Expanding a Shamanic Purview in Amazonian Ecuador

Norman E. Whitten, Jr.

Professor Emeritus of Anthropology & Latin American Studies
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
Curator of the Spurlock Museum
Senior University Scholar - USA

The shamanic universe of a particular Amazonian people yields information on processes of male shamanic presence and prescience in movement from this world to the spirit world and back. The special shamanic purview is expanded in this article to include female ceramicists of indigenous Canelos Quichua Amazonian culture, Ecuadorian interculturality, festivity and political protest, and the intellectualization of shamanic cosmology. It concludes with a section on "distant knowledge and shamanic connectivity" that ranges from the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution to international macro-indigenous identity. Originally prepared in 2009 to honor Michael J. Harner, the article contains a number of personal references and remembrances of the Whittens of Harner's groundbreaking work among the Ecuadorian Shuar.
in visionary and sensory awakening. Datura (wanduj) opens the portals to allow humans to enter the spirit world. Ayahuasca allows humans to move in to and come out of the spirit world and interact with spirits in the human world. I discuss these phenomena in a bit more detail below, after completing this brief discussion of shamanic perspective.

The locus where the spirits enter and exit our world and where the human shamans exit and re-enter our world is the space of shamanic prescience. The ability to perceive this space depends on the foresight of the shaman. To be redundant, this locus is ahead of us in quotidian time. Shamanic presence refers to a specific in situ shaman in an ongoing event, of which the actual shaman-controlled séance is the most prominent example. This séance may transform to a spirit-shaman-controlled event. (2) As we shall see, both shamanic prescience and shamanic presence are integral to the production of alternative modern realities in segments of indigenous Latin America.

Spirit shamans enter and depart from the human plane of existence, whether or not we know they are there. The human shaman may enter the spirit world, but if he or she remains there too long, he or she dies in the human world and can reenter only as a detached soul, apparition, or perhaps spirit. Such an apparition is often known as supai in Quichua and iwianch in Jivaroan.

In the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century esoteric doctrine subsuming shamanic gnosis and performance is conveyed not only through shamanic séance, but also by Canelos Quichua indigenous intellectuals interacting with acknowledged shamans. I return to this intellectualization later in this chapter. Before continuing, let me give a brief background sketch of experiences that commenced in the 1960s and continue through the present into the future.

Personal Development

I was in my third year of graduate school in 1962 when «Jivaro Souls» appeared in the American Anthropologist. I had undertaken my first couple of months of field research with Afro-Ecuadorian and Chachi indigenous people in the northwest rain forest of Ecuador and was preparing for extended field research. Harner’s groundbreaking article made it crystal clear that to understand numinous substances we had to take the precision of esoteric knowledge very seriously, to understand it, in Malinowski’s (1922) terms, from «the native point of view.» In 1968, soon after «The Sound of Rushing Water» was published in Natural History, Sibby...
Prior to this revelation, in 1972, we attended our first sáncie with Virgilio and his patients and clients in Puma Llacta of the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo, and in time we learned that he was not only a powerful shaman, but also a bancu, a seat of power for a powerful spirit shaman. Through the human shaman, sent magical killing darts at enemies of the shaman and his resident kin group (ayllu), Virgilio was the master spirit of the rain forest. The former is also known as sinchi yachaj (powerful or strong shaman), and the latter as sacha runa, forest person (male or female). Although Sungui is regarded as the first shaman, his or her power is such that to tap it is to release destructive chaos on the world. In shamanic performance (my late wife, Dorothea Scott Whitten) and I met a powerful shaman from Canelos, Alejo Vargas. We gave him and his family a ride from the end of the road at Veracruz to Puyo, Amazonian Ecuador. Later (1973), in Canelos, we learned that the magical darts from this sinchi yachaj (powerful or strong shaman), had caused our compadre and long-time collaborator, Marcelo Santi Simbaña, and his wife, comadre Faviola Vargas Aranda, to flee Canelos and move to Puma Llacta under the protection of the spirit shield, supai lurira, of Marcelo’s father, powerful shaman Virgilio Santi.

