

# Reflexes of the Cashinahuas' relationship with their environment

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## Abstract

In 2008, the Cashinahua participants of the DoBeS team in Peru resolved to carry out a study of rituals with chants and dances within the documentation program. They made a list of the fundamental rituals for social cohesion and decided to start with the fertility rite that is the most practiced by the entire group living along the border between Brazil and Peru. For this study, the authors organized workshops called «fundamental rituals», in order to work together with Cashinahua team members on the symbolism of this practice. This led the team to a series of reflections on the lyrics of the chants and on the importance of the ritual for the social and vital relationships of the group. It was in this context that they discussed about the concept of “fertility” that for them is intimately related to their environment: Abundance of food (vegetables and game from the forest) guaranteeing the survival and social stability of the Cashinahua society. This society is based on the alliance between two moieties: the descendants of the jaguar (*inu bakebu*) and the descendants of the puma (*dua bakebu*). Evidence of this conception of the world, which nowadays may already have suffered alterations due to the impact of globalization, can best be given by taking into consideration elements of the Cashinahuas' traditional culture. The analyses presented in this paper, therefore, are based on selected aspects of the fertility rite of *Katxa Nawaa* (performances as well as chants), on oral literature in the form of a central myth regarding Cashinahua cosmology, collected a century ago, and on elements in the lexicon of the Cashinahua language which are related to this subject. This text is the result of a participatory study among researchers and local collaborators who together reflected on the symbolism of the fertility ritual that shows the relationship of humans with different elements of nature.

**Keywords:** Amazonia; Cashinahua; DoBeS; mythology; environment; Panoan; rituals.

## Résumé

En 2008, les participants Cachinawa (Pérou) du projet de documentation DoBeS ont décidé de réaliser une étude sur les rituels dansés et chantés. Dans cette perspective, ces derniers ont dressé une liste des rituels essentiels à la cohésion sociale avant de s'arrêter pour commencer sur le rituel de fertilité, rite encore très pratiqué par la communauté de part et d'autre de la frontière entre le Brésil et le Pérou. Nous avons organisé des ateliers appelés « rituels fondamentaux » afin de travailler avec l'équipe cachinawa sur la symbolique de cette pratique, des ateliers qui ont donné lieu à des riches discussions sur le sens des chants et sur l'importance du rituel pour les relations sociales du groupe. Nous avons échangé en particulier autour de la « fertilité », un concept intimement lié à l'environnement cachinawa, l'abondance de nourriture (végétaux et gibier) garantissant la survie de la communauté comme la stabilité sociale de leur société qui est construite sur l'alliance de deux moitiés : les descendants du jaguar (*inu bakebu*) et les descendants du puma (*dua bakebu*). Bien qu'altérée par la globalisation, cette conception du monde s'observe encore dans des éléments de la culture traditionnelle cachinawa. Les analyses ici présentées s'appuient sur certains aspects du rite de fertilité appelé *katxanawaa* (les danses comme les chants en particulier), la littérature orale et notamment un mythe sur la cosmologie recueilli il y a un peu plus d'un siècle, ainsi que sur des éléments lexicographiques. Ce texte est également le résultat d'une étude participative entre des chercheurs et des collaborateurs cachinawa à travers leurs réflexions communes sur la symbolique d'un rituel de fertilité témoignant des relations de l'homme avec son environnement naturel.

### Mots-clés:

Cachinawa;  
Pano; Amazonie;  
mythologie;  
environnement;  
rituels; DoBeS.

## Introduction

The concept of “nature” in human societies is relative and largely depends on the specific relation between people and their respective natural environment. The world of material objects, especially in the form of industrialized products, has contributed to a great extent to changes in the world perception of many societies where subsistence now relies less on natural products and more on manufactured articles, and the associated values. This can also be observed in indigenous populations of the Amazon who, until more recently, had only limited access to industrialized products and who have experienced a drastic intensification in their relationship with industrial societies and their technology.

Since the Cashinahuas' first contacts with Europeans in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, manufactured products have found their way into these peoples' everyday lives; replacing objects of their own traditional culture: body-painting was replaced by clothes, stone-axes by metal-axes, knives made of bamboo by aluminium ones, bows and arrows by firearms, etc. In pre-Columbian times migrations were caused by conflicts (within or outside the groups) or epidemics, or motivated by the search for food. In post-Columbian times migrations in search of better life conditions have become not only more frequent but more threatening for the survival of these populations, because in the past there had been times of armistice when peace-treaties with indigenous enemies were consolidated, whereas nowadays there is no space for negotiations or treaties in the relation between an autochthonous minority group and industrial society.

As a matter of fact, humans always have a modifying influence on the environment, and indigenous peoples of the Amazon, too, cannot be called natural “ecologists” as the myth of the “noble savage” still prevalent in the minds of some people may suggest. However, it cannot be denied that – in this age of industrialization and globalization – many of the changes which have occurred in recent times (e.g. deforestation, construction of roads and hydroelectric power plants, illegal gold-seeking, mining with unsustainable methods) were caused by interests from outside the indigenous world and have had a radical and devastating impact on a broad scale.

We thank all Cashinahua DoBeS team members (Alberto Roque Toribio (Mudu), student of intercultural studies in Pucallpa, has been the Cashinahua coordinator of the DoBeS project. Further team members were Ercilia Shuarez, Gilson de Lima, Joaquin Cumapa, Juan Torres, Marcelino Piñedo, Nelson Camilo, Noeda Puricho, Texerino Kirino. With Jacob Torres (Peru) and Iban Sales (Brazil), we could talk about sustainable development in their area.). Kawá Noel Sales, a Cashinahua from the Jordão River, for sharing his insights on the ritual of fertility as well as the anonymous peer reviewers for their suggestions related to this text. We also thank Diego Villar and Philippe Erikson, anthropologists and specialists in Panoan culture. Between 2008 and 2010, part of this study had the support of IFEA, in Lima, and of representatives from Alto Purús National Park (Parque Nacional Alto Purús) and Reserva Comunal Purús, in Puerto Esperanza (Peru).



Changing perceptions of natural environments might also have been triggered by the absence of any possibility for reaching (even temporarily) a satisfying condition according to their own logics, as had characterized the past of these indigenous groups, as well as by growing awareness of being cornered by a national society, leaving no space for self-expression<sup>1</sup>. Socioeconomic changes have occurred at all times in all places, but what distinguishes the changes brought about by industrial societies in the Amazonian lowlands from similar situations in many other places is the degree to which these changes have affected the socio-cultural and linguistic behaviour of the minority groups living in these surroundings.

Owing to the presence of Christian groups of various confessions, the belief systems of these populations have also undergone certain changes. While some groups have lost a major part of their traditional culture and new generations cultivate a nostalgic view of the past, others have kept some of the rituals which continue to express a certain world view. They are, however, often practiced in a more covert fashion than in earlier times, in order to protect the traditional knowledge against a surrounding dominant culture according to which certain concepts, e.g. the treatment of elements of nature and humans as elements of the same category, may appear ridiculous. Although other autochthonous groups in turn may have abandoned specific manifestations of cultural practices, such as chants or dances, they have retained and passed on their knowledge.

The national education system, which has found its way into each indigenous village mostly in the form of bilingual schools, has also had a rather negative influence on the traditional culture. Neither in Brazil nor in Peru are these schools adapted to the local socio-cultural and linguistic reality, even though in Brazil a concept of “differential education” was especially applied to this purpose (Grupioni, 2009). Unfortunately, it departs from a view on knowledge and knowledge transmission which is based on national models of cognitive conceptualization and thus opposes the view of most Amazonian peoples and contributes substantially to the changes in the world view of the younger generations. It must be added, however, that more recently some of these younger adults with a formal education, in realizing the threat of the national system to their own cultural identity, have started to

1. In fact, in some places a space for self-expression has been granted to members of such groups. In Brazil a constant growing number of young members of indigenous communities have access to gatherings in the political as well as the academic sphere where they can express their concerns and where their voices are heard. While such gatherings take place at national level, the same indigenous peoples, however, continue to have hardly any political influence in their own regions.

capture the knowledge still vital in the memory of old community members as well as made efforts to revitalize cultural traditions which have come into disuse.

In this context the question arises whether the motivation for such efforts has come from within the minority groups or whether their own “revalorization” of their native cultures is not an effect of the global demand for documenting and preserving these as part of the world cultural heritage, often remunerated or offers certain advantages (e.g. better health care) to representatives of such “traditional” populations. In Brazil, the tendency for revalorization has led to the integration of “ethnic” elements (e.g. rattles) into Cashinahua rituals which are clearly adapted from other indigenous groups. Another example of this kind of generic indigenization can be found in the new habit of Brazilian Cashinahua authorities to attend meetings in town with feather adornments and dressed in a *sanpu*, a kind of tunic which was used in rituals by the “living representative of ancestral knowledge”.

The Cashinahua ethics with respect to their natural environment are still clearly influenced by their own ethnic traditions which, however, did not have the opportunity to evolve and adapt to the norms of modern, industrialized societies. The Cashinahuas have learned to live with two cultural systems, on the one hand continuing with their own way of living and their own concepts, on the other taking over models from the respective national societies. Thus, in Peru their usual ways of transmitting oral literature, the celebration rituals and the authority of their traditional village chiefs continue to exist, alongside the national education system in the village schools, a political structuring of the villages by outsiders<sup>2</sup> and the adoption of urban standards in town.

