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Reproduction and aggression: shamanic practices among Quichuas from Ecuador (Imbabura and Chimborazo Provinces)¹

El agua no es más fuerte que yo, porque yo soy el agua.
La tierra no es más grande que yo, porque yo soy la tierra.
El fuego no es más fuerte que yo, porque yo soy la luz.
El aire no es más grande que yo, porque yo soy el aire.

Yachak from Chimborazo (Ecuador), September 2012

Introduction

Since the times of Carlos Castañeda and Michael Harner² (and the development of the hippie movement in the 50s and 60s) shamanism has not only

¹ This article is based on research material gathered during my fieldwork among Quichua from central and north part of Ecuador (the Chimborazo and Imbabura provinces), conducted between June–November 2010 and August–November 2012. Moreover, the paper summarises the ideas presented in one of the chapters of my MA thesis entitled “*Yachak – shaman, leader and protector of tradition of the Quichua in the Ecuadorian Andes*”, which I defended at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in July 2013.

² Castañeda is a Peruvian-American anthropologist who conducted research on shamanistic practices. Castañeda is also the author of several controversial books (*The Teaching of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge; A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan; Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*) on shamanism among Yaqui (Uto-Aztecan language family) from Sorona (northern Mexico). The controversy around his work concerned his research methods, the credibility of the sources and descriptions as well as his writing style. Michael Harner (1980, 1984) is an American anthropologist conducting research among Jivaro Indians (Ecuador).

started to attract attention of social scientists but also to gain worldwide interest. As a consequence of globalization and commercialization (as well as a change of cultural context) shamanistic practices were absorbed into pop culture. They began to be perceived as a special kind of religious phenomenon (so-called *new spirituality*), gradually took a form of neo-shamanism and became a part of the New Age movement. In this context, the concept was limited to a trance or psychedelic experience. As a result of these changes, the phenomenon underwent a process of foreignization and the notion of shamanism started to be abused and used to describe different phenomena unrelated to the original meaning of this word (so-called *broader definition of shamanism*). The image of a shaman has also been seriously distorted in popular-science and scientific literature. This figure is often described as a rattle-shaking wizard, a charlatan or a psychopath and is frequently associated with the usage of hallucinogens (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1987: 7). According to the evolutionary assumptions, which still linger, shamanism is considered either as a base of a universal and fundamental religion or as one of its development stages. This perspective was largely formed by Judeo-Christian viewpoint (see: Vitebsky 1995; Ward 1994).

For contemporary social scholars, it is evident that shamanism is not only an alternative state of consciousness or a set of archaic religious practices. Above all, it is a culturally and historically conditioned human practice which is aimed at social reproduction. First, it signifies that shamanism is soaked in specific concepts of reality, forming a basis of the way people think, perceive and act (ontology). These worldviews or ontologies consist of local myths and norms, concepts of the world that determine practices and relationships between people (Descola 1996: 85–86). Generally speaking, shamanistic practices are rooted in a non-naturalistic ontological order which presumes the nature to be personal and subjective reality (animistic order) with which the humans can enter into relationships.

Secondly, shamanism cannot be described as a homogeneous, ahistorical or frozen-in-time aspect of ancestral religiosity. It is a historical phenomenon and it is determined by the past and the present, as well as by local and trans-local politics, and economic and social situation (Taussig 1987). In the context of indigenous people's history, it is, for instance, an expression of struggle and resistance (Boddy 1989; Stoller 1995) in interethnic relations of power and subordination. Therefore, a contemporary form of shamanism is also strongly linked to the colonial context and cannot be analysed without taking this aspect into account. An *ayahuasca shamanism*, which was investigated in West Amazonia by Peter Gow (1996) may serve as an example. Gow pointed out that although *ayahuasca* was used by Amazonian people before the colonial period, *ayahuasca*

He is the founder of the *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*. In the book *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing* (1980), he describes so-called *core shamanism* which consists in falling into a trance through ingesting hallucinogenic substance, drumming and ritual dances. His approach to the subject has been criticized by others Daniel C. Noel (1997) and Robert J. Wallis (2003).

shamanism developed in colonial towns and at Christian missions at the beginning of the 17th century. These practices were rather a reply to colonialism and not a colonial product, because they evolved as a form of struggle against Spanish invaders. It illustrates that shamanism cannot be treated as a remnant of archaic religious form. As I showed in my other text (the case of Quechua shamanism in Ecuador), modern shamanism is still linked to interethnic politics and cultural resistance (Przytomska 2015a).

In the western vision of the world represented by the colonizers, shamanism was perceived as a manifestation of primitive culture understood in terms of wildness and primitiveness. On the other hand, shamanism appeared to Europeans as a fossilized form of being “outside the history”, a “real”, “pristine” or “untouched by civilization” element of a culture which would soon be forgotten or absorbed by the dominant Western world. Mainly in popular but also in scientific discourses, a nostalgic rhetoric about the disappearance of indigeneity, traditional costumes and beliefs is still present. However, my research shows that shamans still hold a strong position in local communities. In a wise way, they gain and extend their influence over different aspects of reality, and they maintain positive relations with the non-indigenous people. For hundreds of years, they have been adapting to different (more or less violence-saturated) actions of the Others, in which they have openly or covertly participated.

This paper describes contemporary shamanism among Quichua of the Ecuadorian Andes (Imbabura and Chimborazo provinces in the Sierra region), shaman's roles and his status in local indigenous communities. Based on the Quichua worldview, I show what the key elements of shamanic practices are and what is its importance to the continuity of Quichua life and culture. The premise of this text is that shamanism has two complementary faces. The Quechua shamanism in Ecuador is based on social reproduction or construction (healing, maintaining the fertility of nature and people) and aggression at the same time (witchcraft).

Shamanism – around different theories

Before I proceed to the analysis of the case, I will make a few theoretical remarks. The term *shamanism* has been used in very different contexts (Namba Walter, Neumann Fridman 2004; Price 2011) and its meaning and origin are equivocal. According to some researchers this word derives from the Tungus word *saman*, in which *sa* signifies *to know* (Szirokogorow 1982: 269). According to this hypothesis and *Kulturkreis* theory (culture circles diffusionism), the origin of shamanism is associated with Siberia. According to the diffusionist approach, as the result of migrations and cultural interactions, shamanism was supposed to spread from Siberian area to the South-East Asia and then to other continents. However, this trans-cultural diffusion interpretation has never been confirmed. Nowadays, shamanism is defined as a set of practices and beliefs based on the worldview according to which a shaman fulfils a leading role in constructing and maintaining

relationship between perceptible and imperceptible worlds. The ambiguity of this notion arises from unstable historical conditions and various scientific orientations used by researchers representing different disciplines (cultural anthropology, religious studies and neurobiology). Lack of agreement among anthropologists concentrates mainly on the following questions: what is shamanism and who is a shaman (what conditions have to be met to call someone a shaman)?