Michael Harner enters this progression of knowledge in many ways. In 1972, after many years of communication, he graciously sent us a copy of his outstanding and enduring ethnography, The Jívaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls, while we were undertaking field research in the greater Puyo region. After our return to the U.S. in the fall of 1973 we consulted him many times on multiple facets of interculturality, and he always responded in ways that were most helpful and encouraging.

The Primacy of Spirit Shamans

I said above that «the power of the spirit shaman is prior to that of the human shaman.» To make sense out of what comes next we need more information on this. Two androgynous master spirits are Sungui, the master spirit of the all-encompassing hydrosphere, and Amasanga, the master spirit of the rain forest. The former is also known in feminine form as yacu mama, water «mother» (3) and the latter as sacha runa, forest person (male or female). Although Sungui is regarded as the first shaman, his or her power is such that to tap it is to release destructive chaos on the world. In shamanic performance Sungui, as yacu mama, is the first spirit to come to the human shaman as he begins to «see» (ricuna). The apparition is usually the imagery of an anaconda but may be a giant fish. Amasanga, in a plethora of manifestations, is the spirit shaman with whom human shamans usually interact. The bifurcation of Amasanga is that of forest spirit of human (Runa) territory, and the Jujurí spirit, who is master of the territory of other people and of monkeys. If a human is ensorcelled by any manifestation of Amasanga, as spirit forest shaman, only another spirit forest shaman can affect a cure. Usually such an unfortunate person, even a powerful human shaman, dies when the ire of Amasanga is unleashed.

The portal to the realm of Sungui is opened by the ingestion of American Datura (Brugmansia suaveolens), but in this opening the domains of Sungui and Amasanga are merged. As the seeker moves through mystical space he or she often «sees» as the anaconda «sees,» as if submerged in a lagoon (see Whitten 1985: 151-162). Only after a shaman or aspiring shaman has mastered the ability to «see» through the direct help of the wanduj supai, the Datura spirit, he can begin to appreciate the varied uses of ayahuasca and plant additives. This is why I wrote above that the spirit shaman is prior to the human one, as Datura is prior to ayahuasca.

Datura is of the day; the sun provides order and a clear east-west transect from dawn to dusk. One begins his or her trip into and through regions of the spirit world as the sun reaches its zenith. Wanduj (Datura) represents the consistency within the spirit world, a world of death to humans who cannot reenter the human world. Ayahuasca is of the night, where the moon represents chaos, rising in different sectors and moving in varied manners, in different shapes and sizes. The chaos is controlled by the human shaman in interaction with spirits that come from the domains of Sungui and Amasanga (or their merged domains). Spirits of an ayahuasca session stay with the partakers in this human world. Whereas, in a Datura quest, the Runa is «gone» from the human world while physically in the human world, ayahuasca partakers are coming and going from human and spirit worlds as spirits do the same.

Expanding the Purview of Shamanism: Feminine Dimensions

My first expansion of shamanic purview is to women. Most but not all Canelos Quichua shamans are male, and they are known as yachaj, one who knows, or more likely sinchi yachaj, powerful (or strong) one who knows. If they attain the status of bancu they serve, at times, as the seat of power of a spirit shaman. The bancu is often
referred to as muscuyuj, a visionary. Women who are master potters may be called yachaj warmi, woman who knows, or most often sinchi muscuyuj warmi, powerful visionary (or image possessing) woman. We have also heard such women called sinchi supai warmi, powerful spirit woman. While making pottery women cross the boundaries between their everyday world and the spirit world. They do this through song, graphic imagery, and perhaps visionary activity, induced by neither tobacco nor any psychotropic substance.