The Cashinahuas accept national environmental programs for breeding water turtles in captivity, in order to protect endangered species by temporarily changing their hunting practices. However, when asked to breed cattle or poultry for their own food supply, they do so but prefer to sell these animals for money and continue to eat game as they always did. They even follow guidelines which do not make any sense for them, such as taking the advice of agronomic engineers to cultivate their land, even though during centuries they have developed their own effective methods to exploit the soil. Like many Amazonian peoples they can easily be persuaded to accept any measure, as long as

2. In 1999, representatives of the local government of Ucayali appointed new political leaders, mostly young men, for each of the Cashinahua villages.

they financially profit from it, and if they do not, they as readily abandon such enterprises: they used to collaborate with Peruvian loggers and stopped cutting trees on a large scale, when they perceived that they would never be paid. But even though they cooperate with one interest group or the other, they have not developed a western attitude of either protecting or exploiting their natural environment and continue to conceptualize the world along their own categories. This also manifests itself in their attitude towards non-decomposable waste: since their traditional materials decay, it is difficult for many of them – even today – to grasp that plastic or batteries do not disintegrate and can even be toxic.

The efforts made by the group to preserve their indigenous identity will also be presented in this paper. In the following analysis special emphasis will be given to the original relationship between this ethnic group and their environment which is still expressed in the structural elements of traditional rituals, in their chanting, their oral literature and even in the lexicon of the Cashinahua language<sup>3</sup>.

The article is structured as follows: In sections 1 and 2 some ethnographic and linguistic information will be given in order to then focus on cultural manifestations of the group's relationship with their environment. Aspects of the fertility ritual<sup>4</sup> are highlighted, considering several of the chants in section 3, as well as some linguistic considerations, in section 4, around the term *ba*, roughly meaning 'to generate'.

## 1. Ethnographic information<sup>5</sup>

The Cashinahua ethnic group consists of about 10,000 individuals.<sup>6</sup> They live in a vast territory in the Brazilian-Peruvian border region, in the Juruá and Purus river basins. The Cashinahua language belongs to the Panoan language family, all remaining members of which are geographically concentrated in the border triangle of Brazil, Peru and Bolivia.<sup>7</sup>

Like a number of other Panoan groups, too, the Cashinahuas use the self-denomination *Huni Kuin*, often erroneously translated as "real people". Therefore, it seems important to analyze this so-called "self-denomination" of the group. *Kuin* is an epithet that does not seem to be translatable to any other indigenous language. Together with its negation form *kuinma* (*kuin-ma*), it is a kind of symmetrical operator

3. Most of the data presented here are from their research among the Cashinahuas of Peru and Brazil during the DoBeS project "Documentation of Cashinahua" (2006-2011) which was financed by the Volkswagen Foundation. A second project on Cashinahua rites involving chanting and dancing was financed by a grant Legs Lelong du CNRS and by the Foundation of Endangered Languages.

4. The Cashinahua group is well studied and represented in anthropological literature. The fertility rite has been the subject of anthropological studies (see Kensingler 1995; Keifenheim & Deshayes, 1994; McCallum 1989; Lagrou 1998, 2007). To this text adds previously unpublished translations of part of the chants, which led us to obtain new ethnological information on how the group is inserted in their cosmology, connected with the celestial world and their land, with its fertility (animal and non-animal) linked to the *Inca* world.

5. The first-hand data have been collected along Camargo's several fieldwork trips, and most of them were discussed within the team of the DoBeS documentation project.

6. 790 of them live in Peru (INEI, 2017).

7. Currently, about twenty Panoan groups share a continuous territory between Peru, where most of them live, followed by Brazil and Bolivia (Fleck, 2013; Oliveira, 2014).

that adapts to the social context of use (see Camargo & Villar, 2013; Camargo, 2020). When a Cashinahua uses the term *Huni Kuin* in his community, he or she focuses on the collective relation to other Cashinahua communities. If he or she refers to the whole of Cashinahua society in relation to other Amerindian societies, the Cashinahuas are *Huni kuin* and the others are *huni kuinma*. However, if he or she refers to different Amerindian societies in relation to the regional or national society, all the Amerindian societies concerned would be *Huni kuin(bu)* in relation to the society that represents otherness: *nawa(bu)*. This is symmetrical to what happens on the Western side, which would see itself as *Huni Kuin* against Native American societies, including the Cashinahuas, which would accordingly be *nawa*. There is no other synonymous term. Lagrou (2012: 3) suggests that *Huni keneya* is a self-denomination by misinterpretation: *Huni keneya* designates only “the one who has graphisms’ attribution”.

Until the end of the 1990s, the Portuguese speaking Cashinahuas introduced themselves as ‘Cashinahua’ but, when speaking in their language, they said, for example, *En huni kuinki, Pudus anu en hiweaki* “I am *huni kuin* (= Cashinahua). I live along the Purus River”. It was only through the mediation by outsiders in search of a native form of self-denomination that the Cashinahuas mentioned *huni kuin* as a Cashinahua equivalent in their language.

Since the 1990s, the group adopted the expression with the symmetrical operator in order to mark a so-called “authentic identity” with an “Amerindian” name, given that “Cashinahua” was probably not “native enough” for the foreign researchers. The use of this expression of self-denomination thus is another example of the group’s ability to adapt to the expectations of (inter)national society: “Real Native Americans with a real native name”.

Cashinahua society is characterized by its dualism, i.e. two social moieties complement each other: the *dua bakebu*, the descendents of the *dua* (representing the puma), and the *inu bakebu*, the descendents of the *inu* (representing the spotted jaguar). An ideal village consists of *inu* and *dua* families, whereby the ideal of social cohesion is based upon two brothers-in-law *inu* and *dua*, preferably cross-cousins, marrying each other’s sisters. Women of the *inu* moiety, the *inani*, ideally get married to *dua* men, while the *banu*, the women of the *dua* moiety,



figure 1. Territory inhabited by the Cashinahua ethnic population.

ideally have *inu* men as husbands. These alliances form the base for a social equilibrium, as will be further outlined in the context of the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual in section 3.

The Cashinahuas are hunters, gatherers and farmers. In their plantations they produce a broad variety of fruit and agricultural crops, such as (sweet) cassava, corn, banana, peanuts, beans, different types of yam, sweet potato, pumpkin and pineapple.

The Cashinahuas' first contacts with the emerging national societies of Brazil and Peru, which had partitioned their home territory, were rather violent and took place during the period of the Brazilian rubber boom in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Montag, 2008 [2006]; Iglesias, 2008; Cordoba & Villar, 2015; ISA site). Their villages were destroyed, families torn apart, their land turned into rubber plantations. Their lives changed radically under the influence and command of the non-indigenous workers and the owners of the plantations, who confronted them with a new socioeconomic system which was very different from their own way of being and acting in the world and their own perspective on life. In the 1920s, in order to escape the violence exerted on them in the rubber plantations, a group of Cashinahuas fled into the forest where they set forth their traditional way of life, retaining, however, from their experience as plantation workers the use of metal tools and shotguns. This part of the Cashinahua population will be focused on here, because each of the areas where Cashinahua communities currently live has its own history and consequences for the indigenous culture, and it was mostly the descendants of these "Peruvian" Cashinahuas who supplied the information presented in this paper.

For about two decades the members of this group were living along the river Xapuya in Peru (near the headwaters of the river Curanja)<sup>8</sup>. Then – by the end of the 1940s – they entered in contact with other Panoan groups who, for their part, were in touch with Peruvian loggers. This inner-Panoan contact led to epidemics and further contacts of this Cashinahua group with loggers, researchers and missionaries.<sup>9</sup> Little by little they started again to put on industrialized clothing. Under the influence of omnipresent missionaries, they started to wear industrialized clothes again. In addition, they were confronted with the Bible and had to accept various prohibitions regarding elements of their traditional culture that – according to the missionaries – did not conform to a Christian way of life: they had to give up singing and dancing in their traditional way, smoking tobacco (a fundamental element of a shamanic society) and polygamous marriages and were rewarded with food and medicine. In this same period the first trade posts for merchandise (industrial goods and alcohol in exchange for meat and furs) opened in the area.

In the Peruvian Purus area, in the 1960s the missionaries founded the first Cashinahua schools and started to produce bilingual educational material, as a sort of by-product to the translation, in progress at that time, of the New Testament.<sup>10</sup> During the 1980s, when the Bible translation was almost concluded, fundamental rituals, by which the socio-cultural history of the Cashinahua group was traditionally passed on to the next generation (the category of *Txidim* rituals<sup>11</sup>) and which were formerly used to strengthen their social cohesion (*Nixpu Pimaa*, initiation ritual), had come into disuse. Today, of the *Txidim* rituals there are only memories, some old people sing passages, and generally do not know their meaning anymore, while *Nixpu Pimaa* has been converted from a collective feast into an event practiced almost in private. As a consequence, many young people nowadays participate in the chanting as a collective event without understanding the meaning of the words and the cultural significance. The only ritual which has survived the cultural pressure from outside is *Katxa Nawaa*, a fertility rite, which is regionally known by the name of Mariri.<sup>12</sup> This ritual celebrates in various aspects the foundations of the Cashinahua society as a permanently renewed contract between allies and in this context also manifests a specific relation of this autochthonous group with “nature”, centered on the concept of “fertility”.

8. See figure 1.

9. Among the latter two are the Brazilian photographer Harald Schultz, who visited the Cashinahuas in 1951, the ethnographer Kenneth Kensinger from the mid 1950s onward, and several SIL-linguists (Robert Cromack, Richard and Susan Montag, among others).

10. Montag, 1980, 2008 [1980]: 7.

11. These are composed of four rituals: *pia atxia* ‘taking the arrows’, *buxka waa* ‘headhunting’, *buna waa* ‘honey porridge’, *xanen matsi waa* ‘cooling the (body of) *xanen*’ (Camargo & Villar, 2013: 44, footnote 8).

12. In quechua, *mariri* means phlegm. For further information on this ritual, see Deshayes & Keifenheim 1994; McCallum, 1989, 2001 and Lagrou, 2007.



## 2. A brief introduction to the Cashinahua language

It follows a very short introduction to the Cashinahua language<sup>13</sup> as a guide to the reader who will find statements in this language later on.

