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"Jesus Is the Same Arutam"

Logics of Appropriation among Missionized Indians and Indigenized Missionaries

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Abstract. – This article challenges Claude Lévi-Strauss' and Philippe Descola's diagnosis of the South American tropics, according to which the irreversible influences of the Western civilization have led to cultural homogenization and to the loss of autochthonous "originality." This author discloses local reactions to global impacts as appropriation processes and emphasizes the natives' agency. The missionary presence in the Ecuadorian Amazon has strongly influenced the native cosmology of the Achuar and Shuar, to which Descola particularly refers. However, Jesus has not replaced the indigenous spiritual power called Arutam. Rather the contemporary role and function of Jesus and Arutam exemplify the negotiation of cultural meanings. The article further analyzes the transcultural conditions of this appropriation and focuses on the inner logic of the indigenous and missionaries who create and define these new meanings. It demonstrates that the expression "Jesus is the same Arutam" does not necessarily illustrate the assimilation effects of cultural contact but rather the openness of cultural systems and the creative "originality" of the actors involved. *[Ecuador, Amazonia, Achuar, Shuar, cultural contact, indigenization of Christianity, transculturation]*

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The Issue: "Goodbye to Tristes Tropes"

> "The charcoal skies and louring atmosphere of the doldrums summarize the state of mind in which the Old World first came upon the new one" (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 78).

Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous bestseller which made him also known beyond the borders of ethnology is a pessimistic work – it is as pessimistic and gloomy as his description of the atmosphere of the doldrums. For Lévi-Strauss, the horse latitudes emblematize the encounter between the Old World and the New World which has turned the Amazon tropics to "Tristes tropiques." In his Brazilian travelogue Lévi-Strauss describes the loss of cultural authenticity as well as diversity and laments the impact of Western civilization resulting in a "monoculture of sugar-beet" (1961: 39). For him, the expansion of the Old World leads to an assimilation process of humanity which is eventually equivalent to the slow "extermination of the last 'primitive' tribe"[1] in the New World. Nevertheless, about half a century after the first publication of Lévi-Strauss' opus (1955), the encounters between cultures got even more intense, but the humanity did not become necessarily more monocultured.

In this article,[2] I am going to discuss a case study taken from the Ecuadorian Amazon, demonstrating why the tropics are not as "tristes" as Claude Lévi-Strauss predicted. The phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" typifies the encounter between the Old World and the New World, between the Christian religion and the missionized autochthonous re-

1 Translation (A. M.) of the German edition (Lévi-Strauss 1985: 24): "Verschwinden des letzten 'primitiven' Stammes."

2 The chapter heading is borrowed from Marshall Sahlins's article "Goodbye to Tristes Tropes" (1994).

ligion. This quote is taken from the lips of a Shuar catechist who is a member of the so-called "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" (Sainaghi 1976: 31) which is active in the Ecuadorian province Morona-Santiago.[3] This church, which juridicially is a part of the Roman Catholic Church and was founded by some Salesian missionaries and indigenous catechists, is characterized by its claim to stand in an indigenous tradition, reinterpreting the Shuar mythology and different rituals into a new, Christian context. So, in the catechist's expression, the Christian God is placed next to the most important and powerful transcendental entity within the Shuar cosmology – but Jesus does not replace Arutam; much more, the two concepts of divinity seem to be linked and related to each other. The sentence communicates undoubtedly the impact of the Western civilization on the Shuar society, but it also discloses that the indigenous culture is not culturally exterminated.