A woman potter is the quintessence of creative prescience. She begins with a large mound of clay, takes from it a lump with which to work, rolls coils on a turtle shaped board analogous to the male shamanic board for cutting tobacco (and symbolizing the seat of power of the water spirit shaman and the forest spirit shaman). With her command of clay and rock dyes and slips, brushes made from her hair, scrapers from calabash shells and insightful knowledge of her world of humans and spirits, she «sees» images of what she will make: drinking bowls, storage jars, figurines, playful images to be brought forth during festivals. We see lumps of clay and paraphernalia in the here and now; she looks forward in time and sees an array of colorful and fine ceramics to bring aesthetic feminine powers to her house, kin group, community, and beyond.

To illustrate how such vision works let us think about the Wayalumba Supai. This is the imagery of a black person or black spirit with the appearance of a person, whose feet are on «backwards—chulla chaqui», or contorted in some unusual manner. He lives in the forest near Runa habitations and beats his drum to another rhythm. Sometimes he lures unsuspected children to him. Here is how, some years ago, Esthela Dagua, working in her house in urban Puyo, envisioned and then created the image of this spirit, after learning that we had been told of him by people in Puma Llacta and elsewhere.

Wayalumba Supai photo image about here

During shamanic séances it is women who clarify the male shaman’s vision. One or more women do this by speaking as the approaching spirit to name and therefore clarify and identify itself-herself-himself by use of the first person: jatun amarun runa mani; jatun puma runa mani: «I am the great anaconda person»; «I am the great jaguar person.» In the spirit world ayahuasca, as soul vine, requires the leaves of yají mama, yají spirit woman, to bring shamanic visions to the partaker. This may be the leaves of another Banisteriopsis species or a Psychotria species. And when the human shaman becomes the bancu of a killing spirit, that spirit transforms to three feminine manifestations.

One of these manifestations is usually the shaman’s own sacha warmi who, for the late Domingo Salazar, was an anaconda that lived near the headwaters of the Arajuno river. Even though it lived in water, not on land, he called it his sacha warmi, his forest wife, and nicknamed one of his daughters amarun, after the Quichua name for this giant constrictor. Another manifestation to arrive from the spirit world to stand or dance before the human shaman sitting on his turtle-shaped seat of power is the forest spirit Amasanga warmi, whose avatar is the great black jaguar. Amasanga warmi may arrive as Jurijuri warmi, the fearsome feminine spirit-master of monkeys who eats monkeys with her front mouth, just like people do, and devours people, and all who smell like humans, with the mouth in the back of her head, or the back of her neck.

Put photo of Jurijuri Supai about here

The third manifestation to possess the bancu is the river spirit yacu mama, whose corporeal representation is the black or rainbow anaconda. Sometimes yacu mama arrives as a huge female fish. These three manifestations (and there is much variability in them) somehow merge to form a spiritual bancu presence under the human shaman bancu who also becomes the bancu for the tripartite merged forces of sacha warmi, Amasanga (or Jurijuri) warmi and yacu mama. As he sits, shakes his leaf bundle, whistles, and chants, the «one who knows» is sitting on the spirit bancu and is also serving as the seat of power of the spirit bancu. As such we can say that, as bancu, the shaman embodies spiritual immanence.

Interculturality

My second purview expansion is the interculturality of shamanic powers and places. In his book The Jivaro Mike states that, «The most powerful, and therefore most valued, supernatural darts are considered to be those belonging to the shamans of the Quichua-speaking Canelos [people] . . . «men wishing to become successful shamans would prefer to obtain their own supernatural darts from [powerful Canelos Quichua shamans and bancus]» (1972: 119, 120). What is left out of the discussion is the language that conveys shamanic gnosis integral to the transmission of magical darts (supai biruti, tsintsaca in Quichua, tsentsak in Jivaroin). The initial sites of transmission where Shuar meet Canelos Quichua are in the westernmost Ecuadorian Pastaza regions such as the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo and Canelos, the
central Ecuadorean Bobonaza regions such as Sarayacu, and the southern Bobonaza region radiating out of Montalvo. Here we find Quichua-Achuar and some Shuar bilingualism, and many of those bilinguals can adopt the Shuar dialect for purposes of shamantic transmissions. Strikingly absent as a site is the large Pacayacu region between Canelos and Sarayacu that extends from the Río Yatapi south of the Bobonaza north to Villano, where to the best of my knowledge Shuar and Achuar are distinctly unwelcome.

