; parents, siblings, and other close consanguines in the other case.

The aforementioned myth is present among all Arawak-speaking groups that believe in infantile sorcery but not among those that do not, such as the Piro and the Machiguenga.<sup>12</sup> This further strengthens the argument that the myth of Ayots/Avírerí constitutes the mythical referent for the practice of child sorcery. However, the presence of the myth does not by itself explain how the belief in child sorcery developed among the Southern Arawak. An answer to this problem came to me from an unexpected source. One day, in a taxi going to the office, I noticed on the dashboard a medal of Saint Christopher carrying the Child Christ on his shoulder (see Figure 2). The image reminded me of Ayots carrying his son Poporróna'. I knew that the medal represented Saint Christopher, so I decided to check



Figure 2. Medal of Saint Christopher.

his hagiography. The following abridged version of the Christian legend of Saint Christopher is based on four different sources (Butler 1993: 69–71; Morgan 1994: 75–76; Englebert 1994: 285–6; Woods [1882] 1999):

Christopher was a barbarous cannibal with the original name of Reprobus. He had a gigantic body, an ugly face that resembled that of a dog, and a fearful appearance. Being so strong, he decided to work for the greatest king on earth. He sought out a powerful king and entered his service. But he noticed that the king crossed himself each time the devil was mentioned. Realizing that Satan was stronger than the king, he decided to enroll in the demon's army. One day, however, Reprobus saw his master tremble while passing before a cross, and he asked him why was he afraid. When the devil answered that he feared Christ, Reprobus decided to leave him in order to seek Christ.

On his way to seek Christ, Reprobus met a holy hermit. He asked the hermit what could he do to serve Christ. The hermit showed him a turbulent river and told him to stay there and take travelers across, for this would be a charitable work agreeable to Christ. Thus it was that Reprobus became a ferryman.

One stormy night a child asked Reprobus to take him across the

river. Reprobos lifted up the child on his shoulder, took up his staff, and began the crossing. As Reprobos traversed the waters, the current grew stronger and the child heavier with each step. When he reached the other side, he remarked to the child that it felt as if he had carried the entire world upon his shoulders. The child revealed that he was the Child Christ and told Reprobos that he had borne the weights not only of the entire world, but also of Him who had created it. To prove it the Child Christ instructed Reprobos to plant his staff outside his hut and see what happened. By the next day the stick had turned into a palm tree bearing leaves, flowers, and fruit.

Reprobos converted to Christianity and changed his name to Christopher or Christ-bearer. He then went to Lycia, where he devoted himself to convert pagans. Worried with his success, the local king took him prisoner, ordering him to recant his new faith. When Christopher refused to do so, the king ordered his soldiers to beat him with rods of iron, nail him to a seat of bronze, place a red-hot iron cross upon his head, cover him with pitch, and set him on fire. The soldiers complied, but the seat melted like wax and Christopher emerged harmless. The king then ordered his soldiers to attach him to a strong stake and shoot him with their arrows. They did so, but the arrows did not reach him, except for one that ricocheted off his skin and into the king's eye. Desperate, the king ordered his soldiers to behead Christopher and burn his body. Before dying, Christopher prayed to God to punish his killers. God sent an earthquake exterminating many of his captors. The giant then asked God to grant him the grace that all who saw his relics, or image, and had faith in him would be saved from fire, storm, and earthquake.

Numerous parallels between the Christian legend and the Arawak myth suggest that the myth of Ayots/Poporróna' (or Avírerí/Kíri) has been modeled upon that of Saint Christopher and the Child Christ. Some parallels are direct, like those existing between Christopher and Ayots/Avírerí or between Christ and Poporróna'/Kíri. Other parallels are indirect (in a crisscross fashion), like those existing between Christopher and Poporróna'/Kíri or between Ayots/Avírerí and the Child Christ (see Figure 3). Attributing characteristics and actions of one personage to another, as well as other types of inversion, are common when a myth or legend passes from one people to another.

Let us begin with a discussion of the similarities existing between the figures of Christopher and Ayots/Avírerí. Both are gigantic personages with extraordinary physical as well as mystical powers. Both are anthropo-

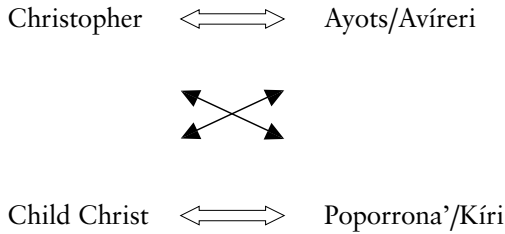


Figure 3. Parallels between the Christian legend of Saint Christopher and the Southern Arawak myth of Ayots/Avírerí. Diagram by Fernando Santos-Granero.