### General information

The **phonological system**<sup>14</sup> of this Panoan language is composed of four vowels (a /a/, i /i/, e /ɛ/, u /u/). There is no nasal vowel, but all vowels can be nasalized. This language has fourteen consonants (p /p/, b /b/, t /t/, d /d/, y /ɟ/, tx /c/, k /k/, s /s/, x /ɣ/, h /h/, ts /ts/, m /m/, n /n/, w /w/).<sup>15</sup> Nasality is a current and complex phenomenon.

From the point of view of general typology, it is a head-final and suffixing language. The order of arguments is SOV, and the change in their placement around the verb is indicated by a topicalizer, *-dan*. Lexical categories are nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs; however, the verb-noun opposition is not very clear-cut. Syntactic functions are mostly indicated by suffixes. For example, the noun *inu* 'jaguar' has a nominal function in a nominal group, as shown in (1a):

1a. *Inu-n kaman keyuaki.* 'The jaguar ate a dog.'

But when it receives a suffix of aspectual state, *-ai*, it becomes the predicate of the sentence, as in (1b):

1b. *En inu*ai*.* 'I am turning into a jaguar (change of state).'

It can also receive the present participle *-i* or the past participle *-a*, as in (2)a and b:

2a. *Inu*i** 'He/she turns into a jaguar.'

2b. *Inu*a** 'He/she turned into a jaguar.'

Many suffixes are multifunctional. For example *-n* can mark the agent of a transitive verb as well as different morphological cases: the genitive, the vocative, the locative and a kind of instrumental.

The Cashinahua language presents some typological facts which are not well-known in general linguistics. One is the movement system indicated by verbal suffixes. They reveal more than twenty ways to move around in space (study in progress). The language further does not have copular verbs or determiners. No grammatical gender

13. Camargo, 1998, 2003a-b, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2018b; Cromack, 1963, 1975; Montag, 1968.

14. Camargo, 1993.

15. Letters without any further indications are graphemes.

is marked in nouns, and natural gender on humans is marked lexically by addition of *huni* ('man') or *ainbu* ('woman'), and for animals by *bene* ('male') or *yuxan* ('female').

The Cashinahua **syntactic system** is characterized by a split system<sup>16</sup>: a) nouns, 3rd person plural pronouns and the interrogative pronoun (*tsua* 'who') are marked as ergative-absolutive; b) 1st and 2nd person singular and plural pronouns are marked as nominative-accusative and c) 3rd person plural pronouns are marked as neuter.

	INTRANSITIVE	TRANSITIVE
SUBJECT	N-∅	N-n
OBJECT		N-∅

table 1. Ergative-absolutive system.

With regard to **personal pronouns**, the Cashinahua language has got tonic pronouns as well as pronouns to mark subjects and objects. The system recognizes a kind of "fourth person", represented by the pronoun *hatu*, which is a kind of extraction operator. It represents the 3rd person invariable in number. Tables II and III are presented here in order to explain the pronouns used in examples (3) and (4).

NUMBER →	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
Person ↓	Intransitive	Transitive	Intransitive	Transitive
1.	<i>ea</i>	<i>ean</i>	<i>nuku</i>	<i>nukun</i>
2.	<i>mia</i>	<i>mian</i>	<i>matu</i>	<i>matun</i>
3.	<i>ha</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>habu</i>	<i>habun</i>
4.	<i>hatu</i>	<i>hatun</i>	<i>hatu</i>	<i>hatun</i>

table 2. Tonic pronouns.

NUMBER →	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
Person ↓	Intransitive	Transitive	Intransitive	Transitive
1.	<i>en</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>nun</i>	<i>nun</i>
2.	<i>min</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>man</i>
3.	<i>ha</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>habu</i>	<i>habun</i>
4.	<i>hatu</i>	<i>hatun</i>	<i>hatu</i>	<i>hatun</i>

table 3. Subject pronouns.

3. *En bunikindan, ean dukun, en pikeanxuki.*

I'm hungry, I myself, I should have eaten.

4. *Hanua yami nawa bexun, hatu kexexun, hatu tsakaabu hatu tsakaabudi.*



Then, the people *Yami* came and one of them (= *hatu*) hid, so they (the group = *hatu*) could kill them (*hatu* = an indigenous people who everybody knows).

**Mood, tense and aspect.** There are different moods: indicative, imperative and infinitive could be identified. There are different tense-aspect-categories in the indicative mood (see table IV, below). In the imperative there are two suffixes *-we* and *-wa*, used to express an order, differing in their degree of formality.

**The tense-aspect system.** In Cashinahua, tense and aspect are one grammatical category. It expresses how an action, event or state, denoted by a verb, extends over time. It distinguishes, for example, an ongoing action (progressive aspect, *-ai*) from a repetitive action (habitual aspect, *-mis*):

- 5a. *En nami pi*ai*.*            I am eating meat.            (progressive)
- 5b. *En nami pi*mis**            I use to eat meat.            (habitual)

In example (5a), the process expressed by the verb is marked as incomplete by *-ai*. Two different aspectual categories are distinguished by accent. The progressive *-ai* in (6a) is marked by a paroxytone accent [pi'ej] 'to be eating', the near future or intentional *-ai* in (6b) is marked by an oxytone accent [pia'i] 'be going to eat':

- 6a. *En baka pi*ai* [pi'ej]*    I'm eating fish.            (progressive)
- 6b. *En pi*ai* [pia'i]*            I'm going to eat fish.      (near future)

In actions, events and states already realized, the tense-aspect system of Cashinahua is intimately linked to space. The language differentiates between accomplished and achieved actions, events and states which are spatially divided into proximal, medial and distal:

TENSE-ASPECT ↓   SPACE →	DISTAL	MEDIAL	PROXIMAL
accomplished	<i>-ni</i>	<i>-ima</i>	<i>-a</i>
achieved	<i>-pauni</i>	<i>-yama</i>	<i>-xu</i>

table 4. Ergative-absolutive system.

The aspectual suffix *-xu* which expresses a proximal-achievement, can also be interpreted like a preterite. In Cashinahua, it describes actions, events or states that happened or took place on the day on which the speaker talks, as in (7a):

7a. *En huxuki (penama)*. I arrived (simple past, preterite)  
(this morning).

7b. *En huaki*. I've arrived. (present perfect)

The aspectual suffix *-ni* approaches an aorist which represents indeterminate time, independently of any notion of duration:

8. *En pixin danka atana nuin hikikainni, kiaki*.

'It is said that when I pulled the mat the worm disappeared (inside the hole).'

(Inanwan myth).

The Cashinahuas seem to conceive of time with a temporal subjectivism. If considering a fact that happened yesterday, for instance, the speaker is expected to use the proximal-accomplished suffix *-a* (9a). But if she feels the death of her husband as a relief, she may well mark this fact by a medial-accomplished marker *-ima* (9b), or even by an indefinite past *-ni* (the aorist, 9c). This often requires the interlocutor to have prior knowledge of the communicative situation:

9a. *En bene mawaxinaki*. My husband has died (last night).

9b. *En bene mawaimaki*. My husband died.

9c. *En bene mawaniki*. My husband died a long time ago.

This language has a temporal morpheme, *-xin*, which indicates (a) an action, an event or a state performed in the previous night(s) followed by the suffix *-a*, the proximal-accomplished (9a), or (b) an action, an event or a state to take place from the night of the day on which the speaker expresses himself or in the following nights. In this case it is followed by the form of unaccomplished events *-ai* (10):

10. *En bene mawaxinai*. My husband is going to die (tonight).

The use of this morpheme marks an important difference in spatio-temporal semantics: for accomplished actions, events or states it means that they took place at night or during the previous days, being night or day. But, for the time to come, it specifies that the action, event or state takes place only at night.

**Number.** Cashinahua has two plural suffixes, *-bu* and *-kan*. The suffix *-bu* can be attached to nouns and verbs, whereas *-kan* can only be suffixed to verbs.

**Ideophones.** Ideophones are a very common linguistic phenomenon in native American languages. Their use in Cashinahua discourse and in chants is very productive. They usually consist of one or two syllables and are often reduplicated. Most ideophones depict a sound or a movement.

17. The examples can be found in the DoBeS archive.

11. (JC\_Heu\_yuxibu)<sup>17</sup>

*Ha txaima uinma, yoooooooo, hawen beunhene buanidan.*

'He looked close [to the fire], (IDEO gush.out), his tears started to come out.'

12. (JC\_Heu\_yuxibu)

*Tsanka pen pen dik.*

(IDEO hit.with.arrow) (IDEO move.wings) (IDEO grab)

'He hit it with his arrow, [the curassow] flapped its wings, he grabbed it.'

One form, varying in rhythm, vowel lengthening and reduplication, can have different meanings. Ideophones grammaticalize into periphrastic verb constructions by means of two verbalizers: *i(k)*- for intransitives (13a) and *a(k)*- for transitives(13b):

13.a. (MB\_Inkaki\_bai\_buni)

*Txaix iki.*

'He stepped on a dry twig.'

As shown in (13b), the verbalizers can take other verbal suffixes:

13b. (MB\_Inkaki\_bai\_buni)

*Xaun xaun abainkin keyutan.*

'He was chewing, stopped.'

Most ideophones, even when occurring with a complex verbalizer as in (13b), are pronounced with marked prosody.

### 3. Cultural manifestations of the relation between the Cashinahuas and their "natural environment"

The relation between human beings and their natural environment is reflected in different elements of the Cashinahua culture. As will be shown in more detail further down, the Cashinahuas' perspective on this relation is, in some aspects, biocentric and, in others, cosmocentric.

A biocentric attitude manifests itself in the interdependency between human fertility and that of plants which is expressed in the ritual of *Katxa Nawaa*<sup>18</sup>. The existence of *yuxins*, supernatural beings of the forest that need to be respected and called upon by ritual, is another manifestation.