Philippe Descola not only was a student of Lévi-Strauss and is his successor at the Collège de France, but he also has been known by his studies on the Achuar and Shuar. In the remarkable ethnography "Les lances du crépuscule" (1993), the French social anthropologist reports on his experience with an Achuar parish belonging to the "Autochthonous Church." He gives a short description of the theology and the liturgy of the parish and finally judges the "Autochthonous Church" as "deliberately researched syncretism."[4] Apart from the fact that the Salesian missionaries shattered the Shuar's traditional values by disapproving of the polygamous marriage and the ceaseless vendettas, bold parallels between some Jivaroan rituals and feasts of the Roman calendar are drawn, Descola relates (cp. 1993: 388 f.). In his view, the translation of Christian creeds and liturgy into the indigenous cosmology may be well-meant, but is a bizarre and enforced construction invented by a few European missionaries. The impact of the "Autochthonous Church" will dispossess the Achuar of all "originality" their relationship to the supernatural holds and lead them into a deep identity crisis, the author argues (Descola 1993: 386, 389).[5]

This article challenges Lévi-Strauss' fears about the "mono-cultured" Amazon and discusses Descola's critique of the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar." Therefore, I am going to raise two guiding themes and arguments:

1. It is indispensable to locate the foundation of the "Autochthonous Church" in a historical context: I want to make clear that the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" is a product of colonial history as well as of the postcolonial protest in Latin America. All in all, the Catholic missionaries played a considerable role, which should not be excluded from the analysis. In agreement with Judith Shapiro (1981: 130) I consider missionaries as well "as the 'natives' to be studied," as they are crucial actors within the social systems social anthropologists deal with and often determine the conditions of cultural transformation within these societies. The missionaries' influence is ambiguous: On one hand, they were the suppressors of Indian identity; on the other hand, they encouraged cultural reevaluation projects such as the "Autochthonous Church." Following Tzvetan Todorov who describes the missionaries' ambiguity as "a Christian converted to 'Indianism' who converts the Indians to Christianity" (1999: 218), I will explain the missionaries' changed attitude to the Indian "Other," using the background of postcolonial paradigms which not only have questioned the existing world order, but have also encouraged internal church reforms.
2. Even though the "Autochthonous Church" seems to be mainly an institutional innovation, the Achuar and Shuar are no uninvolved actors. In contrast to Descola, I will demonstrate that the phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" may not necessarily be a "deliberately researched syncretism" (1993: 389), but a reasonable statement, although this reasonability may be justified differently from the official Catholic reading by the native parishioners. I will show that the encounter between the Old World of the missionaries and the New World of the Indians has produced new "spaces of sense and meaning" which are subjected to the inner indigenous and missionaries' logic.

Before discussing the above mentioned problems and questions in this article, first of all I will clarify my theoretical as well as methodological approach and give an overview of the Jivaro's ethnographical and historical data. In order to situate the founding of the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" in the postcolonial context and pre-

3 The Achuar and Shuar inhabit the Morona-Santiago province in southeastern Ecuador. Both ethnic groups belong to the Jivaroan linguistic family and share many cultural traits (e.g., social structure, cosmology). For example, the word "Arutam" is used by Achuar and Shuar in the same manner, namely to name the main supernatural power.

4 Descola (1993: 389): "… ce syncrétisme délibérément recherché" (transl. by A. M.).

5 Similarly to his master Claude Lévi-Strauss, Descola worries about the "mono-culturing" effect caused by the encounter between the Old World of the missionaries and the New World of the Indians. The time to the assimilation of the Achuar is foreseeable, according to Descola (1993: 38).

sent its features, I will explain the missionaries' and indigenous' intentions to create and accept this "deliberately researched syncretism" – a "syncretism" which has not caused an Amazon monoculture. The article is based on a twelve-months fieldwork (2005/06, 2008, 2009/10), which was conducted among Catholic Shuar and Achuar, including participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, visual mind maps, and an analysis of indigenous sources. My first contact with the indigenous religious identity took place in 2001, when I visited a Shuar family as a member of an ecological volunteer project. In this family I got in touch with a wide religious pluralism, ranging from strongly convinced evangelical missionaries and a former Catholic seminarian to "traditional" believers, participating regularly in ayahuasca sessions and sharply criticizing the missionaries' presence. For me, this differentiated handling of the Christian influence by the Shuar family was a first impetus to reconsider the concept of acculturation and monoculturation as a fundamental category of cultural contact and to regard the indigenous not only as recipients but also as actors within these processes of globalization.