Mircea Eliade³, a Romanian specialist in religious studies and representative of a phenomenological approach, treated shamanism as a timeless phenomenon “existing regardless of history and type of society” (Humphrey 1994: 191). Moreover, from this traditional point of view, shamanism is “an ancient form of religion”, “an ancient religious behaviour”, “a primitive, religious experience” and “an archaic form of ecstasy” (Eliade 1994; Tokariew 1969). Most of Polish studies of shamanism that also derived from works of Mircea Eliade (Wierciński 2000, Wasilewski 1979, Szyjewski 2001), define this phenomenon in the same way – as an archaic form of ecstasy. Thus, in this view, the core of shamanism is centered around trance.

These universalistic conceptions ignore local socio-political specificity and distort the perception of this phenomenon. Rigid definitions reduce the capacity and precision of shamanic practices’ interpretations. I distance myself from essentialist theories, which consider shamanism as one of the religion stages. I think that shamanism is a set of practices stemming from a particular vision of the world, which excludes the dual distinction between the sacred and profane spheres in its structure. Among Quichuans these two spheres are not separated but constitute an indivisible whole. The immanent relation between material and spiritual things excludes a concept of religion in the Western sense. A shaman is not a priest who conducts worship of nature deities or ancestors, but a specialist whose main task is to maintain a harmonious relation and order between human and non-human persons. He plays a very important political, social and educational role. In consequence, he also exerts influence on a group’s functioning and its contact with the non-indigenous world.

Considering these heterogeneous characteristics of shamanism and its different variants, formulation of a precise definition is probably impossible. The attempts to conceptualize this phenomenon by determining a set of specific elements⁴ take us away from the crux of the matter and from its indigenous meaning. In their work, the researchers mentioned above put emphasis on analyzing

³ Eliade (Romanian philosopher and specialist in religious studies) and his successors describe shamanism as “archaic techniques of ecstasy”. This approach gave rise to a set of characteristics that a particular phenomenon should manifest in order to be considered as shamanism. Eliade thought that, originally, there was “pure” shamanism. He considered the Arctic shamanism to be a primary model, the core of which consisted in ecstatic flights toward the discovery of the primary state preceding a “fall” of mankind.

⁴ For example Marcel Mauss determined the following signs of being a shaman: *signum diaboli* (any stigmas, lack of shade, squint), nervousness (compulsive behaviour or exaltation), above-average dexterity and intelligence or disability (gibbus, blindness, old age), specific practices (shamanic initiation, a 5-stage journey to the world of spirits etc.) (Szyjewski 2001: 321–327).

the mechanisms of entering into a trance.⁵ Depending on a geographical region and a worldview of a specific group, shamanism takes different forms and incorporates local elements. Techniques of falling into trance are only tools which lead a specialist to a given goal. From the indigenous people's point of view, shaman goes on a journey to other worlds in order to fulfil some tasks: to heal (e.g. to find a stolen or lost soul), to foretell the future, to refer to an unknown past, to obtain some knowledge or skills, to contact non-human persons who play important role in the human life (e.g. spirits, ancestors, divinities etc.). To conclude, the essence of shamanism is: (1) a journey to other world to perform some tasks – for the community or for the shaman himself; (2) maintenance of relationships between the “material” and “immaterial” worlds, which in fact are tightly coupled with each other. In consequence, I postulate the usage of local terms because in many cases they have specific meaning that helps to better understand shaman's role in the community, history of the group, in any intercultural interactions etc.

Yachak – the one who knows

The Andean Quichua people call themselves *runakuna*, which means ‘people’ (singular *runa* – ‘person’), and speak Quichua and Spanish. The Quichuan ethnic group in Ecuador consists of 14 regional groups (*pueblos*). The Quichuan population lives mainly in valleys covered with fertile, volcanic soil and surrounded by two parallel mountain ranges of the Ecuadorian Andes, which were called “the Avenue of the Volcanoes” in 1802 by the German traveller Alexander von Humboldt (Quinteros Velasco 2006: 35).⁶

In Quichua language the word *yachak* signifies “sage”, literally “the one who knows”. This term came back to usage and gained popularity in Ecuador in the 1990s. In reality, the people to whom it refers bear different names. They are called *chamanes* (shamans), *curanderos* (healers) or in Quichuan language *mamas y taytas* (mothers and fathers), which exactly indicates their high status and the fact that they are treated with great social respect.⁷ The restoration of the word *yachak* was associated with the improvement of socio-political situation of indigenous

⁵ Depending on a geographical and cultural context, the shamans can do it with drums (Siberia, Australia), plants like ayahuasca (liana, in Quichua: climber of spirits), *San Pedro* (a columnar cactus containing mescaline), *datura* (species of vespertine flowering plants) occurring in South and Central America and tobacco in Americas. Trance experience can also be a result of fasting, self-mutilation, dances etc. which lead to exhaustion of the organism. Quichua *yachaks* usually do it using tobacco, ascetic techniques (fasting and hypothermia due to long stays in the mountains) and consuming ayahuasca, *San Pedro* or *datura*.

⁶ The majority of Quichua live in rural areas and earn a living from agriculture (corn, cereals and potatoes), animal husbandry (lamas) or breeding (cattle or pigs). They also specialize in weaving. Their handcrafted products are sold to tourists. Since the 90s, especially the youth have been migrating to towns in search of employment opportunities. Many of them find low-paid jobs e.g. as construction workers, street vendors, cleaners or others physical work.

⁷ In Quichuan culture not only *yachaks* bear titles of *Mama* or *Tayta* – in this context they mean, respectively, Lady and Sir. These terms are used to describe (most often older) people with high status in the group.

people, including rights to maintain their cultural heritage and a wide range of revivalist activities initiated by Ecuadorian indigenous people. *Yachaks* in local communities have a strong position, which stems from their knowledge passed from generation to generation. Their basic task is to keep the community in health by diagnosing and treating diseases. They occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of healers and combine various healing practices. They fulfil a ritualistic role – lead feasts and everyday ritual ceremonies. They are mediators between perceivable (human) and unperceivable (non-human) worlds. By contacting spirits and ancestors they support the continuity and harmony of these two worlds. Moreover, they teach about beliefs, history and norms of life. They actively participate in contemporary politics and education, and fight for the rights of indigenous people. They consciously co-create interethnic relations and transformations. In the past few years, they have begun to exert influence over the reinterpretation of beliefs, feasts, customs and, in consequence, they have influenced the Quichua identity e.g. nativism.

Attributes of Yachak

The medical and ritual role of *yachak* is closely related to the notion of power, understood as an extraordinary property. During my research, several concepts emerged – *samay*, *sinchi*, *kamay* and *atiy* – important in shamanic practices.