Cosmocentrism can be found in the *Katxa Nawaa* chants<sup>19</sup> (in section 3.1), by which, in the celestial world, the Inca is asked to send the seeds of the plants for a good harvest. The myth *The cataclysm* in section 3.2 is also clear evidence for a cosmocentric perspective: earth is linked by a 'column' to a celestial world, the place of the Incas and of the Cashinahuas who have died. Earth is further described as having the capacity to turn into sky what happens at the time of the cataclysm. During this period all life is wiped out on earth and starts again in the celestial world which then 'reverses' and turns into earth. This suggests that the process described here is cyclical.

The approach of the Cashinahuas towards their natural environment may primarily be characterized as symbiotic: If the crops grow in abundance, they can reproduce. And if the great flood kills all the animals and plants on earth, they, too, cannot survive. Traditionally, the Cashinahuas were hunting and cultivating the soil for their personal use. Only in more recent times the growing need for financial resources in order to buy industrial products has led them to kill game to sell it to the fur traders or to cut trees on behalf of the logger industry.

Elements of an integrationalist approach<sup>20</sup> can also be found in that the Cashinahuas believe that in earlier times of "indifferentiation", people and animals could freely communicate and were all one or could easily change form. There are various myths in which a Cashinahua turns into an animal or the *yuxin* of an animal assumes a human appearance and marries with a Cashinahua (Abreu, 2017).<sup>21</sup> This suggests that human beings are not considered to be in a superior position on a hierarchy but just one of many forms of existence on earth.

While an expression of the human-environment relationship is relatively straightforward in the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual, reflexes of it can also be found in oral literature and in the structure of the Cashinahua language. Corroborative evidences will be given in the following three subsections.

18. *Katxa nawa* is the most common transcription of this ritual in anthropological literature. However, in a paradigm of other rituals like *pia atxia* 'taking arrows', *mawa nitxina* 'sending the dead', the verb is in the past participle, marked by the suffix *-a*. Thus, *katxa nawaa* is interpreted as 'the dance of the *katxa*'.

19. The Cashinahua terms for this kind of singing are taken from Kensingler, adapted to the current orthography.

20. Cashinahuas see many of the elements of nature (mineral, vegetable, animal) as animated elements. In the case of a tree being cut, it does not lose its plant-animated property. A piece of wood transformed into an arrowhead can express its "feeling" of contentment if it is hunting or its sadness if it does not hunt, as it feeds on blood (see Camargo; Wajana & Toribio (Mudu), 2018a).

21. See chapters IX and X.

### 3.1 Evidence from ritual: The fertility rite of *Katxa Nawaa*

Twice a year, in April, when the first peanuts are planted on the beaches and corn is sown further inland, as well as towards the end of plantation after mid-September, the chief (*xanen ibu*) or another man in a position of authority<sup>22</sup> organizes the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual in order to “call” the agricultural products, an activity which in Cashinahua culture is known as *yunu kenakindan*.<sup>23</sup> The first *Katxa Nawaa* is celebrated to motivate the Incas<sup>24</sup> in the celestial world to give the seeds and seedlings of their crops to the community, the second to make them provide for a good harvest, i.e. fruit and vegetables in abundance.

The paxiuba (*tau*) palm plays a central role in this fertility rite. This pinnate-leaved palm species (*Iriarteia exorrhiza*) has got a male and a female variant, the latter of which displays a “belly” (*tau pustu*), which during the preparation of the feast is cut off and brought to the village centre, where it is transformed into the *katxa* of the feast. The female tree with its natural bulge resembling the belly of a pregnant woman is considered a representation of fertility in the vegetable realm.<sup>25</sup>



figure 2. *Tau* - Paxiuba palm © Mudu 2012.

22. Traditionally, only the chief was responsible for the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual (cf. GT\_Katxa\_Nawa in the DoBeS Cashinahua Archive). Nowadays, the feast can also be organized by school teachers or other men holding modern government remunerated positions.

23. *yunu* - (edible) plant; *kena* - to call.

24. The “Incas” in this context are not to be confused with the Incas of the Andes (see further down).

25. A woman, when referring to pregnancy, can express this by using the same word *pustu* (‘belly’) with an adjectival suffix *-ya*: *en pustuya* ‘I’m pregnant (lit. bellied)’.



This perceived correspondence between the female tree and a human female is further reflected in the *Katxa Nawaa* chanting in that first the crops are called, enunciating each type of vegetable which is planted in the fields, then the game, and right afterwards the children (*bake kenakindan*).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the *bake kena* melody differs from the other chants. Sung at dawn, the lyrics remind of the fact that all women listen to the song in order to procreate. Men have to be like flies. They have to 'work inside the woman' by quickly laying and spreading their larvae. The songs, which represent the *yuxin* language, carry the *yuxin* essence of being that animates the body (Camargo & Villar, forthcoming).

The remainder of this subsection is divided into two parts. In the first part individual phases of the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual will be described and analysed in their cultural significance, whereby a chronological order will be followed as far as this is possible. This first part also includes the research done by a team of four young Peruvian Cashinahua collaborators.<sup>27</sup> In 2010, the young people chose *Katxa Nawaa* as a subject of study, after they had realized that the way the ritual is performed nowadays in their villages differs considerably from the description of this ritual in a 100-year-old Cashinahua text collection assembled and first published in 1914 by the Brazilian historian Capistrano de Abreu (1941).<sup>28</sup> They interviewed older community members and contrasted this information with their own fragmented knowledge. Statements given and collected by this native-speaker team will be reproduced here in their original wording which is followed

26. *bake* – child.

27. See footnote 1.

28. See 95-99, *Dança da paxiúba barriguda*.



figure 3. *Katxa bianamekanikiki* – Arrival of one of the groups of participants (in this case de descendents of the *dua*). © ECamargo 1994.



figure 4. *Katxa nawakanikiki* – Dance of the *katxa*. © Jakob Torres 2011.



figure 5. Oficina de trabalho - Juan and Agustin consult the pages about rituals in Capistrano de Abreu's book. © ECamargo 2012.

by English translations. The second part of this subsection is an analysis of a selection of *Katxa Nawaa* song texts which were collected by Camargo on different occasions during a period of almost 30 years from various older members of the Peruvian Cashinahua community.

### Aspects of the ritual and evaluation

During the different phases of *Katxa Nawaa* the moieties of the Cashinahua society come together as separate groups, thus demonstrating alliances which represent fertility in two senses: in terms of human reproduction – members of one moiety usually marry





figure 6. Workshop –Cashinahua study group interviewing a female expert on *katxa* songs. © ECamargo 2012.

members of the other – as well as in terms of agricultural productivity.

A first aspect to be explored in this context is the significance of foodstuff for the stability of the Cashinahua society:

In preparation of the feast women produce large quantities of *mabex*, a fermented drink made of (sweet) cassava, corn or roasted peanuts, while men, responsible for the provision of meat, start out for hunting trips.

Men and women in Cashinahua society generally have gender-specific tasks which complement each other. In some cases, husband and wife work together, e.g. when a new field needs to be found. Together they choose the place, and while the husband uses physical force, felling trees and fire-clearing the place, the wife does the *he ika* chanting, by which she solicits the spirits of the forest for assistance of her husband's work and for fertile soil. After the more energy-sapping part of the work is done, both man and woman clear the soil from remaining shrubs to prepare it for plantation which is also done together. These activities related to food production may thus be interpreted as a union of male and female forces with the vegetable which assures the alimentary and social stability of the group.

Foodstuff plays a major role in the establishment and maintenance of social relations since it allows for social exchange between brothers- and sisters-in-law: they present each other with their hunted game and invite each other's families to eat together. Consequently, the absence of food becomes a social defi-



ciency due to the fact that the exchange system cannot be upheld. This shows that food, although primarily meant for domestic consumption within a nuclear family (*nabi*), also consolidates the extended family (*nabu*) relations.

This social productivity is especially echoed in the socio-political relation between brothers-in-law, who, after returning from their respective hunting-trips, offer their kill to each other, while sisters-in-law (*tsabebu*), equally belonging to opposed moieties,<sup>29</sup> show their solidarity with one another in that they subsequently prepare the game hunted by the respective other one's husband. This is expressed by Manuel Kirino:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Ainbu katxa nawaa: Banu bake, Inani bake.</i>     | The <i>Katxa Nawa</i> feast of the woman: daughter(s) of <i>Banu</i> and daughter(s) of <i>Inani</i> . |
| <i>Banu katxa nawaa, inaniki txanikanikiki.</i>      | The <i>Katxa Nawa</i> feast of <i>Banu</i> , (descendants of) <i>Inani</i> are invited.                |
| <i>Inani katxa nawaa, Banu bakeki txanikanikiki.</i> | The <i>Katxa Nawa</i> feast of <i>Inani</i> , (descendants of) <i>Banu</i> are invited.                |

The sisters-in-law then invite each other to participate in the meal which generally consists of a combination of meat (*nami*) with agricultural products (*yunu*), cooked cassava (*atsa hua*) and/ or cooked green banana (*mani hua*), and which is accompanied by *mabex*. The communal work of men and women during food preparation and the collective eating thus reflect and at the same time consolidate the social relations. In this ritual exchange of food and drink during *Katxa Nawaa*, abundance indicates a high political status of the organizer of the feast.

Another important moment of the ritual is when the *katxa*, i.e. the “belly” of the paxiuba, is cut in the forest one day before the already described exchange of food and the subsequent ritual dancing and singing of which it is the centre.<sup>30</sup> It is put in front of the chief's house, where it is prepared for the feast. A cavity is carved into the middle of the “belly”, as if representing its mouth. Two stacks are put over each side of the opening, which are held together by a cotton thread. Over these different kinds of pendants – charms and fruits/ vegetables (e.g. bananas) – are hung to signal good luck for the agricultural production.

29. Since children always belong to the moiety of their fathers, a woman and her brother's wife (ideally) belong to different moieties. The term *tsabebu* generally refers to the relation between women of different moieties who belong to the same generation.