Theoretical and Methodological Approach: Dissolving Dichotomies and Emphasizing the Local

In my opinion, Lévi-Strauss was wrong in his forecast and Descola in the analysis of the "Autochthonous Church" because in the mentioned contexts both authors identified "culture" as a holistic, homogenous, bounded, and static entity, comparable to the Herderian "bowl model" (Herder 1827: 72) of culture. According to this model the encounter between the Old World and the New World can only lead to a clash, but not to an enduring interpenetrating relationship.[6] To sum up this perspective on colonialism in the words of the historian Ryan Dunch, "cultures are solid objects that collide like billiard balls, displacing one in favor of another; in other words, that colonialism leaves in its wake not a transformed or hybrid culture, but the absence of culture" (2002: 312). However, the contemporary world is extremely interconnected and characterized by flows and diffusions of objects, values, and ideas, which are permanently exchanged and integrated between human individuals and communities; for this reason, the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (1992) chooses the neologism of "transculturality" to define this interwoven condition of human relationships. For Welsch, culture has an open, dynamic, and negotiable structure, so that its apparent territorial, national, or ethnical boundaries are constantly transgressed, as a result of which the "Other" is always becoming a part of one's own. "What is called for today is … to think of cultures beyond the contraposition of ownness and foreignness," Wolfgang Welsch writes (1999: 195 f.). Even if Welsch re-introduces the concept of "transculturality" into the academic discourse, neither the term nor the theoretical discussions linked to it have been new to the professional circles of cultural and social anthropological studies. So, the Spanish term *transculturación* has been used in ethnolingustic and sociocultural studies describing the various aspects of Afro-Caribbean and mestizo cultures in Latin America since the second half of the past century (Hildebrandt 2005: 347).[7] Moreover, other social anthropologists have already defined culture as a processual, contextual, and deterriorialized entity which is permanently transformed by continuous cultural interactions.[8] I am referring to this transcultural model of culture, analyzing the Shuar catechist's statement as an example of transcending the cultural boundaries between two religious systems by transferring the foreign symbol into the local, indigenous environment. Following this paradigm of transculturality, I also allude to Karl-Heinz Kohl's remarks on the flexibility of autochthonous religions (1988). Kohl is arguing that the openness of oral religious systems abets the integration of cultural foreign elements; in the situation of cultural contact, autochthonous religions have survived because they permit a religious tradition to change, states Kohl (1988: 258 ff.). He exemplifies his argument by reporting on an Indonesian creation myth, which incorporates several biblical elements, adopting them according to the particular context on Flores Island. Hans Peter Hahn finally associates this kind of reaction with new cultural phenomena within the theoretical framework of "cultural appropriation." In his article "Diffusionism, Appropriation, and Globaliza-

6 I am using the term "relationship" here in a neutral meaning. Nevertheless, it is clear that every kind of human interdependency is not per se a symmetrical relationship but mostly situated in a context of power.

7 In his publication "Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar" (1940), the Cuban social anthropologist Fernando Ortiz illustrates, how the production process of tobacco and sugar in which different cultural groups participated has changed the Cuban society. This mutual interrelation of diverse cultures, by which these cultures as well as Cuba itself were transformed, Ortiz calls "transculturation" (*transculturación*). See furthermore the ethnolinguistic contributions and literary study of Jiménez Moreno (1965), Romero Pintado (1987), and Rama (1982).

8 E.g., García Canclini (1990); Hannerz (1987); Wolf (1982).

tion" (2008), Hahn discusses the "local perceptions of global influences" and advocates the use of "appropriation" as a methodological tool for describing them, as it expresses not only the worldwide cultural interaction but also interprets innovation and resistance as a consequence of appropriation processes. Furthermore, the special advantage of this approach Hahn sees in the microperspective which focuses on the local actors involved. The point is to try to disclose the motivation of the protagonists and to reveal the general circumstances they are situated in, identifying the possibilities as well as the limits of their acting. Hereby Hahn directs attention towards indigenous people "not as victims but as actors" (2008: 196) – although the particular cultural encounter may be sited within the context of power and domination. This actor-centred, microperspective approach as presented by Hahn will be also my methodological basis for discussing the cultural appropriations in the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" and illustrating the natives' and missionaries' logic of "making something to become one's own" (Hahn 2008: 195, 199).