Samay (a breath) is a revitalising factor, a life energy which every single being possesses. According to Quichua, after human death *samay* is transformed and becomes, once again, a part of the world (Przytomska 2013: 69). *Samay* is constructed as an outcome of contacts between an individual and other human or nonhuman elements of the world. In other words, it is constantly created. A violation of any norm or taboo (inappropriate behaviour) causes *samay* loss, which is equivalent to the violation of natural balance (disease). The concept of *samay*, as a co-creative substrate of every life being, is associated with the concepts of health and disease. Health, in Quichua language *allin kawsay* or *sumak kawsay* (a good life, welfare), is defined as harmony between physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. In individual dimension health establishes many rules. I will only briefly mention the most important of them. The first one is to keep a proper diet (*allin mikuy*) – to distinguish food according to a hot-cold concept (*rupay-chiri*).⁸ Another rule is good thinking (*allin yuyay*), understood as positive thinking, not harming oneself and the others. *Yachaks* argue that a human can provoke a disease just by negative thinking. A good man should act well (*allin*

⁸ An anthropologist José Yáñez del Pozo in his book *Allikai: la salud y la enfermedad desde la perspectiva indígena* writes that a hot-cold division not only applies to temperature differences but also to features of nature and man. *Rupay* is the sun, everything white, crystal, masculine, hot and expansive. In turn *chiri* is the moon, everything feminine, dark, cold, weak or docile (Yáñez del Pozo 2005: 17–18). Treatment is based on off-setting by opposition, to return to the state of equilibrium. To treat “hot illness” a therapy of “cold” things are used and vice versa (Przytomska 2013: 70).

ruray) which means living in accordance with conventional standards (not being lazy, lying, nor stealing). Quichua people also respect the principle of *allin rimay* which is an appropriate form of speaking. According to it they should select appropriate words, express themselves with respect and love towards other people, nature and the entire world. The *allin runa* (good/healthy person) is presented with a physical and a spiritual harmony only if he works for himself and others in accordance with the principle of reciprocity, and participates in permanent (e.g. cropping) or temporal group activities (e.g. building of a house or a road), which is called *minka*. According to shamans, healthy people show generosity, share goods, take care of a group's development and harmony, and participate in social and ritual life. The opposition of this is the idea of a sick person (*unk-uska runa*), who shows arrogance, selfishness, envy, aggression, impetuosity and deceitfulness. This state leads a person to sadness, loneliness and, consequently, destroys the relationship between the individual and the group. An ideal form of life consists in attempting to maintain the balance between the individual, the group and the environment (*pakta kawsay*). However, it should be noted that such situation is the ideal model. Such ethos may be implemented in many different ways.

Sinchi (force) is a physical force, an important element in the vision of a person and a community. José Yáñez del Pozo (2005: 48) argues that Quichuan people have an image of a healthy man, who is as hard and strong as mountains and stones. The idea of *sinchi* structures life rules and constitutes the base of human activities (Cifuentes 1992: 41). It is present in everyday language and comes from myths, as a category which seeped into the physical reality. The concept of physical strength is associated with a *chumpi* – a girdle from the Andes made of llama wool and worn by Quichua as a support for the spine during heavy physical work (including carrying heavy loads). The girdle also serves as a protection against “magical” actions. In fact, llama is a very important animal in Quichuan cosmology. It is perceived as a guardian and helper in shamanic practices. *Yachaks* claim that in the colonial period indigenous people who were forced to do hard physical work wore girdles tightly tied around their waists to provide themselves with force and protection against punishment imposed by landowners. Moreover, girdle is used by shamans during rituals. It provides power during medicinal rituals and at the same time protects against the loss of power (*atiy*). *Chumpi* (belt) is about two meters long and is worn around the abdomen as a protection for *pupu* (a navel), which is a weak point of the human body. The Quichuan believe that a navel is the centre of the body, a symbolic point of the universe and the most vulnerable part exposed to external risks. *Sinchi*, coupled with physical work, becomes the basis of strength and continuity of the community. Community life, including collective work (*minka*), is a guarantee of the group survival. Collective building of houses, organization of feasts, sowing or harvesting not only build economic base but also tie social bonds. If an individual does not support it, he is expelled from the group. Diligence and physical strength are crucial features for the members of the Quichuan community and important factors in selecting

a spouse. Therefore, from the earliest age children are taught physical labour when they help their parents in daily tasks. Quichua people say that a man who does not work and does not care about the harmony of his family is not welcome in the community. *Samay* and *sinchi* are the properties which form a person. The imbalance between the two means an illness. Their loss is tantamount to death after which *samay* and *sinchi* return to the universe.

For shamans, the most important of the attributes mentioned above is *kamay* (gift). It is a special ability, e.g. to treat people, to see the past, to predict the future and generally to contact the invisible world. *Kamay* is something that an ordinary man cannot possess, as it comes from the upper realm (Hanan Pacha). Because of it, a *yachak* can fully perform his medical and ritual functions. In addition, the gift distinguishes shamans from other healers (*curanderos*), who despite their extensive knowledge of treatment methods and illnesses do not have any extraordinary capabilities. There are two ways to receive this gift. The first one is related to „supernatural“ events – mostly a series of dreams or visions continuing over a long period of time, sometimes even several years. During this long process, a person prepares and learns from other shamans (a shaman-master). These dreams or visions present things that the person should do or change, they may also show the future and the pathway of the adept’s transformation. *Don* is understood as a vocation, destiny, selection of Pachamama, or the God. A 50-years-old shaman from Chimborazo province told me a story of her visions:

(...) One night in a dream I saw an altar, some spirits, some kind of energy, but then I didn’t understand it. I had a strange dream. I didn’t know what it meant. 3 months passed... I had the same dream again. “Why?” – I wondered. This time the visions were closer and clearer. Then I realized it wasn’t a dream, it was a real vision and these things started to show up also during the day. (...) I couldn’t stand that anymore because these visions were getting stronger and stronger. I thought I lost my mind. I didn’t know what was happening and why. (...) Other *yachaks* said what it could be, but I tapped my forehead, I didn’t believe them. Then I got sick, it was very serious, I suffered very much, I was ill for almost two years. It took me 2 years. I still had some visions, I heard voices saying different things, but I didn’t want to see it, to understand it. I thought it was something bad, that I was possessed. One day, it got even worse, I felt death. Again, visions came. It was six o’clock in the afternoon. I asked my daughter to take me to Quito where Pepe lived. He was a very famous *yachak* at that time. My daughter was terrified, but she took me by van to him. Some strange things happened that night. (...) Pepe looked at me and he said that he was going to Agua Pichincha and if I wanted to, I could go with him. But even if I wanted to, I couldn’t get up. He went, and he spent there four days and four nights. And he came back and said that Agua Pichincha had sent me a gift. He told me to make an altar and I asked him: “But how? What, what should I put there?” Pepe felt offended. He said that I knew very well how to do it. I said that nobody had taught me that. He insisted: „You see it, didn’t you notice?“ (...) So, I made an altar, a very nice one with flowers, water in the middle, very nice [she smiled]. Later, many visions revealed to me, so many tasks that I had to fulfil. But I said: „My God, I’m

so small, so weak, how will I cope with it?" It was a real struggle with myself. Pepe said: „There is no way back. Understand it. You must accept it, you cannot hide it anywhere, you must accept it. Don't feel alone because you won't be alone. Someone will always be with you. Don't be afraid."