30. Note that the time periods between the different phases of the ritual were more extended in the past, as can be observed when comparing the descriptions of the event as made by Kensinger or Deshayes/ Keifenheim with more recent realizations of *Katxa Nawa*.

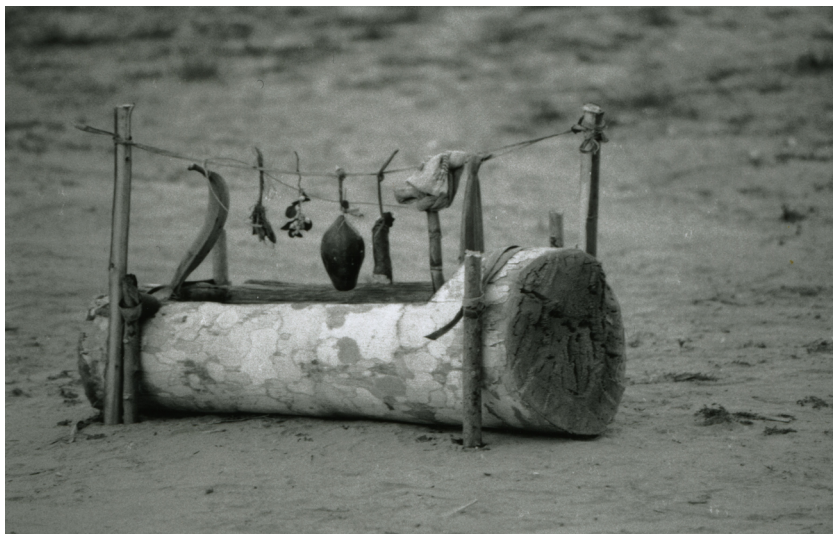


figure 7. *Katxa daka yunu nexaabu* - Vegetables (agricultural products) tied to the *katxa*. ©

31. See Abreu (1941: 99, footnote). Kensinger assumes that the nausea of the dancers was caused by their continuous circling around the *katxa.d*.

The *katxa*, which is also known as *katxa hana* ('vomit of the *katxa*'), was originally made as a vessel for the vomit of the participants of the ritual after ingesting the abundance of food and drink, representing a surplus of agricultural production (Abreu, 1941<sup>31</sup>; Kensinger, 1995: 59). Nowadays, the ritual vomiting is no longer practiced, as is suggested by the usage of the tense-aspect suffix *-pauni*, signaling remote past (that is distal-achievement), in the following utterance given by a Cashinahua consultant in 2010:

Yani watan ixuni ipaunibuki, In the old days they filled  
 habu hanani kabudan. themselves up and afterwards  
 went there (to the *katxa*) and  
 vomited.

After the ritual the organizer of the feast offers the heads of the hunted animals to his (real) brothers-in-law (*txaibu*). The haunches and other parts of the game are given to (classificatory) brothers-in-law, i.e. men of the same generation who belong to the opposite moiety, as is stated by Texerino Kirino in 2010:

*Hawen katxa hawen txai* The head of the game is usually  
*inankindan, hawen buxka* given to the *katxa*, (i.e.) to the  
*inanmisbuki katxaaibudan,* (real) brothers-in-law (*txaibu*  
*hawen pabu xiadabu hawen txai kayabi*). To the others, the more  
*bemakia inanmisbuki.* distant brothers-in-law (*txaibu*  
*bemakia*), the haunches are given.

Note, however, that the most significant part of the exchange, represented by the offer of the most valued animals' heads (*yuinaka buxka*) takes place between (real) brothers-in-law. This is also expressed in the following statement, related to the foregoing hunting trip:

*Huni menki, dekuya, hawen* The good hunter of birds invites  
*txaibe yubai kaai.* his brother-in-law to go on a  
hunting trip together.

“*Mexiu kidi piaya kanaanwe*”, *itan.* “Tomorrow we go hunting  
together”, he says.

*Habe piaya kaxu, unu bai xexaa.* He went hunting with him until  
(they reached) a “junction” of two  
paths (indicating that the path  
terminates, deep in the forest).

*Hanu paxkanaanwe, nawen* There they separate and each goes  
*katanwe, “nadan en kaidan”, “en* to one side: “I go here”, (says one),  
*kaxun”.* “I go there”, (says the other).

The brothers-in-law need to show their aptitude as good hunters who bravely confront the dangers of the deep forest, where there is game in abundance but where few people dare to go. This part of the ritual is a proof of this aptitude and of the joint forces in the relation of two brothers-in-law who walk together far into the forest, as was stated by Alberto Roque in 2008: “Brother-in-law is the one with whom we walk into the deep forest. We walk together far, in the forest and in life”. The following statement, which mentions *manan mema* (‘unexplored territory’), shows that there is a kind of competition between the brothers-in-law in attesting their courage, given the danger of coming across *yuxins* or hostile groups. At the same time a hunting trip of this kind consolidates the social relation between two (real or classificatory) brothers-in-law.

*Huni dekuyabedan, kaxun betsan* The good hunters go together  
*awa akin, txaxu akin, yaix akin* (into the forest) on a hunting  
*anun, betsan isu tsakakin, du* trip. One kills tapir, deer and  
*tsakakin, xinu tsakakin. Manan* armadillos. The other kills black  
*memu anu kaxundan tsuan hanu* howler monkeys and capuchin  
*uinisma anu kaxundan* monkey. (Where) they go (there  
are) unexplored places.

*Unu yuinaka unanama idin.  
Ha yuinaka unanyamai tsakakin.  
Ton natia kenpaxdan, paka  
paepawen yuinaka tsakaabu.*

There they do not know the game. He kills the known game: Ton throws the game there into the basket *kenpax*, the game he killed with the force of the tip of the arrow made of bamboo.

*Hawaida mawabainbainai bekanidan, ixun. Unu bai xexa anuxun.  
Ha hawen txain nitxinbaina.*

They keep killing quickly here and there, until they reach a junction (indicating a path which leads to the village). His brother-in-law accompanies him.

*“Hee”, iki. Ma hui. “Hee”, ituxi iki.*

“Hee”, he does (when they meet). He has already returned. (The other) begins to shout “hee”, (too).

*“Hee, hee”, aka. Hua, huitan.*

“Hee hee”, he answered. (The brother-in-law) arrived. They arrived and went off from there.

32. According to some information sources these trips used to take several days, but in more recent times seem to be restricted to one day only. The duration of a hunting trip also depends on how many people (villagers and their guests) need to be fed.

The fertility rite of *Katxa Nawa*, as mentioned more than once in the above description, is regarded by the Cashinahuas as a demonstration of social exchange in a proper or most basic sense. This becomes most obvious in a part of the ritual which sets in when the hunters, as separate moieties, return from their hunting-trips, each at different times and disguised by leaves of the ivory nut palm (*Phytelephas macrocarpa*).<sup>32</sup> The significance of this appearance of “intruders” in the form of “plant-people” (‘hommes-plantes’) from the forest, one moiety in the morning, the other in the afternoon, is analysed by Deshayes & Keifenheim (1994: 219) in terms of identity and alterity. Their interpretation of this performance is that it simulates a disruption, which thus demonstrates the importance of the alliance as a base for the continuity of the Cashinahua society as a whole: “Grâce à la discontinuité simulée, l’alliance révèle sa fonction” (Deshayes & Keifenheim, 1994: 221). When the first group of disguised hunters arrives at the village, they are met by members of the other moiety as “enemies” or “others from outside” (‘autres du dehors’). After being recognized by these, they turn into the “others from within” (‘autres de dedans’), the allies in a functioning social system of solidarity and exchange. Towards the evening the performance is repeated with inverted roles: the previous attackers become the villagers and vice versa. By this and the previously mentioned performances of food exchange the alliance between the moieties is

characterized as a dynamic relation which, representing an alternative to warfare, is not naturally given but depends on the political will of the involved parties for social cohesion.

A different kind of relation between men and their natural environment is depicted in this part of the ritual: by recognizing them, the allies from the village can free the 'hommes-plantes' from the foreign element of palm leaves. By then bringing them meat as the preferred food of the Cashinahuas, the villagers further reestablish the human identity of their "others". This shows that the Cashinahua hunters, when advancing into the depth of the forest, have partially fused with their natural environment. According to the interpretation by Deshayes & Keifenheim (1994: 223) this temporary fusion, which leads to a loss of Cashinahua identity, is necessary to bring back from the forest sufficient knowledge of what characterizes the vegetable world, its fertility, in order to be able to later call the crops in their chants.

The social significance of the exchange in the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual, here in the form of an inversion of gender roles, can also be deduced from a statement given by Texerino Kirino in 2010:

<i>Nukunadan beyusidan nun in-annanmiski, kene inun hamapai xiadabu nun idiamiski.</i>	What is ours, (during) the feast, we exchange; it can be the (body) painting or anything; we keep exchanging it.
--	--

In a metaphoric sense, men can assume the social role of women and vice versa, as is indicated by the exchange of body painting mentioned here, i.e. during the ritual men can use the characteristic female ornaments, and women the male ones. This interchange of roles can further be expressed by gendered gestures which during this part of *Katxa Nawaa* are used by the opposite sex in a parodical manner (Kensinger, 1995: 62/63).<sup>33</sup> Linguistically, the exchange can be expressed by applying verbal tense-aspect suffixes to the nominal terms for 'man' (*huni*) and 'woman' (*ainbu*) and thus turning these into verbs (Camargo, 2003b):

14a. *en huni-ai* ('I'm becoming/ acting like a man', said by a woman).

14b. *en ainbu-ai* ('I'm becoming/ acting like a woman', said by a man).

33. This kind of gender parody is performed in the afternoon and must be distinguished from the 'genital insults' of both sexes against each other which take place later in the evening and are illustrated by the texts of the chants in the next part of this section.