The Ethnographic Setting: The Jívaro in the Ecuadorian Amazon

The region where the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" is active and native is the province of Morona-Santiago in the Ecuadorian Amazon. This region forms part of the traditional settlement area of the Jivaroan language family to which the Achuar and Shuar belong. There are more than 100,000 Jívaro-speakers,[9] one of the most numerous linguistic groups in the Amazon (Lewis 2009, data from 2000), inhabiting the southeast of Ecuador and the northeast of Peru. This area extends over the eastern slopes of the Andes to the region of the Upper Marañon, ranging from an elevation of 1,200 m to 400 m and covered by barely penetrable virgin forests. The narrow and steep canyons and valleys of this landscape were one of the reasons why many foreign invasions remained unsuccessful and the Jívaro unconquered for a long time. Up to this day, the awareness of the long-lasting but triumphant fight against any kind of occupation has fortified the consciousness of the innate cultural tradition among the Achuar and Shuar, keeping their language and religious belief alive. Among the indigenous cultures in Latin America, the Jívaro are a special case, as the destructive consequences of the Spanish conquest and European mission among them were limited – a fact which has contributed to the relatively strong self-confidence of the Achuar and Shuar people who prefer to consider themselves as successful "actors" and not as passive "victims," especially in the encounter with the Western world. Thus, in ethnographic literature the Jívaro are known as the "only one tribe of American Indians … to have successfully revolted against the empire of Spain and to have thwarted all subsequent attempts by the Spaniards to reconquer them" (Harner 1984: 1). Neither the Inca rulers, whose thirst for conquest took them to the southeast of contemporary Ecuador in the 15th century (Münzel 1977: 264–266), nor the Spaniards could defeat the Achuar and Shuar militarily.[10] It was not until the end of the 19th century that settlers and the Christian mission prevailed over their resistance. In 1888, President Antonio Flores asked Pope Leo XIII to create an apostolic vicariate, in order to "civilize" the Indians living in the Achuar/Shuar region. Leo XIII conferred the responsibility of the new vicariate on the recently founded Salesian Order (1859) and, in March 1894, the first Salesian Fathers arrived at the Ecuadorian Amazon (García 1999: 302–304). From the perspective of the Ecuadorian government, the presence of the Salesians was necessary for the colonization of the region by mestizo peasants from the highlands. For government officials, the evangelization of the natives had the exclusive purpose of integrating them into the Ecuadorian nation and assimilating them into the dominant mestizo society. The best method to guarantee the success of this "*mestizaje* policy" seemed to be the formation of various boarding schools run by the Salesian missionaries. The life in the boarding schools should not only reduce the contact between the children and their families to a minimum but also inure the Shuar to discipline and the proper lifestyle of Western "civilization." Around 1960, already almost 2,000 Shuar students visited the nine boarding schools in Morona-Santiago (Bottasso 1993: 105).

Initially, the Salesians started their missionary efforts exclusively among the Shuar, who dwelt in the Western part of Morona-Santiago, near the Andes

9 The name "Jívaro" is an external designation and has to the Ecuadorian Achuar and Shuar a pejorative connotation, as it bears the meaning of "wild" and "crude," probably stemming from the Puerto Rican Spanish (cp. Harner 1984: xiii). Nevertheless, the specialist literature still uses the term to designate the linguistic family.

10 In history, the "Uprising of Logroño" in 1599 became famous: The Shuar attacked the village located in their territory and paid the demanded tribute to the conquistadors in a very special way – they poured the claimed and heated gold into the throat of the Spanish governor – for the next 300 years the Shuar banished any invaders from their territory.

and the larger mestizo communities. Although the contemporary infrastructure of this region is quite extensive (urbanized sectors, roads, public transport, etc.), the Achuar live in an area close to the Peruvian boarder which to date is only accessible by air or fluvial transport. For this reason, the Salesian missionaries did not come into contact with the Achuar people until the 1970s – at a time, when the "Autochthonous Church" has already begun to function among the Shuar.