The late Virgilio Santi comes to mind here with regard to his wide ranging intercultural relationships as signaled by the claim of being «from Méndez» (Shuar territory), by his close kinship ties to the Achuar Copataza-Capahuari region, by his residence in Canelos and marriage to a Napo warmi prior to moving to Pumilla on the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo south of Puyo. Achuar people too, from the Capahuari-Copataza-Pastaza region are often bilingual in Quichua. The bancu in this region of Canelos-Achuar biculturalism, rather than serving as a metaphor of a storage bank, is a person temporarily possessed by a spirit (or merged spirit forces), which may come to him in various manifestations, including deceased Zaparoan or Andoa ancestors. Without Harner’s initial insights Sibby and I might not have paid as much attention to intercultural communication through shamanic performance and discourse as we have.

The Avllu Festival and Political Protest

My third expansion of shamanic purview is that of the annual or semi-annual Canelos Quichua avllu (kinship) festival system (Whitten 1976: 165-202; N. Whitten and D. Whitten 2008: 119-166). Here people carry themselves to the brink of hallucinations and, as they approach a state of «seeing,» break into song to specific ancestors whom they perceive as «accompanying» them. The systematic and highly repetitive pulse of the small drums and tremolo of snares of these drums reach out to all beings, spirits, souls and what-have-you while at the same time building a collective spirit shield (supai lurira) or net (supai lica) around the area of the festival, keeping all evil (manalli) at bay or filtered out or tangled up outside of an expanding human-spirit universe. This too is a «coming and going» of people from this plane of existence to others.

Expanding the shamanic purview still further, into the realm of national transformations caused by indigenous political action, in 1990 there was a great indigenous uprising in Ecuador, followed, in 1992, by the March for Land and Life where Canelos Quichua, Achuar, and Shiwiar collectively trekked to Quito to eventually obtain over one million hectares of indigenous Amazonian territory (see Whitten, Whitten, and Chango 1997; N. Whitten and D. Whitten 2008). The Shuar themselves boycotted this event, though some reports have them leading it. In this great political trek shamanic séances were ubiquitous. The first night was spent in Río Verde in the veritable montaña where groups of shamans collectively took Banisteriopsis caapi mixed with yají mama leaves and communicated about ancient ties to ancestors (including Achuar, Andoa-Shimigae, and Zápara) and spirits. Next came a reunion of Andean and Amazonian people in Andean Salasaca, where shamanic-led intercultural communication between diverse humans and diverse spirits never before experienced by living peoples was reported (Corr 2010: 115-116).

The trek from Amazonia to Andes involved, in other words, side trips to other planes of existence, to spirit worlds, to shamanic prescience as well as their ubiquitous shamanic presence. Leaders of the great trek remembered and drew substance from the knowledge of their shamanic ancestors. Examples include the Zaparoan grandfather of Antonio Vargas, Eliseo Vargas, who hailed from north of Sarayaquillu-Sarayacu, and lived out his life in Unión Base on the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo, and the great grandparents of the Viteri Gualinga brothers through their master-potter mother, a sinchi muschuyuj warmi, Rebeca Gualinga, of Sarayaquillu-Sarayacu who spent many adult years in Puyo. Pandu Gualinga was her mother’s father, and Roque Cuji was her father’s father’s father, a renown Andoa shaman who could turn himself into a jaguar. Such were the remembrances of those on trek to Quito from their Amazonian homes.

The shamans also looked forward toward Quito, the destination of hope and danger and saw their way to a better life for the marchers and their families still in the Oriente. We return to this in the final section. But first, I want to introduce a relatively new dimension of Amazonian shamanism: its intellectualization by non-shamans.