After the dancing and singing the *katxa* is destroyed, and the man of the opposite moiety who receives the first fraction of it from the organizer of the feast will organize the following *Katxa Nawaa*.

### Analysis of the chants

Another parallel between human reproduction and the fertility of the soil during the feast of *Katxa Nawaa* can be drawn by an analysis of the chanting, especially when opposing the chants of the men to those of the women. While men, as outlined above, chant to “call” the crops, the game and the children,<sup>34</sup> women during the major part of the ritual sing in the chorus, repeating the verses sung by individual male singers. The specific chanting of the women sets in only towards the end of the feast.

Women allude in their chants to the sexual harassment they feel exposed to by men. They compare men to bats (*kaxi*) who pester them by continuously looking for an opportunity to have sex with them. According to a Cashinahua consultant it is at day-break, when the feast is coming to its end, that the women call the bats:

<i>Ma xabakidanaya kaxi wapaunibuki.</i>	It is already dawning when they call the bats (in order for these to arrive in a cloud to bite the people).
<i>Hidi tsiun-tsiun, hidi tsiun-tsiun, hidi tsiun-tsiun.</i>	They call the bats by chanting <i>hidi tsiun-tsiun</i> .
<i>Hatu tsumi-tsumi akin. Tsumi tsumi akanikiki.</i>	They bite us.
<i>Uééé uééé. Kaxiki, ika.</i>	(People shout) “Ué, ué, it’s a bat”.
<i>Ma butui keyuabu, haskatan sai-sai itan inun bupaunibuki</i>	Those who are bitten leave their hammocks and go away shouting.

The sexual harassment the women complain about is metaphorically explained by the fact that in Cashinahua culture the female body is viewed as a vessel which needs to be filled or “fed” almost daily with the male sperm in order not to lose its equilibrium. A man, by contrast, needs to liberate his sperm for a balance of his physical energies and “nourish” the woman’s body which thus receives his descendants (Lagrou, 1998, 2007). Texerino Kirino (2010) describes the women’s performance as follows:

34. In the text written by Gregorio Torres (2011: 4) the young women “call” the children: *Hanua txipaxbu xunska bake kenaxunmisbuki* (See Cashinahua Documentation, GT\_Katxa\_Nawa). This may indicate a change in the way the ritual is practiced today.



<i>Katxa nawaai ainbu ikidan, kaxi waadan, hawen kenan yuankin, tae wakin min abaunai.</i>	The woman participates in the <i>Katxa Nawaa</i> and imitates the bat, calling it by her chanting; she starts to call it by dancing in a circle.
<i>Kaxi ainbu inun itxanamemisbuki.</i>	The bat woman goes off (in direction of the men), (while they insult one another. She calls the bats who want to talk to her vagina ( <i>xebi</i> ).
<i>Kaxi kena, ainbu xebi yui katsi imisbuki,</i>	
<i>Hatun bene amisbuki; bene inun hawen txaita amiski. Hawen ati adiamiski</i>	They call their husbands ( <i>bene</i> ), husbands and cross-cousins ( <i>txai</i> ). (They) also (call) their lovers ( <i>ati</i> ). <sup>35</sup>
<i>Kaxi waadan beyus keyu katsi amisbuki</i>	They jest by acting like bats.
<i>Txiwen hatu txuxamisbu: "Henekanwe", iwanan</i>	They put them (the men) on fire in order to "stop the harassment," they (the women) say.

35. Cross-cousins can be lovers (and potential husbands) of a woman because in the Cashinahua kinship system they occupy the same position.

36. This chanting of the women is performed in a very different rhythm in comparison to the chanting controlled by men.

In order to protect themselves (their vaginas), women ignite their (legitimate and potential) husband's ankles with the dry leaves of the uricuri palm (*Attalea phalerata*).

While men sing about the vagina, women respond by intoning insults, during which they compare the men's penises to body parts of animals or to edible plants, again showing the parallelism between the fertility of one and the other. This is illustrated by the following verses of the respective male and female chants, as presented in 1994 in the Peruvian village of Colombiana (river Envira), by the couple Marcelino Piñedo and Alicia Puricho:<sup>36</sup>

Male chant of *xebi itxai* (Kensinger, 1995: 57, 59), ('vagina insult', *lit.* 'frighten the vagina'):

<i>Heke-heke</i>	(ideophone for the movement of the penis in the vagina)
<i>Ha bixin, ha bixin</i>	'Open it, open it (says the penis to the vagina).'
<i>Hi kini wawani</i>	'The rod (= penis) made the hole.'
<i>Hanpadan, hanpadan,</i>	'It is not good; it is not good (the penis is not well adjusted).'

<i>Hanpadan,hanpadan,</i>	'It (the penis) (also) 'kisses' it (the vagina).'
<i>Hatxatxuma,</i>	'It (the vagina) is content.'
<i>Txuin-txuin</i>	'It (the vagina) is happy with the 'kiss' (of the penis) (ideophone for the vagina's response to the 'kiss' of the penis)

37. The term *nawa* refers to *Inka* (image, symbolism), i.e. it designates the 'foreigner', 'one who holds the metal, like the *Inka* (pre-European).'

38. The rhythm of this chant, however, is altogether different from the rhythm of the 'vagina insult'.

Female chant of *hina itxai* ('penis insult', *lit.* 'frighten the penis'):

<i>Xawen bene texu keskada xeni</i>	'It is thick like a turtle's neck.'
<i>Awa hubu bida keskada xeni</i>	'It is like the testicles of a tapir.'
<i>Nawan huxu pua keskada xeni</i>	'It is thick like a white 'potato' (of the <i>Inca</i> <sup>37</sup> ).'
<i>Ha denitxinibu keskada xeni</i>	'It is thick like the surface of contact (of a potato) which they set (on the ground).'
<i>Bitsitsiti texu keskada xeni</i>	'It is thick like the body/ neck of the banana <i>bitsitsi</i> .'
<i>Txaxu hina keska, keskada xeni</i>	'It is identical to a deer's penis.'
<i>Yawa hubu keska, keskada xeni</i>	'It is identical to the testicles of the peccary.'

28

The allusion to sexual intercourse and thus to human fertility/ reproduction in the male chant by the onomatopoeic element *heke-heke* is paralleled in a chant intoned at the moment when the disguised brothers-in-law arrive from the forest and approach the chief's house:<sup>38</sup>

Heke-heke	Heke-heke
<i>Unudia heke</i>	(that may come) from there <i>heke</i>
<i>Heke-heke</i>	heke-heke
<i>Xeki hewan heke</i>	(that may come) a lot of corn <i>heke</i>
<i>Heke-heke</i>	heke-heke
<i>Tama hewan heke</i>	(that may come) many peanuts <i>heke</i>
<i>Heke-heke</i>	<i>heke-heke</i>
<i>Unudia heke</i>	from there <i>heke</i>



<i>Heke-heke</i>	<i>heke-heke</i>
<i>Pua hewan heke</i>	(that may come) many potatoes
	<i>heke</i>
<i>Heke-heke</i>	<i>heke-heke</i>
<i>Unudia heke</i>	from there <i>heke</i>
<i>Yubin hewan heke</i>	many taioba leaves <i>heke</i> .

This use of this same element in both chants either seems to indicate that in Cashinahua culture human fertility does not differ much from the fertility of plants, and that the hunters, in their appearance as 'man-plants', may be seen as hybrid beings, uniting human as well as vegetable properties, or – in a less radical interpretation – demonstrates that the Cashinahuas interpret human and vegetal fertility with the same set of analogic terms.

However, when the crops are “called” after the end of the meal, the chanting starts with “ho ho ho”, as illustrated by the following version given by Eusébio Cumapa in 2006:

<i>Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>	<i>Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>
<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>	<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>
<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>	<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>
<i>Ua nai senenen, ua nai senenen.</i>	There at the horizon one can see the forest meet the sky.
<i>Inkan kana huai, inkan kana huai</i>	The Inca's macaw is coming
<i>hawen yunu uin, hawen yunu uin,</i>	to see his products,
<i>xeki henwan uin, xeki henwen uin</i>	to see his cornfield.
<i>An ahn ikai, an ahn ikai,</i>	<i>An ahn</i> , sings (the Inca's macaw),
<i>ankun ikai, ankun ikai.</i>	bringing agricultural products in abundance.
<i>Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>	<i>Ho ho ho ho ho ho ho</i>
<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho.</i>	<i>ho ho ho ho ho ho ho.</i>

This initial part of the first chanting further refers to the celestial world, which is inhabited by the *Inca*. The Inca is a central figure in Cashinahua cosmology. His image is omnipresent in the Cashinahuas' daily life, in the relations between human beings as well as in the spiritual world which also occupies the terrestrial space. The celestial world is spatially symmetrical to the world inhabited by the Cashinahuas

during life, and when a Cashinahua leaves his or her body after death, his or her aim is to reach the other world where he or she will live with other Cashinahuas and with the *Incas*.<sup>39</sup> The *Inca* is also known by the term of *nawa*, which in its more common sense refers to the 'Other' in general. The 'Other' thus is the owner of all the goods for which the Cashinahua people have to work hard, and agricultural products, too, are part of his wealth (Tastevin, 1925: 23-26).<sup>40</sup> The Inca in his celestial world has everything, everything grows, nothing is missing. This perfect condition is partially outlined in the above verses. The forest and the celestial world come together, and the Cashinahuas wait for the appearance of the Inca's macaw to bring the seedlings from the Inca's field which will produce crops in abundance. The following verses from the same chant illustrate that corn is the first agricultural product to be called:

<i>Xeki sai apaunibuki,</i> <i>xeki sai akindan, xekidan.</i>	They call the corn. Corn is called, corn.
Inka huai pe, inka huai pe.	The Inca is coming directly.
<i>Betsa-betsa mananki huai pe. (2x)</i>	Many others are coming directly to the river bank.
<i>Ikunkabi inka huai pe. (2x)</i>	It is indeed the Inca who is coming, directly.
Betsa-betsa mananki huai pe.	Many others are coming directly to the river bank.
Manan kaidiaki huai pe.	He is also coming directly to the river bank.
<i>Kaidia panpak<sup>41</sup>i huai pe. (2x)</i>	He is coming directly to the prairie (on top) of the river bank.
<i>Ikunkabi inka huai pe. (2x)</i>	It is indeed the Inca who is coming, directly.
<i>Manan kaidiaki huai pe. (2x)</i>	He is also coming directly to the river bank.
<i>Kaidia panpaki huai pe.</i>	He is coming directly to the prairie (on top) of the river bank.
<i>Betsa-betsa mananki hui pe.</i>	Many others are coming directly to the river bank.
<i>Inka huai pe. (3x)</i>	The Inca is coming directly.