The gift is present in the Quechua microhistory. It is based on the idea of a circular (or spiral) time as a part of the history of each family line or generation. After the death of a shaman it returns, and it is passed down from generation to generation (from parent to child or from grandfather to grandson) like an inheritance, which cannot be renounced. If the shaman does not transfer it before his death, the gift returns anyway. In case it does not find a suitable person, it may return after a few generations. It is conceptualized by the attribution of human (personal) qualities – “the gift is looking for someone who is worth receiving it”. According to another idea the spirit of a deceased *yachak* looks for the right person who could accept and incorporate the unique gift (*embodiment*).

Atiy (power) is a concept understood as a prime mover, an ability to do something. The power is unstable and produced in a particular place and time. It is closely related to action and change of a human condition. It transforms itself. It is subject to continuous accumulation and loss, to constant exchange or a game between the animated natural world and humans. *Atiy* can be characterized by such properties as vagueness, openness and fluidity. This concept is closely related to *samay* – a vital human force. Every person has the power, provided that he or she lives in accordance with the standards and the rhythm of the universe (that is balance). Otherwise, a person is exposed to its weakening or loss. However, shamans know different techniques of power accumulation, which is why they are stronger (more influential) than other people.

For Quichua nature has human qualities – it is conscious, causative, intentional, and omniscient. It can grant or take away, punish or reward people. Nature, understood as *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) cannot be cheated. It bestows power on those who deserve it. The power, compared to the concept of the gift, operates outside of history and time. It is an asocial property (in the broad sense), which means that it is common to different types of persons (humans, animals, deities, spirits, the dead etc.). In addition, it is subject to constant negotiation between shamans, and constitutes a major factor in the competition and acts of aggression between them.

Medical and ritual roles of *Yachak*

The most important role of a *yachak* is treating people and maintaining the group in good health. Individual and group health (*allin kawsay*) define and depend on each other. A unit exists as a part of a larger whole: family, local community and other elements of the world. Therefore, health is determined by the relational mode and reciprocity, which leads us to the collective (social) perception of health

and disease. The first rule is based on the fact that every element of the universe has an impact on others, and it has the same structure defined by the relationships that occur between them. The principle of reciprocity means that everything has to be reciprocated and the proper functioning of the whole (e.g. community, family, individual) is dependent on the balance (health) of other elements.⁹ Moreover, *allin kawsay* includes not only the concept of human health (human species), but also the status of non-human beings with whom humans enter into relationships. The Quichuan world is not anthropocentric, but rather person-centric (or cosmocentric).

From the Quichuan perspective, the disease has a two-fold dimension. First, it is a result of the imbalance of an individual or a group which results from the breach of *alli kawsay* rule. Second, when the balance is already disturbed, a person is exposed to the attack of various aggressive beings (also non-humans) and to other factors resulting from the breach of life rules: possession by some external force or loss of some elements. In other words, a disease is the state of imbalance provoked by actions of humans or other entities (conceptualized e.g. as wind, spirit, rainbow, thunder). These beings are commonly referred to by a general Spanish term *mala energía* (bad energy). Negative action of these beings is based on taking away *samay* which causes specific symptoms. According to *yachaks* from the Imbabura province, diseases take a form of animals that, according to their worldview, have negative characteristics (usually of reptiles, amphibians, worms). The following brief story, which I recorded in the Chimbo-razo province, illustrates this concept:

Good *yachaks*, who have a lot of power can heal witchcraft. There are people who can kill with witchcraft. If someone is enchanted they need to undergo a purification ritual with black candle. A few years ago, I had a severe case. I asked another *yachak* for help, it was my good friend. We rubbed the body of patient with candle. Then I put it in an earthenware and I covered it with white and red piece of cloth. Then, we tied it strongly, very strongly, so that nothing could escape. Then we continued the ritual. (...) We went to the river. When we walked, we felt it, heard a hiss of a snake. It was in the container. We were scared, and we tied the string even tighter. Oh, it was very strongly tied. If it had escaped, it would have killed all of us. When we reached the river, we untied the string and quickly threw out what was inside to the river. It was a snake. He told us everything.

⁹ The model of a whole is that the world and its constituents are all persons i.e. animate beings (people, animals, plants etc.) and concepts (time, space, ideas and knowledge etc.) The other model of a whole is also family or community, whose balance is determined by the health of their members. The same relationships occur between the whole and its parts (which also form the whole), and the inner elements. Thus, the family can be a whole for its members, but at the same time it is a component of some villages, which in turn are parts of all Quichuan group and parts of the universe. It is important that in the inside of one component whole occur the same mechanisms as in the final whole and in the universe. We can compare it to a matryoshka doll – components are miniatures of the whole Quichuan world. In a basic sense, health refers to every animated being. Quichuan believe that a sick man has direct impact on the social environment in which he lives (Przytomska 2012: 70).

He told who cast the spells. Then he swam downstream and disappeared. It is not a legend. It is a real story.”

As the above quote mentions, a disease can also be caused by witchcraft of another *yachak*, called in Spanish *brujos*. This kind of disease can be healed only by a *yachak*.

Treatment is often lengthy and requires change in lifestyle and the restoration of broken relationships. What is also important in treatment process is *yachak*'s preparation. Before and during the rituals, they must keep a special diet; abstain from any sexual relations, alcohol and other drugs. If the case is difficult, they need to perform additional rituals in order to purify themselves and strengthen their medical power. Methods of treatment take a form of a ritual, in which every gesture and each spoken word is significant. It can be subject to minor changes, but it always forms a coherent whole. Healing process begins with a diagnosis aiming to identify the type of disease and to find out what is causing it. In this process, *yachak* uses eggs, guinea pigs or candles. Sometimes, he does urine analysis and checks the pulse. After the diagnosis, he begins the treatment. This process, just like a concept of disease, comprises two stages. Initially, *yachak* deals with the physical treatment of the disease's symptoms. He performs a purification ritual (*limpia*), with what I call “medical power catalysts” such as: eggs, plants, fire and tobacco. This ritual should be performed prior to giving any medicine. Next, *yachak* takes a series of steps with the patient (diet changes, improvement of relationships in the family or the group, usage of natural resources in accordance with the principles of equality and reciprocity), which aim to return to *allin kawsay* and prevent another disease (Przytomska 2012: 73).

The *yachak* has extensive knowledge and abilities which are the combination of different medical specialities. He can be *partero* (obstetrician), *limpiador* (specialist in purifications rituals), *hierbatero* (herbalist), *cuypitchak* (specialist in rituals involving a guinea pig) or *fregador/sobador* (kneader – bone specialist).