Shamanic Intellectualization

Alfonso Chango’s father, the late Abraham Chango, is Achuar from the Capahuari River region and his mother, Clara Santi Simbaña, is a Puyo Runa daughter of Virgilio Santi. Alfonso’s ex-wife’s father, Domingo Salazar, was a powerful shaman of the Upper Arajuno River region so well known in Ecuador that he is depicted in Andean Tigua art (D. Whitten 2003: 252). In 1983 Alfonso wrote an extended treatise on the origins and practice of
Canelos Quichua shamanism, inspired by his mother’s songs, and illustrated with his own drawings. In 1984 a condensed version was published as the booklet Yachaj Sami Yachachina (Shaman’s Class Lessons) by Mundo Shuar (now Abya Yala) in Quito.

**Photo of Cover of Yachaj Sami Yachachina here**

In 2008 and 2009, following a severe illness that necessitated three Brugmansia (wandaj) induced curing sessions (wandajta upisha muscuna) with forest-master spirit shaman Amasanga (wandaj supai), Alfonso spontaneously returned to his task of mystical pedagogy with deepened insight into shamanic phenomena. He did not become a shaman, and is not planning to become one. But he is engaged in intellectualizing what he and others regard as fundamental dimensions of Canelos Quichua culture specifically, and Runa culture generally: the presence and prescience of shamans in all phases of life and the inner workings of shamanic gnosis that separates them from others while strengthening the bonds of family, kinship, and community between shamanic nodal people and the rest. We treat a few insights of this specific intellectual here as illustrative of a depth of indigenous philosophy yet to be adequately plumbed by questing scholars.

In 2009 Alfonso began his image-laden depiction of shamanic gnosis and the spirit life world with the concept of the shaman’s causaushecai, a different world from that which we normally experience, and moved immediately to what came to the mind of shamans in the beginnings chronotope of shamanic visions (callari muscuiguna apamusheca). He moved through illustrations of this imagery in the shaman’s brain and then immediately to shamanic prescience—how he sees the future—punshaclla ricuna. He dramatically illustrated the shamanic ability to be sitting on his bancu and flying through the air at the same time, jatun llangai (an illustration of this during a shamanic séance can be found in the CD album Soul Vine Shaman 2010, and its transcription on the downloaded monograph, Whitten 2009). After extensive discussion of social relations involving the shaman he turned to manchaita—fear—which led to the multiple ways by which a shaman, who is just like us in quotidian life is really—and at the same time—very different because of his spirit-induced abilities to heal and kill.

Eventually he got to muscuyuj, and actually illustrated how people would «see» (ricuna) a bancu, if they were so foolish as to look right at him (something one should never, ever do).

**Image of muscuyuj here**

He described this image of the bancu as a completely «defleshed» yachaj. He stressed that these bancus were beings with a supai, meaning they are beings in a state of spiritual immanence. Here, for comparison, is a master potter’s image of a spirit shaman in feminine form. This is Sungui, the ultimate source of power in the universe, and first shaman. In this photograph of the pottery rendition made by Apacha Vargas in 1979, a woman widely known as sinchi muscuiguna warmi, and even sacha supai warmi, Sungui on the right, is sculpted as male shaman, and his soul, as defleshed bancu muscuiguna in feminine form is on the left. The imagery of defleshing to reveal the real countenance of the spirit bancu compared to that which the adept «sees» if he or she is so ignorant or careless as to look directly at the human shaman, is striking.

**Image of Sungui and his soul here**

Alfonso returned to the subject of fear vis-à-vis the bancu, under the rubric of manchamaita, then brought up the word zargunhawi, which he said was an older term applied to a dangerous bancu, someone to be avoided. Alfonso produced forty-five colored paintings to illustrate these ideas, including specific techniques to provide temporary powers and long-term powers to clients.

Analysis of all of this is ongoing, as we integrate such new material with female imagery embedded in pottery design and discourse of the muscuyuj warmis, the master potters (women who posses visionary imagery). Alfonso stressed that once shamanism came into being in «beginning times places» (callarirucuguna, Quichua), often now called «times of great transformations» and «times of transcendental changes» in Spanish) all events take place with shamanic presence, and are foreseen through shamanic prescience. The universe, in other words, is shamanic. This leads us to the final section of connectivity and interculturality among Amazonian and Andean peoples, to the indigenous initiation of alternative modernities that include the dimension of shamanic gnosis in national discourse and praxis.