gous. Christopher is described as a barbarous cannibal; the Arawak divinity as having a taste for human beings, which he likened to edible larvae. Both Christopher and the Arawak divinity carried a wondrous child on their shoulders (see Figure 4). In one case, it is an unrelated, mysterious child; in the other case, his son or grandson. Both figures are killed and deprived of their powers. A powerful king beheads the Christian saint; his brother-in-law buries the Arawak divinity.<sup>13</sup> They both have to bear the weight of the earth: Christopher temporarily, while carrying the infant Jesus; the Arawak divinity permanently, as holder of the earth. Finally, both figures are related to earthquakes: Christopher by protecting people from them, the Arawak divinity by producing them.

Other striking parallels also underlie relations between the Child Christ and Poporróna'/Kíri. They are both children with extraordinary powers. Whereas the Child Christ is presented as creator of the entire world, the Arawak evil child is described as a re-creator, a powerful transformer of existing people and things. Both are adults disguised as children: Jesus because he chooses to reveal himself to Christopher in his personification as the Child Christ; the Arawak child because he refuses to grow up and remains small even though he enjoys adult capacities. Both are carried on the shoulders of powerful figures. The Child Christ is carried on the shoulders of a gigantic ferryman; the Arawak evil child on the shoulders of his father, or grandfather, a gigantic evil divinity. Finally, both vex their bearers: the Child Christ by making himself heavy; the Arawak child by wearing out his father/grandfather with repeated questions. The resemblance between the name of the Child Christ and the name of the mythical child—at least in the Asháninka version of the myth—reinforces the idea that the figure of Kíri was modeled upon that of the Child Christ. In effect, in Spanish, Christ is Cristo, a name that the Asháninka pronounce as Kiristu, and that could have led to the abridged form, Kíri.



Figure 4. Saint Christopher by Peter Paul Rubens, 1611-14.



Other similarities are shared in a crisscross fashion between Christopher and the Arawak mythical child. Both are pursued by people who want to kill them but cannot because both enjoy mystical powers. In the case of Christopher, they try to beat him with iron rods and shoot him with arrows; in that of Poporróna'/Kíri, they try to club him, shoot him with arrows, and cut him into pieces. Both personages are bound to a seat and impaled by their pursuers. Christopher is tied to an iron seat, and his head is pierced and burned with a red-hot iron cross; the Arawak child is tied to a balsa wood throne and impaled with a spike of hardwood. Finally, both figures are associated with the miraculous flowering of a palm tree. In the Christian legend Christopher's staff is transformed by the Child Christ into a palm tree bearing leaves, flowers, and fruit as a sign of his divine origin and extraordinary powers (see Figures 5 and 6). In the Arawak myth it is the evil child who surrenders his extraordinary powers, allowing his pursuers to impale him and transforming himself into a peach palm tree (*Bactris*).

Although fewer in number, there are also some crisscross parallels between the Child Christ and Ayóts/Avírerí. Both are conceived to be sons of a supreme creator: Christ is the son of God the Father; the Arawak divinity is the son of Our Grandfather Yos. In addition, both support the earth. The Christian legend tells us that the Child Christ carried the weight of the world. In the religious iconography of Saint Christopher, the Child Christ is frequently portrayed carrying a globe or jeweled sphere representing the world (see Figures 2, 5, and 6). The Arawak divinity, in turn, was deprived of his evil powers and locked underground, assuming the burden of sustaining the earth on his shoulders.

### Structural Transformations and the Mimetic Faculty

In colonial America, native mythologies and Christian hagiography cross-fertilized much more widely than previously acknowledged. In some instances, colonial agents adapted Amerindian myths to Christian traditions in order to further their evangelization projects. As Thérèse Boyssé-Casagne (1998) has recently shown, Spanish priests and chroniclers resorted to the legends of the Apostles Saint Thomas and Saint Bartholomew to understand, reformulate, and in a way "Christianize" the Andean myths of the gods Tunupa and Viracocha. Morphological and thematic similarities between Christian hagiography and Amerindian mythology "generated syncretic productions of archaic style, which were assumed to be indigenous, but were not" (*ibid.*: 162). By way of contrast, it was the Amerindians who adopted, reformulated, and "Indianized" the



Figure 5. Saint Christopher by unknown German artist, 1423. In *Laus Virginis*. Bohemian manuscript from the John Rylands Library, Manchester, U.K.



Figure 6. Saint Christopher by unknown Peruvian artist, circa 1500s. At the Cathedral of Cuzco, Peru. Photo by Fernando Santos-Granero.

legend of a popular Christian saint among the Southern Arawak.<sup>14</sup> However, the legend of Saint Christopher and the Arawak myths underwent important alterations, not the least of which is the transmutation of the infant Jesus from the benign and compassionate son of God to a malignant and selfish child sorcerer. These remain to be explained.