The *yachak*, as a *hierbatero*, knows medicinal plants and herbal medicaments. He gathers herbs in the mountains, in glades and by the rivers. Sometimes, like other *curanderos*, he grows his own herbal garden. Herbs are used for purification rituals, baths, medications in the form of infusions and ointments. The *yachak* also uses different plants to protect houses and farms (the most popular is *Ruta graveolens*). Growing in front of doors, gates or entrances, plants ward off diseases or witchcraft. From the Quichuan perspective, plants (like every other element of nature) are treated as persons (animated beings). One *yachak* repeatedly told me that plants love and feel like humans. In addition, they have a definite sex, emotions, feelings, awareness and free will. They can reward or punish people for breaking rules or taboos. Plants have the power of healing, but a healer cannot use them for treatment unless they let him. For this purpose, the *yachak* needs to create a friendly (reciprocal) relationship between him and the plant. Nature endows humans only at their request. Nothing can be stolen or taken away from nature. The *yachak* connects with the plant by touching it gently and talking to it.

In this way, he can get to know its sex, age and history. He asks the plant to allow him to pick it up and use its healing power. The *yachak* mutters certain formulas during the gathering, preparation and treatment process. Plants should be treated with respect and sensitivity. The *yachak*, while talking about plants or talking to them, uses diminutive forms such as *plantitas* or *hierbitas*. A *yachak* from Otavalo countryside told me the following story:

If a plant disappears, it means that there is no love, harmony and respect in the community. Here all the *yachaks* have medicinal plants in their gardens. Three years ago, all our plants were gone. They did not want to grow. They withered or started to rot. We planted them again, but they didn't want to grow. We cared about them, we watered them, and we talked to them. It didn't help. We gathered together and we all talked about it. Why? How? – we asked. Three times we sowed without any result. We decided that we had to perform a ceremony before the next sowing. We asked for forgiveness, we celebrated a purification ritual. Then the plants started to grow.

If during the growing season some plant species wither or die, it means that they are angry (penalty imposed for the improper people's behaviour) or they are sick. Disease is a disorder of the whole environment (understood in the social sense), which consists of people, plants, animals, spirits, ancestors etc. In the Imbabura province, the indigenous Quichuan believe that mountains are usually men and plains are women. Humans, in order to be able to live and work with them (to sow, plant, pasture herds) must ask them for permission, otherwise they may get angry and punish humans. Relationships that people build with nature are based on exchange and reciprocity. For this purpose, the *yachaks* celebrate ceremonies aimed to tame the space and obtain nature's favour (Echeverria Almeida 2004: 166–167; van Kessel Brouwers 1997: 38–40).

The ritual involving plants is called *limpia con hierbas*. Purification process is conducted by hitting patient's body with a bundle of different herbs (*escoba de hierbas*) until the skin turns red and starts to itch and burn. For the *yachak* this is a sign that the healing power of plants works efficiently. Another common method of diagnosis and treatment involves a candle (*limpia con vela*). Each patient, before visiting a specialist, buys two white candles and rubs his whole body with them. The *yachak* lights a candle and then blows it out. He lights it again and reads the flames to find out from which type of disease a patient is suffering and what is the cause of it. According to *yachaks*, pictures that appear in the candle flames represent diseases or sick organs. The flame can also show the future, lost or stolen objects or places associated with them. Only the *yachak* possessing a gift of vision can see those representations.

Yachaks use chicken eggs to treat *mal aire* (bad air) or *mal viento* (bad wind). The treatment (*limpia con huevo*) consists in rubbing a patient's body with eggs. According to *yachaks*, an egg „absorbs the bad energy“. It means that it absorbs a disease. After cleansing, the ritual egg should be discarded out of human's reach in order to prevent the retransmission of the disease. Healers also use eggs

to diagnose a disease. After the massage, the *yachak* breaks the egg and throw it into a glass. By examining the egg's white, he is able to determine the cause of the disease and its type. On this basis, he can also see where and how the patient caught *mal aire*.

Yachaks use fire, which also has purifying properties. The specialist spits alcohol on the candle flame in the direction of the patient. He ought to stand about five feet from the patient, so that the flame would not burn him. After this procedure, commonly known as *soplo de fuego*, some *yachaks* fill their mouth with a mixture prepared with *trago* (cane alcohol) and infusion of herbs, and then they splash it on the patient's skin. Others rub *colonia* (a liquid prepared with alcohol and 12 species of flowers and herbs) on the skin. Both treatments have a protective function. *Yachaks* from the Chimborazo province use tobacco for purification, by directing smoke towards the patient. Tobacco is added to coal and set on fire. Smoke envelops the whole body of the patient. Tobacco is also a kind of connector with the *yachak's* protector spirit who helps him to heal and accumulate the power. During purification rites healers whistle, sing and speak formulas addressed to mountains, lagoons, volcanoes, *Pachamama* or the God (depending on beliefs), asking for healing. The words are spoken very quickly, quietly and indistinctly. There is no common formula. Each shaman creates his own individual and unique version, which is sometimes transferred from master to disciple, or presented in visions or dreams.

Radiografía de los pobres (x-ray for poor people) requiring the use of a guinea pig is very popular in the Andes. The *yachak* selects healthy animals that are no more than three months old. For a female-patient he uses a male-animal and a female for a male-patient. The ritual involves kneading or rubbing a patient's body with the animal, the head with the head, the abdomen with the abdomen, etc. According to healers, guinea pig has the power of healing and can absorb diseases by physical contact with the patient. Sometimes, the animal dies during this process. Otherwise, the *yachak* kills the animal, he skins it and then he opens it up. According to *yachaks*, guinea pigs are built in the same way as a human body. The diagnosis is based on the analysis of animal's internal organs, bones and skin. When one of the parts shows redness, bumps, cracks or other lesions, it means that the patient has a problem with this particular part of the body.

In the past, indigenous shamanic practices were prohibited or demonized. Therefore, *yachaks* used to receive patients in their houses in the cover of the night, in order to hide their activities from inimical local administration. Even today, the oldest of *yachaks* serve only at night. Nowadays, it is not because of the fear of persecution but rather out of habit. As healers, they usually work in their own house and they see patients in separate rooms dedicated to medical treatment. The most important part of such a room is an altar. It is located in the central part of the chamber or by one of the walls. Each altar has four principal components, symbolizing the four elements: water, rocks (earth), fire and air. The rest of equipment is individualised and depends on the shaman's beliefs. If they are Catholic (in the form of so-called *folk Catholicism*) they have religious artefacts- pictures,

rosaries and figurines of saints, the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ. The quality (power) of an altar is determined by the so-called sacred objects, such as spears from a special type of wood, stones, and shells which are charged by *atiy*. During treatment and rituals these items also have a protective function. Before and after treatment the *yachaks* put flowers, corn, and other grains under the altar. The practice of thanksgiving (reciprocity) strengthens the power of shamans and provides compensation and thanks to *Pachamama*. In the literature (Sharon 1976: 75; Joralemon, Sharon 1993: 168; Giese 1989: 151-154) we come across the concept of altar division into two sides (left and right). The left one is identified with life-taking forces and the right with life-giving forces (Joralemon 1985: 10):

An altar [mesa], as it is understood by the shamans, is a game board, a symbolic paradigm against which the ritual is played. It represents the struggle between life-taking and life-giving forces, between left and right. But this struggle, this opposition, becomes a passage, a resolution, by the shaman's reaffirmation of mastery over both the left and the right. He is a balancer in the contest between opposing forces. The game of ritual, which the mesa presents in concrete symbols, is a balancing act performed by an individual who stands above the contest by mastering both sides.