«Distant Knowledge» and Amazonian-Andean Shamanic Connectivity

We return now to indigenous presence and shamanic prescience on the national Ecuadorian scene and within indigenous Amazonian-Andean transactions of great consequence. Writing about Tigua Andean art that she
has analyzed over the past two decades, D. Whitten offers this interpretation:

«The multinational, multicultural nature of Ecuador is clearly articulated in portrayals of shamanic healing. While these [paintings] appear on the market frequently, with a great deal of repetition and copying, some stand out in their communication of patterns of interaction among healers, patients, and agents of illness and health. These layered connections exist across great social topographical and physical distances and extend from antiquity into modernity (D. Whitten 2003: 248).

Distant knowledge is a key to the shamanic presence that spans Amazonia and Andes. In the Ecuadorian Andes such knowledge is bound up in the concept of the Yumbo. In the context of power and healing, the yumbo is a powerful healer from either side of the Andes, specifically from the area of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchila (previously Santo Domingo de los Colorados) and the Quichua-speaking sectors of the Oriente, or Amazonian region.

The image of the Amazonian healer arriving to cure in the Andes is vividly portrayed in the Quito festival described by Salomon (1981) in «Killing the Yumbo» (also Fine-Dare 2007) and was revived during the Amazonian «camp out» in El Ejido park in Quito in 1992 (Whitten, Whitten, and Chango 1997) as 10,000 Amazonian indigenous people, joined by Andean peoples, held their highland ground en El Ejido Park in Quito until more than a million hectares of Amazonia was restored to the descendants of the original indigenous inhabitants.

The climax of the yumbada festival drama of Quito and its surrounding communities is the ritual killing of a hunted yumbo as peccary prey by another, predator yumbo. Participants then petition a yumbo shaman to bring the deceased back to life, which he does after summoning his spirit powers in his saliva (Ikausa) and blowing his breath (samai), infused with trago (raw cane alcohol) over the fallen ones’ head. The Amazonian shaman, who has been paid by other yumbo performers for his services, transforms an Amazonian space of death to an Andean indigenous resurrection as he creates life out of death. With this act the yachaj trips the symbolic lever to launch the final activities of an Andean dance of delight. In the words of Lawrence Sullivan (1988) the Eschaton of indigenous «ending everything» through the death of the yumbo in urban Quito is transformed into the Primordium, which is the indigenous beginnings of everything. This transformation (tucuna) is known in Quichua as pachacutij, an episteme of radical change from one space-time system to another.

In 1996 more indigenous uprisings led to the formation of the Pachakutik social movement that now serves as a political party. Two of the indigenous people who initiated this movement, Andean activist Luis Macas (whose mother’s brother is a shaman), and Amazonian activist Valerio Grefa (whose father is a shaman), drew on the presence and prescience of these two venerable yachajs to take a major step onto the national political stage. The concept of Pachakutik signals in national-political action a transformation of indigenous time-space from an unsatisfactory contemporary chronotope to another satisfactory one, a temporal transformation demanding conjoined Amazonian-Andean indigenous and spiritual agency. Such a transcendental change from contemporary life to a state of buen vivir (Spanish) or sumak kausai (Quichua) (4) has been written into the new Ecuadorian constitution.

D. Whitten (2011) recorded the dynamics painted by Tigua artist Francisco Vega Ugsha of the shamanic cleansing Dr. Luis Macas, the first indigenous national congressman elected on the Pachakutik platform. (Valerio Grefa, from Arajuño, Napo Province was also elected as regional congressman).

«Two paintings, quite similar in content and composition, portray different views of the political ascent of Dr. Luis Macas. Both scenes are set on the Panecillo («little bread loaf»), a landmark hill that over looks the colonial center of Quito where Macas is surrounded by colleagues and supported by throngs of other Andean indigenous people. Before he took the oath of office in August, 1996, as national congressman—the first indigenous person so elected—he and other newly elected indigenous representatives were cleansed by shamans on the plaza atop the Panecillo.»