Mission Reconsidered: The Re-Discovery of the "Other"

The first parishes of the "Catholic Autochthonous Church" were established in the late 1960s. As a result the foundation occurred at a decade which was characterized by profound transformations, reformations, and reflections in multiple spheres; previous valid political and economic realities and thinking models had started to be challenged, and the status quo of the world order had begun to be questioned. The decolonialization of the so-called Third World countries was in progress, and the demands of political independence from Western hegemony were accompanied by academic discourses which reconsidered the predominant European perspective on history, race, and cultural norms. Thus, the "post" of the postcolonialism has a twofold meaning: it can describe "a country 'after' its formal political independence from colonial power (temporal sense)" as well as the "after" of resisting or having overcome the authority of Eurocentric explanatory models, postulating autochthonous cultural standards as criterion for assessment (ideological sense) (Pilario 2006: 11). This ideological sense of postcolonialism impacts on the discourse in all social sciences and humanities and influences as well the discussions within Christian theology.

For the missionaries involved in the "Autochthonous Church," the concept of this church is based not only on a theological but also on a postcolonial project: The demands to expose the asymmetrical structures of cultural contact and to reveal its consequences – to conceive the colonized "Other" as a European projection and to make heard the voice of those who are marginalized – have also encroached on the field of theological reflection; thereby the European character of Christianity is reassessed. How much of its occidental robe can Christianity and the Roman-Catholic Church strip off without losing its identity? And how many of their autochthonous cultural symbols and practices do non-European Christians need to abandon, if they want to become a part of the church? Can a non-European person be baptized without "making oneself white" (Rosner 1992: 124)? The famous Catholic theologian Karl Rahner put it that way (1980: 289):

> Does the conjugal morality of the Massai in Eastern Africa have to be materially a repetition of the morality of the Christian occident, or could the chief live according to the style of the patriarch Adam, even if he is a Christian? Does the Eucharist in Alaska have to be celebrated also with grape wine?[11]

The difficulty of translating Christian symbols into non-European cultures is the core concern of theologians who ask for "local theologies" (cp. Schreiter 1985) and a decontextualization of traditional theology to disclose its occidental shape.[12] "Local theologies" can be understood as an attempt to "indigenize" Christianity – that is, to adopt a globally formulated message to the given cultural context and to interpret it inductively from the perspective of a specific culture. The demand for "local theologies" manifests the will to break off the agelong supremacy of Western theologizing in the missionary colonies and to accentuate instead a Christian but "native point of view":

> In postcolonial theory, "nativism" refers to the move to recover *native's* positive meaning by the project of return to pre-colonial forms and cultural practices. Colonization has damaged our culture; to rebuild it, there is a need to recover and promote indigenous ways of thinking/feeling and being. In theology, this can be found in the projects of indigenization and inculturation (Pilario 2006: 40).

The "Other," formerly a pagan who performed some strange and demonical practice, is conceived now as a man whose religious system manifests his profound belief in the (Christian) divine power and, therefore, has to be encouraged. Otherness defined as non-European is no more seen as an intermediate stage in the human evolution, which has to be overcome, but as an alternative, equal way of life. Therefore, Christian missiologists argue, the Gospel has to be read and reread in the light and context of every particular culture. The above mentioned term

11 Translation A. M. The original text: "Muß die Ehemoral der Massai in Ostafrika material einfach die Wiederholung der Moral des abendländischen Christentums sein, oder könnte dort ein Häuptling, auch wenn er Christ ist, im Stil des Patriarchen Adam leben? Muß auch in Alaska die Eucharistie mit Traubenwein gefeiert werden?"