Two questions must be answered here. First, why did the Arawak of eastern Peru adopt the legend of Saint Christopher? And, second, why did its central characters experience such substantial transmutations along this process? In seeking answers to these questions, I shall appeal to Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory of myth as well as to Michael Taussig's theoretical propositions around mimesis and alterity.

I suggest that the Southern Arawak were drawn to the legend of Saint Christopher because the Franciscan missionaries claimed that this saint could protect them against misfortune. Statues and paintings of Saint Christopher often bore the inscription "Whoever shall behold the image of Saint Christopher shall not faint or fall on that day." During the Middle Ages it was believed that if a person saw an image of Saint Christopher she or he would be shielded from ill fortune all day. This included threats from flood, fire, tempests, and earthquakes (Butler 1993: 71; Morgan 1994: 76). Saint Christopher was invoked not only as protection against general misfortune but, more specifically, also as a safeguard against plagues (Butler 1993: 71). Together with Saint Roch and Saint Sebastian, they were the most popular "plague saints" of the medieval period (Brown et al. 1997: 194) (see Figure 7). For these reasons, large statues or paintings representing the saint were "usually placed in public wayes, and at the entrance of Towns and Churches" (Browne 1999 [1672], 5:xvi). This customary practice was introduced and preserved in Peru; to this day a huge painting of Saint Christopher adorns one of the lateral naves of the Cathedral of Cuzco, facing the entrance door (see Figure 6). This same practice must have also been preserved in the missions that the Franciscans founded among the Southern Arawak. We know that their churches were modest, but they had numerous images of saints. In 1730, the temple of the mission of Quimiri had eleven statues, eleven large paintings, and numerous engravings, according to church inventories (Rodríguez Tena 1780, vol. 2).

We know that recurring epidemics affected the Southern Arawak during the colonial period (Santos-Granero 1987). Following European folk beliefs, the Franciscans most probably taught the Yanasha and the Ashaninka to invoke Saint Christopher as protection against misfortune and, particularly, to guard them against plagues. This would explain why the Yanasha and the Ashaninka were attracted to the legend of Saint Christopher. It does not explain, however, why they adopted and adapted the



Figure 7. Saint Christopher, Saint Roch, and Saint Sebastian by Lorenzo Lotto, circa 1535.

legend as their own. Here is where Taussig's magic of mimesis comes in. Elaborating upon Sir James George Frazer's ideas on "sympathetic magic" and Walter Benjamin's reflections on "mimetic practices," Taussig (1993: xiii) defines the mimetic faculty as "the nature that culture uses to create a second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other." The magic of mimesis consists in having the replica share in, or acquire, the power of that which it repli-

cates. In other words, through the act of mimesis, “the copy [is granted] the character and power of the original, the representation the power of the represented” (ibid.: xviii). Although mimesis is a human faculty present in all times and places, the mimetic faculty has especially flourished in contexts of colonial and neocolonial domination, where the colonized strive to appropriate magically the power of the colonizers.

Mimesis finds expression in magical contexts through various ways: by making and manipulating artifacts that imitate powerful things or beings, by replicating their bodily movements and gestures, or by inducing and manipulating mental images of powerful things or beings. In other words, the magician’s art of reproduction is put to work producing both tangible and intangible replicas (ibid.: 57). For Taussig, what is important here is not the means by which the power of the replicated is captured; rather, it is the fact that “this power can be captured only by means of an image” (ibid.: 62).

The adoption of the legend of Saint Christopher should, in my opinion, be interpreted as an act of mimesis within a much larger process in which the Southern Arawak mimed the colonial agents, their objects, gestures, and rituals, in the hope of appropriating their power. Numerous examples of such a process, most of them related to the Franciscan missionaries, exist. Particularly striking is the example of the Yanesha priestly leader of the temple of Palmazu, an important pilgrimage center sheltering the stone figures of three important native divinities (Santos-Granero 1991: 284–5). In the early twentieth century, after attending Sunday school for a whole year in the Franciscan mission of Quillazu, the Indian priest went back to his ceremonial center. There, according to a Franciscan chronicler, he practiced before his idols “the external acts of the religious ceremonies that he had seen performed, to the point of simulating with compunction the reading of a book made of bird feathers” (Bailey-Maitre 1908 [1902]: 622–3). The Yanesha priest not only mimed the Catholic Mass and the Bible, but he also imitated the act of reading. In other words, rather than attempting to appropriate the Christian deity, he strove to obtain through mimesis the magical power of Christian ritual performances and objects. We know that the Yanesha and the Ashaninka also mimed the cross, the religious medals that the missionaries wore as a sign of devotion, and even parts of the Franciscan habit, such as the hood, preserving these tokens long after they shook off Spanish domination in 1742. I argue that together with these elements, the Southern Arawak mimed the legend and image of Saint Christopher and the wondrous child so prominent in missionary discourse and church iconography.