39. Note that the "Inca" in Panoan culture is a somewhat ambiguous character who, according to an analysis by Sáez (2000), has slightly different attributes for the Shipibo, Yaminahua (*Yami Nawa*) and Cashinahua (*Kaxi Nawa*) with different functions in their respective societies.

40. This is made explicit in the myth *Yauxiku Nawa* ('the avaricious Other') in which an avaricious Inca does not want to share with the Cashinahuas the products from his field.

41. Lexical borrowing from Quechua.

*Heman iti inka huai pe.* Via the yard the Inca is coming directly.

A different version of this initial chant, by which the first singer invites the others to participate in the dancing after finishing the meal, was given by Marcelino Piñedo in 1997:

<i>Ho ho ho</i>	Ho ho ho,
<i>Nai mexiu medan anu</i>	in the dark of the sky,
<i>Xeki hewan butuni</i>	that a lot of corn ( <i>xeki</i> ) may come,
<i>Hawen xuku taba</i>	that they (the Incas) may pour out their 'sap',
<i>Taba mekidani</i>	that they may come pouring (it) out,
<i>Nai budu taba</i>	that they may pour (it) out via the column of the sky
<i>Taba mekidani</i>	that they may come pouring (it) out,
<i>Ho ho ho</i>	ho ho ho.

These same verses are repeated 17 times, calling each agricultural crop to be planted in the field individually and in a fixed order: *xeki* ('corn'), *mani* ('banana'), *atsa* ('sweet cassava'), *tama* ('peanuts'), *kadi* ('yam'), *pua* ('indian yam'), *yubin* ('arrowleaf elephant's ear'), *xapu* ('cotton'), *maxe* ('annatto'), *siu*, *yuxu*, *yusu* ('beans'), *sika* ('barbasco'), *xatxi* ('type of grass/grain), *yutxi* ('palmito'), *xupan badan* ('pumpkin') and *tawa* ('sugar cane').

Marcelino's version of the initial chant indicates that the agricultural crops come from the "dark of the sky" (*nai mexu medan anu*) and that the sap pours down via 'columns' or 'stems' (*budu*). It is by these 'columns' that the sky is connected with the earth, as was explained by a group of Cashinahua consultants in 2011. The consultants further outlined that the wind carries the sap to the soil where the rain helps to make the plants grow. This version of the chant, again, reveals the existence of an axe or a connection between the terrestrial and the celestial space. Like in the preceding version the origin of fertility lies in the celestial space from where the sap of the plants comes down to grow on earth. This latter description also indicates again the parallelism between a fertility of the crops and human fertility which is characterized

by the arrival of the male 'sap' (sperm) in the female 'vessel' (uterus) where the offspring is produced.

### 3.2 Evidence from oral literature: *The woman who was struck by lightning*

A close relation between the celestial and the terrestrial world in terms of fertility is further revealed in a central myth called "O cataclismo" ('The great flood') in the text collection by Capistrano de Abreu (1941: 481-506). It describes that humanity had a good life on earth, with an abundance of crops growing on their fields, until one day it started to rain heavily. It was thundering a lot, the "sky broke and came down" (*nai tekekidandi, naman hu kin*), and a great flood wiped out all life on earth, killing humanity game and fish. What happened afterwards is expressed in the myth as follows:

5411. *Detekin, keyutan, maidan kadabekekin, manan udi nai kainun, naidan maini kiaki.*

'It killed (them). Earth turned over, went up and turned into the sky.'

5412. *Mai nai kaina, manan udi huni kuinbu nai hatu detea.*

'Earth became sky; this one killed the Cashinahuas.'

5413. *Nai kadabekekin, hatu yuxin(in) iyua, nai medan hiwenibu kiaki.*

'The sky turned over; the yuxins took the Cashinahuas with them. They went to live in the sky.'

According to this myth, earth and sky are not only interrelated by a "column" (as was indicated in the *Katxa Nawaa* chant), but instead one can turn into the other, what on the one hand emphasizes a symmetry of their structures, on the other their interdependence.

Another excerpt from the same myth, which in a modern version is known as *Ainbu kanapan napaix* ('the woman who was struck by lightning'),<sup>42</sup> shows that the sky is not only the place of origin of the fertility of the crops but that human fertility after the cataclysm also started out there. A Cashinahua woman becomes pregnant and is killed by the entity Kanapan ('lightning'). Her body is taken to earth:

42. A modern version of this myth, told by a young woman, can be found in the Cashinahua archive under: AT\_Ainbu\_kanapan\_napaix.

5432. *Nai medan anu, ainbu bake waabu, kanapan detea. Mai waa katsi ikama, naman putaabu.*

'In the sky they made a woman become pregnant; and lightning killed her. They didn't want to bury her, brought her down (to earth).'

The twins, a boy and a girl, who are still alive in the dead woman's womb, are saved by an animal, a crayfish, by which they are raised. This can be interpreted as an initial period of indistinguishability between humans and animals, which is also referred to in other myths:

5433. *Xakapan ainbu putexun, hawen bake dabe yume wani kiaki, hatun hatu ba wanundan.*

'The crayfish opened the woman's belly, brought up her two children so that these would yield the others.'

5434. *Xakapan yume waa.*

'The crayfish raised them.'

Another notable fact expressed by the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual – that human reproduction cannot be dissociated from the fertility of the plants which are necessary to nourish their offspring – is implicitly given in the following lines of the myth. The siblings, when grown up, marry each other, but before they have children, they start a plantation and wait for the harvest. After that the animals also start to reproduce again:

5435. *Hanunkain yume dabea, hawen pui ain waa, habes, habetan bai waa, yunua, hanu hiwea.*

'So it raised the two, the brother married his sister, with her he made a plantation, and there they lived.'

5436. *Yunuyamaken. Nawen xeni anu, nawen anua atsa taxu bixun, mani panke bixun, yubin bixun, kadi bixun, badan bixun, tawa bixun, yusu, tama bixun, hati.*

'There were no vegetables. They took stalks from wild cassava, took banana offshoot; they took yams, potato, papaya, sugar cane, beans and peanuts, only this.'

5437. *Hawen bai anu banakin, keyua. Dasibi hukuni, keyua.*

'They planted them in their field, all of them grew; they finished (their work).'

5438. *Hawen yunu yumei, keyuaya. Hanunkain yunu kania. Hawen yunu peken. Hanu hiwekin.*

'They finished producing their vegetables. These ripened, were good. There they lived.'

5439. *Hanunkain, hawen pui bake waa, bake kaina, huniken.*

'So the brother made his sister become pregnant. The child was born; it was a boy.'

5440. *Hanunkain, hawen bake yumeaya. Ana bake waa, hawen bake kaina. Hanunkain ainbu kaina.*

'Now they were bringing up their son. Again, the man made her pregnant. This time a girl was born.'

[...]

5448. *Habun hatu yume waa. Hanunkain huni kuinbu bai, keyutan. Ana hanudi bai, keyutan, hiweabu.*

'Those who brought them up, made other Cashinahuas come into being, all of them. There they reproduced, were living.'

5449. *Yuinakadan ana hanudi bani kiaki, baka yabidan.*

'The animals reproduced again, fish, too.'

5450. *Hanudi bai, keyutan. Hiwenibu kiaki.*

'There they came into being, all of them. They were living (like that).'

In sum, the myth – in addition to the *Katxa* chants by which the vegetables are called from the Inca's celestial fields and in which they come to earth as 'sap' – explicitly localizes the fertility of men in the celestial world. The pregnancy of the first woman, the female procreator of the new Cashinahuas after the flood, takes place in the sky where she is killed by lightning before her children are born. In addition, the myth suggests by the fact that the twins are raised by a crayfish that in the beginning of new life on earth there may not have been a distinction between humans and animals.

### 3.3 Linguistic evidence: The morphological component *ba-* in the Cashinahua lexicon

The link between human beings and the world of plants via the concept of fertility – human reproduction and growth of agricultural products as a basis of nutrition and social relations – is also lexically expressed.

The lexical root *ba(i)*, *ba(kindan)*, as a transitive verb, refers to 'breed, procreate' and also to 'cook'. This root is formally almost identical with the nominal root *bai* which can either have the meaning of 'plantation', 'fertilization' or 'path'. Taking into consideration the cultural information given in the preceding sections, one may hypothesize that the various meanings of the polysemic verbal and nominal roots can be related by the same underlying concept of fertility applied to humans and plants in Cashinahua culture.<sup>43</sup> This will be illustrated by a number of examples. Note that, as already shown in example (1), there is no neat distinction between verbal and nominal roots in Cashinahua, i.e. both nominal and verbal suffixes can be attached to most roots.