Rachel Corr (2010: 107), long-time ethnographer of Salasaca, reports on publicity via Ambato radio July 4, 2002, on the fifteen-day visit to Riobamba of two Amazonian shamans, one of whom claimed to be a cousin of Antonio Vargas, a man from Unión Base of the Comuna San Jacinto, whose father’s father was Eliseo Vargas, the powerful Zápara shaman originally from north of Sarayaquillu-Sarayacu. Vargas served two terms as Director of CONAIE, the national indigenous organization housed in Quito, and even ran for the presidency of the republic. He attributed much of his success in this leadership role to the presence and prescience of both Amazonian and Andean shamans whom he regularly consulted before launching...

Michelle Wibbelsman, ethnographer of the greater Otavalo area in the north, also writes of the powers of shamans and their leadership roles in many Andean ceremonies. «Shamans, both male and female, . . . led the pilgrimage [to the sacred lechero tree, a tree of life or axis mundi]. In addition to local specialized knowledge their ritual paraphernalia reflected intercultural and interregional borrowings ranging from Native American healing traditions to ritual knowledge from the Ecuadorian Eastern Lowlands, known as the Oriente» (Wibbelsman 2009: 4). In a personal communication to me (Wibbelsman 27 May, 2010) writes: «Shamans present were members of the ASHIM (Association of Imbaburan Shamans). However, the Andean shamans had clearly traveled to and from Amazonia and exchanged knowledge with Amazonian yachajs and with Native American healing experts.»

Shamanic activities occur in international contexts, too, and we mention this briefly as we bring this essay to a close. In July 1990, after the great indigenous uprising referred to above, a Pan-Indigenous Congress was held in Quito. The theme of the congress, which had been established a year before in Bogotá, Colombia, was manifest in its title: Primer Encuentro Continental: 500 Años de Resistencia India (First Continental Encounter: 500 Years of Indian Resistance). The unity resulting from the sustained resistance was expressed as a reuniting of the condor and the eagle, symbolizing the union of the inner essence of Latin American indigenous spirituality, bound to shamanism, with the outer essence of North American spirituality, bound to public indigenous ceremony. The key to the unity lies in the collective sense of indigenous healing—shamanic in the case of Ecuador—of foreign inflicted illness. The identity of the indigenous shamanic power to heal serves as one of many reverential symbols worthy of macro-indigenous identity. This is an aesthetic quality that people self-identifying with human indigeneity find and appreciate across the boundaries of specific communities, regions, nations, diasporas and traditions. Twenty years later, in 14-16 June, 2010, this reunification of North and South was repeated in Quito, with shamanic healing at the center of many of the ceremonies held there.

Final Comments

I hope that I have identified two components of an important alternative modern reality of contemporary Ecuadorian life that together constitute a salient dimension of this very modernity: shamanic presence and shamanic prescience. Particularly salient here are those features that emanate from the indigenous people of its Amazonian regions. To seek out shamanic thought processes and praxes across multiple domains of Ecuadorian intercultural lifeworlds yields insights that cannot be gained in other ways. From motivations to undertake truly millennial movements (e.g. Whitten 1996, 2003; Whitten and Whitten 2008, 2011) to the offer of hope to the suffering; from creating urban drama to rural and urban art; from seeking transcendental vehicles to a «good life» to fomenting peaceful radical political-economic change, understanding of shamanism in contemporary Ecuador, as in past epochs, is enlightening and ever unfolding in its plethora of revelations.