However, mimesis alone does not explain how a narrative about a

saintly figure who carried the Child Christ and had the power to protect people against misfortune and plagues became the myth of a malefic divinity with a wondrous son who use their evil powers to transform people. A plausible answer is provided by one of the central tenets in the structuralist analysis of myth. Lévi-Strauss (1969: 2) argues that each myth within a group of myths is “simply a transformation, to a greater or lesser extent, of other myths originating either in the same society or in neighboring, or remote societies.” Transformations may be experienced at the level of the myth’s code, defined by Lévi-Strauss as the particular interrelationship between a myth’s constitutive elements. Or they may be experienced at the level of the myth’s message, defined as the content of such elements. The most common type of transformation is that by inversion, whereby the attributes of the characters of a myth, or the sign of their interrelationships, are transformed into its opposite.

Lévi-Strauss is not very explicit as to what causes these transformations. In some places he suggests that they result from material changes, such as a strong demographic decrease (1970: 106), or by moving to a new environment (1968: 42). More often than not, however, Lévi-Strauss regards these transformations as an intrinsic property of mythical thought itself. Like the actions of a bricoleur, mythical thought elaborates structured systems by combining and recombining odds and ends, past events, personal experiences, and fragments of other systems, altering them in terms of form or content (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 42–43). Here, I argue that in elaborating new myths, mythmakers combine these odds and ends and infuse them with meaning in accordance with contemporary societal and philosophical issues and perceptions. I suggest that, in this case, the inversion experienced by the benevolent figures of Saint Christopher and the Child Christ responds to changing indigenous perceptions of the causes of the violence and population disorder resulting from the colonial encounter.

The historical sources indicate that after repeated contact with the Spanish, the Southern Arawak became persuaded that it was the Franciscan missionaries who had brought with them all kinds of misfortune, including dwindling supplies of game and fish and crop failures. In 1716, a Franciscan missionary reported that the “diabolical Enchanters or Sorcerers” — the Arawak shamans and priests — greatly hindered the missionaries’ evangelical work by disseminating the idea that they were also responsible for introducing the “mortal epidemics” that consumed them (San Antonio 1750: 15). Most probably, after suffering the disastrous effects of foreign epidemics, the Southern Arawak readily came to suspect that rather than warding off epidemics, Saint Christopher and the Child Christ were actually introducing these plagues into their lands.<sup>15</sup> Among the Yanésa and

the Ashaninka misfortune is never accidental; it is the work of witchcraft. This cultural premise, which preceded contact with the Spanish, helps to explain how Christopher and the Child Christ were reinterpreted as evil agents of sorcery. As a result of both historical experience and the structural properties of mythical thought, the legend of Saint Christopher was transformed, establishing a basis for the belief in child sorcery.

The question remains as to why the transformed Child Christ became more prominent than the transformed Christopher in the Arawak myth. Why, in fact, did its transmutation lead to the belief in child sorcery? An answer to this query, I suggest, lies in the patterns of morbidity and mortality that characterized the various epidemics affecting the Southern Arawak peoples. The most recurrent and lethal epidemics menacing indigenous peoples during colonial times were smallpox and influenza (Santos-Granero 1987: 33-42). In postcolonial times these two diseases continued to ravage the Southern Arawak, but four new epidemics were added: measles, chickenpox, yellow fever, and malaria (see note 9). Some of these diseases had a greater impact upon infants and children than upon adults. This is true of smallpox, influenza, malaria, and yellow fever.

Smallpox and influenza are particularly fatal to children and the elderly. It is reported that death rates from smallpox are "higher for infants, children, elderly people and pregnant women" (Carlson 1996). In eighteenth-century Europe, the case-fatality rate (deaths per 100,000 cases) associated with smallpox varied between 20 percent and 60 percent for the total population but was as high as 80 to 90 percent among children younger than five years of age (Barquet and Domingo 1997). Influenza attacks people of all ages, but its mortality rate is also higher among "the very young, the very old, and those with poor immunity" (Medinfo 1999). Malaria and yellow fever have the greatest impact upon children. In regions where malaria is endemic, people are continuously infected so that they either die or come to tolerate the disease. However, children who have not yet acquired resistance, and pregnant women whose natural defense mechanisms are reduced, are much more vulnerable (WHO/CTD 1998). Yellow fever also takes a heavier toll among children. In times of epidemics, the case-fatality rate of yellow fever for unimmunized adults is around 50 percent, whereas it is as high as 70 percent for children (WHO 1996).