Joralemon (1985: 21) provides an example of a ritual with San Pedro cactus (*Echinopsis pachanoi*), which is considered to be a sacred plant in the Andes – it has healing powers. Andean specialists receive visions after drinking an infusion from its leaves. Among Peruvian healers, where the author observed this ritual, the cactus is placed on the right side of the altar. Personally, I did not find such division of the altar area in the shamanic practices among the Ecuadorian Quichua. However, I found the same relationship and symbolism in a slightly different context. It is present in treatment process, preparation of medications and in rituals. During treatment, *yachaks* do not touch a patient's body with their left hand, they say it may cause the absorption of disease. The *yachaks* transfer power (e.g. to a disciple), and use plants to treat – e.g. by rubbing an ointment of medicinal herbs – with their right hand. I also noticed this division during rituals, when the *yachak* puts his left hand on the ground and says different formulas or sings songs asking *Pachamama* for power.

Axel Kroeger and Francoise Barbir-Freedman, authors of the book *La lucha por la salud en el Alto Amazonas y en los Andes*, claim that altar is a symbolic point of shaman's contact with spirits, and that it represents the place of regeneration of healing power, which is usually a stream or a source (Barbir-Freedmann, Kroeger 1992: 233). In my opinion, it is not limited only to the symbolic (metaphorical) meaning. Altar is made of elements that come out of powerful places, i.e. those that are filled with *atiy*. The presence of these elements not only represents places of power, but in the physical (material) way they are present at the time of treatment in shaman's house. Therefore, altar is not only a metaphor but a physical reconstruction of the power.

Rituals celebrated by *yachaks* are not only of medical nature. They often have a collective character and they are celebrated as part of indigenous feasts. On such occasions it is necessary to gather all the villagers. Rituals are celebrated near waterfalls, streams, lagoons, lakes, in mountains or at the foot of volcanoes. The central point of each ritual is an altar, which also includes four elements (like a private altar of the *yachak*). In its centre, there is a small vessel with water and fire where the *yachak* throws dried plants, producing unique scent. Altar takes the form of a circle or spiral (with fruits, flowers, seeds and stones), which is the representation of time. Around the altar, people participating in the ritual also form circles, standing in an alternate order (female, male, female etc.). The number of circles depends on the number of participants. Their forms are based on the four cardinal points defining the four directions of the world. These points are, at the same time, gates (called *puertas*) to the invisible world. In the gates there are stranded *guardianes* (defender or guards). They are situated within the last circle, the largest and the outermost ring. The *guardines* task is to control evil spirits who can enter the circle and harm participants. The first circle of the altar is created by the shaman and *pilares* (persons who fulfil a role of helper or shaman's assistant) – other shamans and young disciples. The main *yachak* and his helpers offer gifts, express requests, prayers and sing *canticos* (shamanic songs). Other circles are created by other participants. Every person is obliged to bring gifts for *Pachamama*– flowers and food (at the end they are divided among all the participants as a symbol of unity and harmony).

Nowadays, not every local community has its own *yachak*. Therefore, some shamans have become very mobile. They travel to perform rituals or medical treatments in neighbouring villages (usually within one province). Already mentioned Axel Kroeger and Francoise Barbira-Freedman (1992: 230–231), writing about the range of *yachak*'s work, created a classification which divides shamans into two groups: „community members” and „foreign”. The former are leaders of a community who take part in everyday life. The latter have marginal status and do not participate in daily activities of a group. The authors suggest that „the distinction between foreign and local healers can be found in all regions of traditional communities, at all levels of the hierarchy of healers, from the most remote areas where indigenous traditions survive as the most important to urban areas of Metis”. This division, however, is imposed from the outside and it does not correspond to the native point of view. Firstly, the relationship between the community and the shaman is formed mainly by sharing the same ideas, beliefs, and practices. The matter of sharing a living space or belonging to the same group is less important here. Indigenous patients use the services of healers outside the village or *pueblo* due to insufficient number of skilled specialists. Secondly, the status of the *yachak* generates certain behaviour and relationships. Even if he does not come from the same community, he shares the worldview of indigenous groups and he has desirable experience, knowledge and skills that the other members of the group lack. Therefore, *yachaks* are invited to celebrate rituals; ask *Pachamama* for a good harvest, harmony and prosperity for a given community.

They provide some advice or mediation. Even if a shaman is not resident in a community (is locally foreign), he can enter into a relationship with a group because he participates in the most important social practices, which impact the everyday life of a group. The *yachak* has the status of a wanderer whose only destiny is teaching and healing in order to maintain the balance (health) of a group. *Yachaks* enter a community under special but temporary conditions. To enter a group and lead it, he must become familiar. The group makes him responsible for the most important issues, which require sensitivity, knowledge, and above all, exceptional power. After he completes his task he goes away. He loses his special status in the group and, once again, he becomes a stranger. Because of his skills, he is presented with a possibility of coming and leaving. To conclude this question, it must be stated that the problem of alienation and locality can be solved if there are conditions for doing it capably. It is true that a *yachak-outsider* never becomes a permanent community member and he will not enter into day-to-day relations with the inhabitants. However, for the time of the ritual he becomes a representative and a member with specific temporary status of the group's guide.

The activities of the *yachak* are real indicators of his prestige and social authority. However, the acceptance of their abilities does not mean any group's blind faith in their unique healing power. The proof of truthfulness and effectiveness is the *yachak's* life. It is related to the Quichuan concept of knowledge. The term "*yachak*" derives from the word "*yachay*" which in Quichua language has three basic meanings: 1. knowledge (content); 2. to understand, to have knowledge of a topic, to have the ability to learn; 3. the knowledge possessed and demonstrated, to practise knowledge, to have a habit of doing something. The concept of *yachay* includes the concept of knowledge, and cognitive and intellectual ability to gain it, but it is also related to the concept of action. Not only does knowledge mean theory (a potentiality) but it also denotes empirical practice. "To know" means simultaneously "to know" and "to introduce in practice" (Przytomska 2015a). According to César Itier (Crickmay 2002: 40–55) the word *yachay* derives from the archaic form *yacha*, in which the prefix *ya-* means "movement", while suffix *-cha* indicates the implementation of an indicated action. The secret of local signification lies in a question of how Quichua perceive and understand the concept of being a *yachak* – the one who knows and can demonstrate knowledge through his own deeds. Therefore, knowledge is not only verbally articulated. Its transmission occurs as a result of its implementation (practice) by the *yachak* and by the experience of a group, if the *yachak* provides an example by his own life, if he is the illustration of what he says. This signifies that he has the gift and skills needed to perform the mission and to serve the community. Social skills legitimate the healer and they influence his prestige. His educational function is present in social practices – in rituals, disputes, healing processes, help in conflict resolution. Nevertheless, his teaching does not take a form of theoretical speeches or lectures. Most of the time it constitutes the response to human behaviour. Nothing is limited only to theory (Przytomska 2015b: 199–215).