Tucurín

Acknowledgments

All of the research upon which this chapter is based, beginning in 1968, has been and was until her passing in 2011, joint with Dorothea (Sibby) Scott Whitten, whose analytical skills and writings have been part of my thought processes for a very long time. I greatly appreciate her careful comments on drafts of this paper. I also thank Rachel Corr, Mary-Elizabeth Reeve, and Michelle Wibbelsman for many conversations involving Amazonian-Andean relationships and for trenchant and productive comments and advice on a penultimate draft of this essay. The intellectual insights of indigenous analyst Alfonso Chango was and is crucial to this presentation, as was and is the tutelage of Marcelo Santi Simbaña through many years beginning in 1971 in the small hamlet of Puma Llacta and later in his own founded hamlet of Cushi Tambo of the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo. Travels with Marcelo among numerous Canelos Quichua Runa territories as well as the Napo Runa, Achuar, and Shuar have helped greatly with my sense of interculturality and shamanic gnosis.

Notes

1. This perspective is challenged by Alice Beck Kehoe (2000). In spite of the extensive treatment in the Handbook of South American Indians, in the 1940s, and earlier, Kehoe traces the anthropological interest in shamanic performance, and its drug use in South America, to the hippie movements of the western United
States of the 1960s, and particularizes shamanic phenomena to only Asiatic Russia and northern North America. My perspective on an expanding purview emerges as this chapter develops. Basically, I entirely disagree with her. Without an understanding of shamanic practices and thought processes, an observer would miss much of what goes on in ecology, social relations, politics, ritual and art in indigenous Ecuadorian life, particularly in Amazonia. Contrast Kehoe’s restriction with this statement by Amazonian specialists Rival and Whitehead (2001: 16): «What makes Amazonia absolutely unique and yet little understood, apart from the failure to properly historicize and compare our understanding of ethnographic practice, is its shamanic world view . . . the belief in the dual nature of reality, which is both visible and invisible, and in constant transformation (emphasis added).» Michael Uzendoski (2008) offers a telling humanistic perspective that crosses the «indigenous/nonindigenous» divide by discussing his own experiences in Amazonian Ecuador and Peru.

2. Shamanic séances are described, explicated and analyzed in Whitten 1976: 141-163 where their relationships to the kinship system are also detailed. See also Whitten 1985; D. Whitten and N. Whitten 1988; N. Whitten and D. Whitten 2008; and especially Chango 1984. Alfonso Chango’s book, which has been used in courses in «natural medicine» in Ecuador through the systems of bilingual education, offers a vivid series of images of shamanic séance as the author moves, shaman-like, in and out of Quichua and Spanish discourse as he explicates his insightful drawings. See also Uzendoski 2008.

3. «Mama» in contexts such as spirit naming and naming of primary designs on pottery vessels refers basically to «continuity,» or «primacy» of being.

4. In most of this paper Quichua orthography is that described in N. Whitten and D. Whitten (2008: xxii-xxiii). When Quichua is written in Ecuadorian documents I follow the spelling adopted by indigenous organizations and by the national media. This accounts for the difference between sumaj causai and sumak kausai, and pachacutij and pachakutik. More recently, I have written about the «clashing concepts» tied to the concepts of Buen Vivir in Spanish and that of Sumak Kawsi in Quichua. The Spanish and Quichua concepts actually mean different things, indeed may contrast with one another, when considered in indigenous and non-indigenous practice

References

Boas, Franz

Chango, Alfonso

Corr, Rachel

Crawford, Neelon

Fine-Dare, Kathleen S.
2007 «Más Allá del Folklore: La yumbada de Cotocollao como vitrina para los discursos de la identidad, de la intervención estatal, y del poder local en los andes urbanos ecuatorianos.» In William F. Waters and Michael Hamery, compilers, Estudios Ecuatorianos: Un aporte de la discussion, Tomo II. Quito: FLACSO.

Harner, Michael J.


Kehoe, Alice Beck

Métraux, Alfred
Rival, Laura M., and Neil L. Whitehead

Salomon, Frank

Sullivan, Lawrence J.

Uzendoski, Michael

Whitten, Dorothea Scott


Whitten, Dorothea S. and Norman E. Whitten, Jr.

Whitten, Norman E., Dorothea Scott Whitten and Alfonso Chango

Whitten, Norman E., Jr. and Dorothea Scott Whitten