In contrast, measles (rubeola) and chickenpox (varicella) cause more fatalities among adults than among children. Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that attacks both children and unimmunized adults. However, it is asserted that the "risk of death from measles is higher for infants and adults than for children" (NCAI 1999a). Thus, whereas infants under the age of two years and adults over twenty years of age have a 20 to 30 percent



chance of complications and death, schoolage children have a 3 to 5 percent chance of serious complications (WSDH 1999). In turn, it is reported that “complications as well as fatalities from varicella are more commonly observed in adults than in children” (WHO 1999). In fact, researchers have found that the case-fatality ratios in healthy adults are thirty to forty times higher than among children aged five to nine. Another source asserts that adults “are twenty-five times more likely to die from chickenpox than children” (NCAI 1999b).

Most of the epidemics affecting the Southern Arawak during colonial times caused more fatalities among children than among adults. Of the sixteen great bouts of epidemics reported in the Selva Central region between 1602 and 1736, eight were outbreaks of smallpox, two of influenza, one of measles, and the rest were undetermined (Santos-Granero 1992b: 207–9). In contrast, most of the epidemics occurring in postcolonial times affected adults rather than children. Of the fifteen epidemics reported between 1879 and 1964, eight were of measles and at least one of the two reported smallpox epidemics may have actually been an outbreak of chickenpox (see note 9). It is very probable that this new type of epidemic began to affect the Southern Arawak in the late eighteenth century, after the Juan Santos uprising, when numerous Andean Indians, runaway African slaves, and poor Spaniards joined the rebels.

The bewilderment at the survival of children in postcolonial times and the connection between this phenomenon and the belief in infantile sorcery are preserved in Yanesha oral history. In a narrative I collected in 1983, a severe epidemic of measles swept a small settlement located at the confluence of the Iscozacín and the Palcazu rivers sometime in the 1930s. Those persons who escaped the illness abandoned the settlement and went to live in the forest. When they came back, they found everybody dead, except for the only survivor, a baby boy who was sucking his dead mother’s breasts. Convinced that the baby was responsible for causing the evil plague, the returnees killed him.<sup>16</sup>

According to my analysis, the transmutation of the legend of Saint Christopher took place in three stages. In a first stage occurring during colonial times—from the first contacts with the Franciscans in 1635 to their expulsion in 1742—the Southern Arawak must have mimed the legend in the hope of appropriating the saint’s power to avert the foreign diseases that were decimating them. As historical experience suggested that it was the missionaries who were bringing all kinds of misfortune, including the “mortal plagues,” the perception of Saint Christopher and the Child Christ changed profoundly. From being conceived of as mystical beings who protected them against misfortune, Saint Christopher and the Child Christ

came to be perceived by the Yanésa and the Asháninka as evil beings who wrought mishap and disease upon their people.

In a second stage—between 1742 and 1847—during the period in which the Southern Arawak regained their autonomy, the transformation of the legend of Saint Christopher into the myth of *Ayots/Poporróna* (or *Avírerí/Kíri*) must have been completed. This established the basis for the belief that children could possess evil powers. It is worth noting that from 1742 to at least 1752, the Yanésa and Asháninka were led by Juan Santos Atahualpa, a converted highland Indian leader, who merged Andean, Christian, and Amazonian religious notions to create and re-create his sacred genealogical background and to persuade his followers of his messianic mandate (Zarzar 1989). It is probable that the transformation of the legend of Saint Christopher took place during this period in which the new type of epidemics began to affect the Southern Arawak and in which Juan Santos began to reinterpret the basic notions of the Catholic doctrine on the basis of Andean and Amazonian religious ideas.

In a third stage, during early postcolonial times—beginning in 1847—the survival of children in the midst of ravaging epidemics defied explanation. It was a small step to the belief that, like the wondrous child of the myth, some children could use their evil powers to bewitch, that is, to inflict illness and death. The evil powers of the mythical child—the child in disguise—became vested on children who did not behave as children—the extremely bright, the unruly, the mischievous, and the disrespectful. Thus the notion that children could possess evil powers overlapped with earlier beliefs in adult sorcery, giving final shape to the belief in child sorcery. We can define this process as one of *mimesis gone wrong*: those instances in which the mystical power that the colonized wrested from the colonizers by means of the magic of *mimesis* turned against them, putting at risk their existence and very survival.