Other side of shamanism

Yachaks can as well be called *hampi* (the one who poisons). *Jambi* in Quichua signifies both: a medicine and a poison. Colloquially called *brujos* (witches) in Spanish, they can use their skills to harm and kill. In fact, these apparently antithetic activities are based on the same mechanism and the boundary between them can be changed. In the Amazon, the researchers call this phenomenon *dark shamanism*. The term was introduced by Johannes Wilbert, who conducted research among Warao inhabiting the Orinoco Delta in the North-Eastern Venezuela and Eastern Guyana (Wilbert 1972). Neil L. Whitehead, who conducted research on shamanism (*kanaimá*) in Patamuna the Guiana Shield, indicates that anthropological literature tends to focus on the „good“ side of shamanism while the matter of so-called *dark shamanism* is systematically avoided or treated superficially (Whitehead, Wright 2004: 10). The researchers of the Andes have never taken this subject seriously. I outline this topic, because it is a very important part of the Andean shamanic practices and it complements the contemporary image of *yachaks*.

The phenomenon of *brujería* among Quichua takes three different forms. Firstly, it is (1) the practice of a shaman aimed to harm (by an illness, death and other misfortunes) a particular person on someone else's behalf. It is classified as a ritual performed indirectly, i.e. at a distance. Sometimes *brujería* takes (2) a form of an open, conscious and direct struggle between shamans in a situation of conflict or during a ritual when there are open so-called *puentes* (bridges of power) between the ritual participants. Thirdly, *brujería* involves (3) the activities which I call „vampirism“. They consist in direct but covert theft of power (*atiy*) from other shamans, rarely from people unrelated to shamanic practices. The crucial point is the back – a place between the shoulder blades. *Yachaks* confirm that during an attack the victim feels pressure and hotness in this part of their body. The victims are mostly young apprentices, who are not fully aware of hostile actions of others *yachaks* and do not know how to effectively defend themselves. When the gift or power is stolen, *jambij* can cast a „spell“ called *secada* (drying) on his victim, in order to get rid of the enemy. The illness is manifested by a sudden and quick loss of weight. Within a week, the victim becomes skin and bone, and then in a very short time he dies. The following story may serve as an example of (3) hidden attacks:

Yachaks are very envious of knowledge. They are very reserved and secretive. It's their secret. Each of them has thier own individual form of action, treatment. They have their own private prayers and songs. Once, I met two very old *yachaks*. They were very enlightened. They had extensive knowledge inherited from previous generations. Their ancestors were also *yachaks*. It happened in 1994. One of them had the gift of vision. One day, a man came to that *yachak* from outside of the village and asked him for help in finding his missing cattle. The *yachak* performed a ritual and he pointed out cars with the stolen cattle. The man called the police and they found the stolen animals and captured the thieves. The man from the other village asked the *yachak* what he wanted as a payment. But

the yachak said: "it's up to you". It was a good yachak; he never asked for specific amounts of money. The man offered him a part of his herd of cattle. What happened later? After that event, the old yachak, who had the gift of vision, became popular in the entire province. One day, other yachak from the same village came to him and said: „how is it possible that you have the gift of vision and I don't?". But the old yachak didn't reveal his secret. Next time they met at some collective ceremony. They sat next to each other. (...) During collective rituals yachaks create bridges of power. It is a very dangerous moment. Then, that night something terrible happened. The jealous yachak stole the other's power. The old yachak, the one with the gift of vision, lost everything. That man stole his knowledge and his gift. The old yachak couldn't see anything. He lost everything, because he couldn't defend himself.

The final result of a fight depends on the power of shamans and cannot be predicted. Nobody knows in what condition the enemy is. Often, particularly during rituals, shamans make an alliance to accumulate power and to effectively attack their rivals. Such practices have led today's *yachaks* to form clans – groups of allied *yachaks*, created to promote and protect each other and help in treatment after the attacks. Moreover, group members share common interests. All activities of *brujería* are always conscious and voluntary. „Good" and „bad" *yachaks* use the same techniques in their practices and have the same knowledge. They can use the same sources of power (lagoons, volcanoes, streams, etc.) for both aims. As N. L. Whitehead put it, *dark shamanism* is the other side of the same coin.

During my research, I observed several shamanic attacks. I describe briefly two situations below. The first incident took place during a meeting of over a dozen of *yachaks* from the Chimborazo province. This fight took place in a public space. An initially quiet conversation between two *yachaks* turned into a serious argument. As it turned out later, it was associated with their long-standing conflict. I started to watch them when I heard some screams – both loud and low sounds. It was terrifying. They dribbled. Their eyes were bloodshot, popping out of their heads. They stood slightly hunched with heads lowered and tense bodies. I could see the pulsing veins in their necks. They resembled animals getting ready to attack. In the end, they both gave up. They turned away and went in opposite directions, limping. It all took no more than a few minutes. The incident was watched by a few people, including others *yachaks*. Nobody reacted or commented on it. Later, one of the observers, in response to my question, said: „It's better not to meddle in the affairs of other people". A while later I talked about the incident with a younger *yachak* who participated in the struggle. I learned that his treatment after the battle lasted three days. He stated that they had got carried away by their emotions.

The second example of *brujería* is quite tragic. Although I was not a direct witness or participant, I watched reactions and heard comments about those events. At that time, I lived with *yachak* Roberto and his family in a village near Riobamba (in the Chimborazo province). One morning, during breakfast, Roberto received a vision. He started drooling and blinking. A spoon slipped out of his

hand and he mumbled to himself. He looked as if he had been paralysed. After having recovered consciousness, he told us that hard days were coming, and we must be careful. During the following few days he was tormented by dreams and visions. Roberto was the head of an alliance formed by five other *yachaks*. At that time, all of them were weakened because of some prior events. As he claimed, they came into conflict with a group of *yachaks* from another province. He suggested that they needed to pause their activities for some time in order to regenerate their power. One of the shamans living in Quito decided otherwise. A patient came to him with a disease caused by *brujería*. During the treatment (actually a purification ritual) the shaman lost consciousness. His wife took him to the hospital. Doctors announced that he was in a coma, but they failed to provide a clear diagnosis. After two weeks in the hospital, the man died. The *yachak* with whom I lived, explained to me that his friend from Quito had been too weak to cope with treatment (Roberto said: *Él tenía muy poca fuerza/ He had too little power*). None of the clan members had made any attempt to heal the *yachak* from Quito. They explained that they had been too weak to help him. Secondly, they suspected that the incident was caused by the action of the hostile group. The *yachaks* feared that if they tried to help, it could trigger an open conflict. They could not afford it in that situation.