The parallelism between fertilizing the soil and making a woman become pregnant, i.e. "sowing descendants", can be shown in (15a), where one verb phrase, consisting of an invariant, possibly nominal element *bai* ('fertilization') and an inflected verb *wa-* ('make'), can mean one or the other:

15. *En bai waai.*

a. 'I'm making (a woman) pregnant.' (spoken by a man)

b. 'I'm fertilizing (the soil).' (spoken by a man or a woman)

The relation between fertility of the plants which results in a good harvest and thus in the possibility to interchange food with relatives of the opposed moiety during *Katxa Nawaa* and stabilize the social relations is linguistically reflected in (16a) and (16b):

16a. *En bai kaai.*

'I will go for a walk.' (uttered when visiting other people in the village,

i.e. "to fertilize social relations")

16b. *Hiwetibi en bayuai.*

'I'm (just) going along from house to house.'

In (16a) the verb phrase is composed of *bai* in the same sense as in (17) and the verb *ka-* ('go'). The interpretation of *bai* as 'plantation'

43. It may even be possible to find a more general meaning for a word root *ba* by which what then turns out to be different interpretations of one meaning can be joined. For this, however, more semantic analyses in close cooperation with native speakers will be necessary.

is not possible, because in this case it would have to be followed by the locative postposition *anu*, as in (17):

17. *Bai anu en kaai.*

'I'm going to the field.'

The example in (16b) contains a verb *ba* ('fertilize') which is followed by the TAM-suffixes *-yu* and *-ai*. The sentences in (18) illustrate two usages of the element *ba* in the sense of 'cooking' or, in application of the above cultural information, "transforming a vegetable into foodstuff (i.e. something to nourish people/ fertilize social relations)":

18a. *Nami baikiki.*

'(She) is cooking meat.'

18b. *Hawa min ba waai? Namidan, en yawa ba waai.*

'What are you cooking? (It's) meat, I'm cooking peccary.'

While *ba(i)* in (18a) is used with verbal suffixes, in (18b) it is again part of a verb phrase with the finite verb *wa-* ('make'). A last meaning of *ba*, referring to 'origin' or 'family relation' and more difficult to relate to the concept of fertility, is given in (19):<sup>44</sup>

19a. *ba huni kuin hantxadan*

'language of another/ a related Panoan (*huni kuin*) group'

19b. *Nukun nabu ba betsabu.*

'It is our 'other' family (i.e. the Yami nawas).'<sup>45</sup>

In the two usages in (19) the element *ba* occurs as part of a compound consisting of two nouns.

The syntax of the language distinguishes the zone of humans (+human) from that of non-humans. The former is characterized by agentivity, the agent receiving the suffix *-{a-, e-, i-}n* which is multifunctional.<sup>46</sup> This suffix marks human agents (20b-c), genitive (20a) and also certain non-human ones (like some ants, the moon), which are classified as members of "the zone of humanity". The enunciations below suggest that 'trees born of seeds of large trees (*hi ewapa*) are assimilated to humanness'.

20a. *Hi ewapa bimi-ya nidi-tan, yume-mis-ki, hi-n*  
*bake-dan* tree large fruit-attr<sup>47</sup> fall-mov grow-hab-  
 -ass, tree-GEN progeny-FOC.

44. In a far-fetched interpretation the element here may refer to a common origin of these people with the Cashinahuas in the celestial world.

45. According to Cashinahua consultants the construction *ba betsa* is not of Cashinahua (*Kaxi nawa*) origin. It is ascribed to the Yami nawa (Stone ax | People) who, however, are another Panoan group.

46. The same suffix can also mark the ergative, genitive, locative and vocative case and the middle.

47. Abbreviation: A(gent), ASS(ertion), ATTR(i-butive), FOC(alisator), GEN(itive), HAB(ituative), MOV(ement), P(a-tient), PAST.PERF Past perfect; SG Singular.



'The large tree's fruit falls down and grows. It's the tree's continuation/progeny.'

20b. *Hi-n e-n kaman, ea debu-n wa-xu-ki*  
 tree-ERG 1sg-gen dog.P, 1sg.p die-n  
 do-past.perf-ass (lit. the tree my dog, I had been killed him of me)

'The tree killed my dog.'

The syntactic marking also reveals a Cashinahua way of thinking<sup>48</sup>. For instance, large trees have owners (*ibubu*) which are *yuxin* entities. This is the reason why syntactic properties show the flexibility of trans-categorization of elements of nature. In this language, the agentive property is not restricted to humans as is illustrated in 20a-c. These elements are endowed with animacy by the presence of their owner, of their *yuxin* who initiates their metamorphosis:

20c. *Hi ewapa yuxin-en mi-a hadibi wa-tidu-ki.*  
 Tree large owner-ergA 2sgsg-absABS Xfrighten  
 make-perm-assX-ASS

'The *yuxin* of the large tree may frighten you (transforming you).'

Its animacy raises it to the class of +human because like a human being, it does not die, it transforms. It is only wasted as it is expressed in the following statement in Spanish by a Cashinahua speaker: '*Con el arbol grande se hace bote, y cuando se rompe se muere. Pero con palo corto se hace juguete, este palo no es humano entonces no se muere, se malogra no mas.* ('With a large tree boats are built, and when it breaks it dies [that is, it transforms in another thing]. But with a short stem, toys are built, this stem is not human therefore it does not die [that is, it remains without experience to be transformed], it is simply wasted'.)

## Conclusions and prospects

In the traditional Cashinahua conception of the world, which is still reflected in their rituals and myths, human beings are intimately related to their natural environment: the fertility of one – in the form of agricultural crops – provides for the existence and social equilibrium of the other. Cashinahua society is based on a permanently renewed contract of alliances between two moieties. This contract regulates the political relationship between brothers-in-law, between nuclear and

48. See Camargo; Wajana & Toribio (Mudu), 2018a.

extended families as well as between husband and wife. Its significance for social stability and the importance of food in this context become most evident during *Katxa Nawa*, a fertility rite celebrated to make the Incas in the celestial world provide for good seeds and a rich harvest.

Different aspects of the *Katxa Nawaa* ritual and of food production in general as well as the excerpts of the chants (discussed in section 3.1) provide evidence for this complex system of mutual relationships with regard to fertility in a biological and in a social sense: human fertility is linked to the fertility of plants, symbolized by the “belly” (*pustu*) of the paxiuba palm as the centre of the dancing and singing performance and alluded to by similar elements (*budu* as a “column” for *xuku*, the “sap”, to come down from the celestial world and fertilize the soil as compared to the mechanisms of human reproduction) and the same onomatopoeia (*heke-heke*) in the chants. Men and women complement each other in their division of labour as do brothers- and sisters-in-law in order to guarantee social productivity.

According to the ‘The great flood’ “*o cataclismo*”, a central Cashinahua myth (described as a kind of clash of the two worlds), the relation between the terrestrial and the celestial world is not only characterized by the fact that an abundance of agricultural products comes directly from the Inca’s celestial fields, but the celestial world is in fact also the source of human fertility. During the cataclysm, which is described as a kind of clash of the two worlds, all life on earth is wiped out. In Cashinahua cosmology, earth is conceived of as completely symmetrical to the celestial world to which the Cashinahuas are brought after death. In this celestial space, after the great flood, the first twin-pair of Cashinahuas after the great flood was begot by a female procreator. These siblings came back to earth in their dead mother’s womb and founded the current Cashinahua population.

In addition, the Cashinahua language has preserved traces of a conception of the world, where humans and plants are closely interrelated and where the reproduction and social coherence of the former will not be properly understood without reference to the fertility of the latter.

Despite manifesting such a complex cultural concept of fertility in the relationship between humans and nature, contact with a world different from their own has provoked changes within the

Cashinahua communities which differ in degree, depending on the type of contact that has been established.

In the case of the Peruvian Cashinahuas, the contact with the *nawa*, the “other”, has led the group to make themselves acquainted with alternative lifestyles and to integrate some of the new elements such as clothes, industrial food and tools, motors and more recently remunerated labour into their own communities and lives.

A central role in the process of giving up local traditions played the omnipresence of non-indigenous people in the Cashinahua villages. The missionaries, who came first, expected them to radically change their social behavior and to abandon their traditional knowledge, which was considered to be “pagan” and incompatible with Christian belief. They were followed by traders who made the Cashinahuas change furs for industrial products and encouraged alcohol abuse to create permanent dependencies.

In order for the Cashinahuas to find their place in a changing world, they need to be able to integrate themselves into the national system without losing their own cultural identity which manifests itself in their language and rituals. An applied contribution in this direction could be made by organizing, in the context of our documentation project, workshops for the community members in which they develop their own meta-language to reflect and discuss cultural and linguistic concepts among themselves. Since 2006, several of these workshops opened up the opportunity to exchange – in a neutral setting – ideas and opinions about one’s own cultural knowledge and to reflect upon what happened to it in the last few decades, leading to a situation in which the new generations have lost most of its aspects. In 2008, after such a workshop in Peru, we were approached by several young adults who asked us to help them “revitalize” the knowledge with regard to their most important rituals, by bringing together older recordings of these made by different researchers and by recording the chanting of older community members. In 2010, the same group of young Cashinahuas decided to extend the sparse information they had on the fertility ritual of *Katxa Nawaa* by interviewing their remaining ‘specialists’; older people who had witnessed the performance of the ritual in the past and who could give them information about the meaning of the chants. During a workshop specifically dedicated to this topic the young participants discussed and evaluated different sources of information.

They consulted Capistrano de Abreu's text collection and compared the information found there with that given by the old people. They further found out that there are regional variants of the *Katxa Nawaa* chants. The analyses presented in the previous sections of this paper are part of this process of finding out about the past by evaluating and comparing the sources available today.

By getting involved in a project which was focusing on their own culture the young Cashinahua workshop participants became aware of the significance this traditional knowledge had for their own lives as members of the ethnic group and also of the scientific value which was given to it as a unique cultural expression in the diversity of human cultures. Our workshop experiences further suggest that the newly-stirred interest of these young Cashinahua people in their native language and culture has given them more self-confidence to conceive of themselves as members of a culture in its own rights which needs to find expression and consideration in local and national politics.

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