## Epilogue

The phenomena of child sorcery, and the killing of children sorcerers, are not exclusive to non-Western societies. In 1841, Dr. Charles Mackay (in Chamberlain 1896: 323) condemned the burning and killing of children witches in Great Britain as one of the most extraordinary “popular delusions” of the not-so-distant past. Whether, among the Southern Arawak, this “delusion” resulted from a combination of structural transformation of myths and *mimesis gone wrong*, as I suggest here, is something we will never know for sure. Similarly, few possibilities exist of ever knowing for certain why infantile sorcery did not develop elsewhere in Amazonia. What

is undeniable, however, is that among the Southern Arawak the belief in child sorcery is one of those unforeseen and tragic products of the colonial encounter. Tragic because in their eagerness to exorcise colonial violence the Southern Arawak turned against themselves, unleashing violence against their children's bodies and, through them, against the body politic at large. Tragic, also, because this practice has resurfaced in recent times, causing extreme violence and distress among these remarkable peoples.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Symposium "Violence and Population: Bodies and the Body Politic in Indigenous Amazonia," organized by Bartholomew Dean and me on the occasion of the Ninety-Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, held in Philadelphia on 2–6 December 1998. I wish to thank Anne-Christine Taylor and Egbert G. Leigh for their skeptical comments, which forced me to find new—and I would like to believe more persuasive—arguments to support my hypothesis. I would also like to thank Olga F. Linares for her comments and suggestions on how to improve the manuscript, as well as for her patience in editing my English.

- 1 The Yanesha, also known as the Amuesha, live along the Oxapampa, Villa Rica, Cacazú, and Palcazu River valleys and in the highlands of Metraró and Yurinaqui. The Ashaninka, formerly known as the Campa, are divided into the Ashaninka proper, inhabiting the Lower Perené, Pichis, Ene, and Tambo rivers; the Asheninka, occupying the Upper Perené River and the grassy uplands of the Gran Pajonal; and the Nomatsiguenga, living in the areas of Pangoa, Sanibeni, Anapati, and Kiatari.
- 2 I use the terms *children sorcerers* and *children witches* indistinctly, for I argue that Evans-Pritchard's (1976: 227–8) distinction between *witch* and *sorcerer* based on the Azande material does not apply here. Arawak children accused of magically harming others share the characteristics of both Azande witches ("a person whose body contains . . . witchcraft substance and who is supposed to practice witchcraft") and Azande sorcerers ("anyone who possesses bad medicines and uses them in rites of sorcery").
- 3 It has been suggested that the figures of Yosoper and Korióšpiri have been modeled on that of Lucifer, the fallen angel of the Christian tradition (Smith 1977: 84–85; Weiss 1975: 283–4).
- 4 This would explain why some sources assert that adult women, namely, orphan young women and widows, were also accused of sorcery (Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 93; Navarro 1924a: 24; Torre López 1966: 64; Weiss 1975: 292).
- 5 Some contemporary observers noted that it was impossible not to find this kind of object in an indigenous house where all kinds of things are thrown onto the dirt floor. Others accused the patient's relatives of having planted these objects (Sala 1975 [1893]: 438). Weiss's informants (1975: 293) "insisted that these materials are not simply discarded refuse, but rather are found tied or wrapped in a leaf, or otherwise show evidence of being specially prepared."
- 6 Both among the Yanesha and the Ashaninka the execution of children sorcerers

was carried out during a grand nocturnal celebration in which large amounts of manioc beer was consumed (Izaguirre 1922–9, 12:114; Navarro 1967 [1924b]: 395; Palomino Arana et al. 1936: 513). The relatives of the deceased and the shaman who had treated him or her organized this celebration. It is not clear what was the objective of this feast. One source asserts that they “celebrate the death of the one who had brought misfortune to the tribe,” that is, the child witch (Uriarte 1982 [1938]: 211). But some pages ahead it is asserted that they celebrate “the death of the innocent [child accused of sorcery] and that of the person who died” (ibid.: 224). In other words, they seem simultaneously to have the traits of a funerary ritual in honor of the deceased and those of a cleansing ritual on behalf of the community.

- 7 If the accused belonged to a family different from that of their accusers, their parents sometimes tried to defend them or to smuggle them to the nearest mission post. We know that since at least 1,896 Franciscan missions became refuges for children accused of sorcery (Izaguirre 1922–9, 12:113–5). In 1922, the Franciscans founded the mission of Puerto Ocopa on the Lower Perené River with the express purpose of rescuing abandoned orphan children or children condemned to death for sorcery (Ortiz 1978: 208). The Adventist missions established along the Perené River beginning in 1921 also became places of refuge for alleged children witches (Pérez Marcio 1953: 175).
- 8 The following is a list of some of the numerous historical sources and works on the colonial history of the Arawak of eastern Peru: Córdoba Salinas 1957 [1651]; San Antonio 1750; Rodríguez Tena 1780; Biedma 1981 [1682]; Amich 1975 [1854]; Pallares and Calvo 1870; Maúrtua 1906, 1907; Izaguirre 1922–9; Fuentes 1859; Loayza 1942; Valcárcel 1946; Tibesar 1950, 1952; Ortiz 1961, 1967, 1969, 1978, 1979; Varese 1973; Lehnertz 1969; Castro Arenas 1973; Smith 1974, 1977; Camino 1977; Santos-Granero 1980, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1992a, 1992b; Renard-Casevitz 1981, 1985, 1993; Renard-Casevitz et al. 1988; Zarzar 1989; Zarzar and Román 1983).
- 9 The following is a list of the epidemics reported for the Selva Central region between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century.