The energetic aggression may also be action of non-humans (bad spirits). I personally experienced one instance of non-human aggression in the house of a shaman from Chimborazo province. I participated in a San Pedro ritual. I did not drink the cactus decoction and only observed the ceremony. The same night I woke up in tears at 4 a.m. I dreamed that something or someone came to me (some gloomy, bad and dark creatures which I could not identify) and they stole some of my characteristics, skill; something of mine that I could not exactly define. I did not know what happened exactly, but I was terrified, and I felt that I was not me anymore. I was only laying in my bed, waiting until a new day started, and the household woke up. I told my dream and what I felt to the shaman. He said that during the ceremony, evil spirits or some *brujo* came to me and stole something that was valuable to them. That same evening the shaman performed a ritual during which he went to recover what had been stolen and he called my soul. It is hard to explain but suddenly I felt better. The shaman explained that sometimes during the ceremony unexpected things may happen. During shamanic rituals, shamans open the passage between the world of humans and nonhumans. Apart from „good spirits“, the “evil spirits” may also come along. According to him this was what happened in this case.

Shamanic practices as a political game

An American anthropologist, Frank Salomon (1983: 413–425), shows that in the colonial times shamanism was a tool used during fights against enemies. Shamans not only had „magical” powers but also political power, which was exercised both

inside indigenous groups and outside of them, as a result of interethnic relations and dependencies. Ethnohistorical studies of eighteenth-century sorcery trials in the Royal Audience of Quito (1563–1822) indicate that many acts of „magical“ aggression and defence were caused by the colonial oppression. Shamanism was the mechanism of internal resistance, which regulated the relations of domination and subordination imposed by the colonial administration. Moreover, shamanic practice was adapted to the new situation in various ways. It occurred on the outskirts of the colonial organism, where the government’s control was not very effective. The mechanisms of the colonial subordination of indigenous groups proved to be not strong enough to effectively stand up to the opposition (represented, among others, by shamans) and to affect the relations of indigenous communities. Shamans and their patients (clients) adapted to the colonial situation in different ways – they paralysed legal systems by creating rebel groups. They penetrated administrative structures and, consequently, thwarted their plans. Solomon describes cases when officials and merchants were left to the mercy and help of shamans in their dealings with local communities. In this context, shamans played an important political role in establishing relations between the natives and the colonizers. When the ineptitude of local officials became apparent, the colonizers suddenly realized that the real power over indigenous communities is concentrated in other hands. The reasons of these situations have been detected in the actions of magical provenance and, at the same time, the colonizers denied the local political dependency (Salomon 1983: 414). Soon they made efforts to weaken the shamans’ position. They emphasized shamans’ demonic powers and accused them of crimes and misdeeds. Silverblatt (1980: 176) points out that the colonial authorities permanently demonized shamans. The policy aimed to dispose of them, but it was not effective enough, especially among people from the peripheries, where the resistance was difficult to overcome. “Magic” strength very soon began to be perceived by the Creole society as the essence of indigenous culture and as a force that exceeded the ethnic and cultural boundaries. By this conceptualization, the colonizers rationalized their own aggression against indigenous people.

In addition, Andean indigenous population was perceived as leaderless (except for the groups to which the colonial leaders were delegated) and uncontrolled (or ungovernable). Such assumptions hampered the management of indigenous communities. Solomon confirms that cases of shamanic aggression in the eighteenth-century Andes reflect the complicated micro-political situation. Shamanism, or rather its aggressive form, served not only to eliminate competitors (Middleton 1960; Mair 1969: 116–159) but also as a way of relieving the economic and ecological tensions caused by unequal distribution of goods and land management. Luis Millones (1979) shows that the increasing political power of shamanic practices in that period was associated with the degradation of colonial judiciary and with the attempt to resist growing dominance of the Catholic clergy.

Interethnic aggression of shamans can be interpreted as “peculiar strength of weakness” of the colonial power (Salomon 1983: 425), which was used very often, although in an invisible way, in local conflicts. These facts demonstrate that the colonial authorities were not always effective, and that they did not fully control indigenous groups. The lack of understanding of different cultural practices and lack of defence or preventive mechanisms made the administration impotent and sometimes also dependent on shamans. The reason was lack of alternatives, or the desire to use the insidious (relatively easily accessible) forms of defence or attack. Such situation only perpetuated the incorporation of magical-political forces of shamans into the colonial system.

Solomon demonstrates different situations, in which the representatives of the colonial powers used the services of shamans to solve their internal conflicts. In these times, the most powerful shamans knew the colonial society; they had a network of contacts that stretched over vast geographical areas, to different ethnic groups, as well as to various classes of the Creole-indigenous society. These conclusions, drawn from historical context, also help us to understand contemporary shamanic relationships. The intercultural competence of shamans still allows them to align themselves with culturally different enemies and, as a result, to extend their practices from intra-indigenous politics to external post-colonial society. I think that shamanism is not only an exotic phenomenon or, in the case of aggression, a peculiar problem of indigenous communities, but that it has become an important part of the political practices of the colonial administration (Przytomska 2015). Nowadays, this problem still exists. People still talk informally about the political competition supported by shamans.

Conclusions

Within the shamanic practices, we find two patterns of praxis (Descola uses it to specify properties of objectified social practices, cognitive templates or intermediate representations): reciprocity and predation (Descola 2013). The first principle represents the exchange system which strengthens communities and gives them a sense of justice and stability. As to the second, humans can pursue the relationship of predation in two ways. One is by not preserving the principle of *ayni*, i.e. if they do not fulfil their obligations towards the community, then they become spongers. More obvious is the *brujería's* example. All patterns of social relations are realized in the same way between human persons and non-human persons. The ethnographic material presented in this paper demonstrates that shamanism is a deeply social practice which permeates all social dimensions. Moreover, we can conclude that shamanic practices have two distinct faces – reproductive and destructive at the same time. First, they maintain an order between the world of human and non-human persons. It means that they make possible the indigenous reproduction according to their own perception of the world. On the other hand, these practices are imbued with aggression.

Brujería practices and accusations may represent tensions in the inter-community and inter-ethnic relations. It is also a product of relationships, pre-Columbian, colonial and contemporary, which are situated within two overlapping worlds of Indian and non-Indian. Nowadays, it is not possible to clearly separate these two spaces. Unquestionably, the other side of Quichuan shamanic practices requires extensive research, analysis and reflection on the grounds for uncontrolled or illegitimate shamanic forms of aggression.

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SUMMARY

Reproduction and aggression: shamanic practices among Quichuas from Ecuador (Imbabura and Chimborazo Provinces)

This paper describes the contemporary shamanism among Quichua from the Ecuadorian Andes (Imbabura and Chimborazo provinces in the Sierra region), shaman's roles and his status in local indigenous communities. Basing on the Quichua worldview, I show what the key elements of shamanic practices are and what is its importance to the continuity of Quichua life and culture. The thesis of this text is that shamanism has two complementary faces. The Quechua shamanism in Ecuador is based on social reproduction or construction (healing, maintaining the fertility of nature and people) and aggression at the same time (witchcraft).

Keywords: shamanism, Ecuador, Quechua, indigenous worldview.