1879–80: Combined epidemics of yellow fever and smallpox ravage the Yanasha of the Huancabamba and Chorobamba valleys (Smith 1974: 55).

1881: Epidemics of measles affect the Yanasha converts of the mission of Quillazú, in the Chorobamba valley, which was founded that same year (Ortiz 1967, 1:320).

1885: An epidemic of smallpox sweeps the Upper Ucayali River, affecting the Conibo but also the Ashaninka living in this area (Ordinaire 1988 [1885]: 133).

1906–10: Severe outbreaks of malaria decimate the Yanasha and the Ashaninka of Chanchamayo valley and the Upper Perené River (Ortiz 1967, 1:416, 489; Ortiz 1969, 1:475).

1910: Epidemics of measles decimate the Ashaninka of the Pichis and Apurucayali rivers (Izaguirre 1922–9, 12:293).

1918: Pandemics of influenza, which affects the whole world, killing more than twenty million people, also affects the Selva Central region.

1928: Hundreds died of measles and other illnesses after gathering in the Adventist missions of the Perené River during the 1928 messianic movement (Bodley 1970: 115).

1933: Epidemics of measles attack the Yanéscha and the Ashaninka of the Upper Perené region; 120 out of the 300 neophytes in the Adventist mission of Sutziki die (Barclay 1989: 127).

1937: New outbreaks of malaria in the Chanchamayo valley and the Upper Perené region affect the Yanéscha and the Ashaninka (Ortiz 1969, 1: 543).

1939: Epidemics of measles decimate the Yanéscha and the Ashaninka of the Upper Perené region (Ortiz 1978: 196).

1948: Epidemics of measles attack the Yanéscha of the areas of Eneñas and Yurinaqui in the Upper Perené region (Barclay 1989: 126).

1956: Nonidentified epidemics attack the Yanéscha of the Yurinaqui area in the Upper Perené region (Smith 1977: 229); an epidemic of measles kills 50 percent of the Nomatsiguenga of the Upper Pangoa and Anapati regions (Ribeiro and Wise 1978: 84).

1964: Major epidemics of measles devastate the Ashaninka of the Gran Pajonal uplands (Bodley 1970: 118).

1992: Epidemics of cholera and measles affect the Ashaninka of the Lower-Perené and Ene rivers (Rodríguez Vargas 1993: 47).

10 The following is a list of the indigenous uprisings and movements of resistance between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century:

1862: Asheninkas attack colonists settled along the Chanchamayo road and the haciendas located in the environs of the San Ramón Fort (Ortiz 1978: 84).

1864: Asheninkas make more than twenty attacks to the haciendas of the Chanchamayo valley and engage in combat with the troops of the San Ramón Fort (*ibid.*).

1869: Asheninkas attack the mail carrier and its armed escort between San Ramón and the army camp of Nijandaris (Ortiz 1969, 1: 261).

1888: Attracted by the news of the appearance of an Amachegua, a white man who claimed to be the messenger of Father Sun, the Ashaninka of the Pichis and Ucayali rivers flock to the Pampas del Sacramento (Brown and Fernández 1991: 62).

1896: The Ashaninka, the Asheninka, and the Nomatsiguenga of the Perené, Tambo, and Pangoa valleys join forces to expel the priests and colonists of the Pangoa mission (Izaguirre 1922-9, 12: 112-40).

1897: Convoked by an Amachegua, a divine messenger who appeared in the Pangoa valley, the Ashaninka and the Yanéscha rise against the colonists in Chanchamayo, Cerro de la Sal, and the Perené Colony (Anales 1900, 2; Sala 1897: 100, 106, III, 114).

1898: Yanéschas of the Quillazú mission, together with those from the Palcazu River basin, attempt to expel the colonists from the Oxapampa valley (Anales 1900, 2).

1913-4: Ashaninkas attack several road camps and telegraph outposts along the Pichis trail; they burn and loot the settlement of Puerto Yessup on the Pichis River and destroy the mission of Cahuapanas on the Apurucayali River (Bodley 1972: 223).

1928: Many Asheninkas and Ashaninkas from the Perené and Tambo valleys join a religious movement inspired on the discourse of Adventist missionaries that promised the destruction of the white men and the coming of a messiah (Bodley 1970: 111-5).

1933: Asheninkas of the Perené River attack the Adventist mission of Sutuziki, killing the Asheninka converts accused of collaborating with the Peruvians and threatening to attack the air strip of San Ramón (Barclay 1989: 127).

c. 1960: The evangelical missionary Werner Bulner establishes a mission on the Ene River, attracting people from the Satipo area, who claim he is Itomi Pavá, the Son of the Sun (Brown and Fernández 1991: 76–77).

1965: Many Ashaninkas and Nomatsiguengas from the Satipo and Pangao valleys join the guerrillas of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria or Movement of Revolutionary Left (*ibid.*: 120–1).

1989–95: In the early 1980s many Ashaninkas and Yaneshas are forced to join, or join voluntarily, the ranks of the Shining Path and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement; beginning in 1989, they start organizing themselves in armed self-defense groups to expel these groups from their lands, a process that ends around 1995 (Rodríguez Vargas 1993: 27–31; Fabián Arias and Espinosa de Rivero 1997: 42).

- 11 This account is based on two versions of this myth that I recorded in 1983. Pedro Ortiz provided the first one; Espíritu Francisco provided the second. The myth of Ayots and Poporróna ends with two other episodes that I did not include here because they are not directly linked to the subject I am discussing in this article (see Santos-Granero 1991: 152, 154).
- 12 In a recent article, France-Marie Renard-Casevitz (1994: 88–95) presents a transcription of a version of the Matsiguenga myth of Pareni, Salt Lady, which is intertwined with a narrative similar to that of Ayots/Avírerí. However, she suggests that this latter myth belongs to a “different tradition” and was probably adopted as a result of trading relations with neighboring Ashaninka.
- 13 Condemned children sorcerers are sometimes buried alive in an armadillo hole (Weiss 1975: 293), an act that recalls the way Armadillo punished his brother-in-law, Ayots/Avírerí, for transforming his children into animals.
- 14 In lowland South America abundant evidence exists for Amerindian appropriations of Christian imagery, particularly with respect to the mimetic replication of ritual paraphernalia and knowledge in the context of native messianic movements (Butt Colson 1985; Wright and Hill 1986; Agüero 1994). In contrast, little has been written on the appropriation of Christian myths or mythical motifs by native Amazonian peoples and their incorporation into their own mythologies. In fact, authors studying Christian-inspired messianic movements assert the opposite, namely that such movements are an “application or practical exercise” of an indigenous myth (Carneiro da Cunha 1973) or that their structure is “organized around indigenous mythical concepts and ritual practices” (Wright and Hill 1986:). My guess is that appropriation and “Indianization” of European myths by Amerindians is much more widespread than previously thought.
- 15 A similar process took place in medieval Europe after the outbreak of the Black Plague in 1347. According to Barbara Tuchman (1984: 108–9), “St. Roch, credited with special healing powers, who had died in 1327, was the particular saint associated with the plague. . . . As his story spread and sainthood was conferred, it was believed that God would cure of the plague anyone who invoked his name. When this failed to occur, it enhanced the belief that, men having grown too wicked, God indeed intended their end. . . . In a terrible reversal,

- St. Roch and other saints now came to be considered a source of the plague, as instruments of God's wrath."
- 16 The survival of children amid generalized mortality caused a deep impression among Amerindian peoples in general. The Stó:lo of the Fraser River, Canada, have similar narratives. In one, a man comes back from a long stay in the forest only to find that an epidemic has ravaged his village: "All his kinsmen and relatives lay dead inside their homes; only in one house did there survive a baby boy, who was vainly sucking at his dead mother's breast" (Carlson 1996). In contrast with the Yanesha story, however, in the Stó:lo narratives survival is not associated with malignant powers and sorcery. In fact, survivors are seen as founding ancestors, as is indicated in another Stó:lo narrative in which a boy who was the only survivor of his village marries a girl who was the only survivor of hers.
- 17 Accusations of infantile sorcery have resurfaced with renewed strength among the Ashaninka of the Pichis, Tambo, and Ene River valleys as a result of armed confrontations, territorial displacement, and repeated epidemics brought about by the presence of guerrillas belonging to the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Fabián Arias and Espinosa de Rivero 1997: 62). In contrast, the story of Saint Christopher has been purged from Christian tradition. The Vatican considered his hagiography to be so legendary and barbaric that in 1969 it decided to eliminate Christopher from the universal calendar of the Catholic Church (Matz 1996).

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