12 Compare, e.g., Leonardo Boff (1981), Juan Gorski (1998), Eleazar López H. (2000), Raimon Panikkar (1991), Karl Rahner (1980), and Robert Schreiter (1985).

of "inculturation," which has become the key word of the missiological discourse, stands for a missionary concept of translation: The universal message of Christianity has to be expressed in the local language of the respective culture. According to the social anthropologists Vásquez and Marquardt, this model of a "New Evangelization [is] a clear example of 'glocalization,' a cooption of the local church by the universal church …" (2003: 84). Similar to Vásquez and Marquardt, Beyer defines this changed missionary attitude and practice as a "process of creating localized and 'inculturated'[13] variants" within an universal religion as it is Christianity (2003: 368). In this perspective, evangelization and the diffusion of Christian messages are indeed a reality of the globalization process, which does not necessarily lead to an uniform, mono-cultured religious system, but allows local alternatives and modifications – i.e., an indigenous appropriation.

The epochal turning point, which gave to this project of recovering the native's positive meaning an official status within Catholic theology, is marked by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s: The Council emphasises that the church does not favour any particular culture, but has to consider the special context of every one (cp. GS 1965: 42, AG 1965: 22). Moreover, the documents assert that the non-Christian religions also contain divine truths, as God is present in all cultures and peoples: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life … [they] often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (NA 1965: 2).[14] Admittedly, "that truth," the Council declaration mentions, is the Christian truth, and "a ray" is not the sun itself. However, the foundation of every religious system would collapse, if its adherents denied that their faith is not grounded in absolute, true principles, confessed by this religion. Furthermore, the commitment to regard every religion as "a ray of that truth" and to respect its holy creeds promotes an attitude towards non-Christian believers which substitutes the "son of darkness" metaphor with the acknowledgment of "sun beams" in the native religion. The Salesian missionary Siro Pellizzaro who has worked more than fifty years among the Shuar gives a good example of these theological reflections, when he states in an article written ten years after the Second Vatican Council: "Finally, I realized that the sons of the darkness are truly sons of God, with a salvific history not inferior to the biblical one" (Pellizzaro 1976: 32).[15] Vatican II was the impetus for many missionaries to take up additional studies in anthropology, such as Fr. Juan Bottasso, who was also a missionary to the Shuar, and many other Salesian brothers. That way, the perspective on other cultures has been "secularized," explains the priest: From an anthropological point of view all cultures and religions are equivalent; one analyzes them without judging them. Taking this into consideration, the missionaries started to wonder if one could evangelize without destroying the culture (Bottasso 1982: 7).

"It is perhaps ironic that scholars of missions have moved in the same directions as subaltern studies and postcolonial studies, tracing irony, resistance, hybridity, and selectivity in non-Western appropriations of Christianity," states Ryan Dunch, who sums up the contemporary trend within Christian theology (2002: 311). Against this background, the "deliberately researched syncretism" (Descola 1993: 389) of the "Autochthonous Church" can be regarded as one of the theological "projects of indigenization and inculturation" (Pilario 2006: 40) which seems to obey the same paradigms characterizing the postcolonial discourse: demanding the positive reconsidering of the "Other" and challenging the Western ethnocentric and evolutionistic thinking. Of course, in the view of many missionaries the inculturation model is less a response to the worldwide transformational and decolonizing situation, but more a theological argument grounded in the Christian concept of God and Church (cp. footnotes 13 and 14)!

Stuart Hall (2002: 226), a guiding intellectual force of postcolonial studies, invites us "to read anew the binary forms themselves, by which the colonial encounter has been presented for such a long time."[16] For Stuart, the differences between the colonized and the colonizing culture are fundamental,

13 The inculturational model characterizes the missionary method as a dialogue between the Gospel and the particular culture: It is the missionary's task to reread and to understand the Gospel according to the context of the given culture. The theological argument for the inculturation of the Gospel is founded in the incarnation theology: God became man and was born into the Jewish culture, accepting all the conditions of an earthly existence (Phil 2:7). So, Jesus Christ lived within and preached along the Jewish tradition, relating his message to a concrete human context (cp. Górski 2005: 129 f.).

14 One has to keep in mind, that this kind of theology has not been new to the church. After many centuries, the Catholic Church revisits the texts of the early fathers of the church. Justin Martyr (1997) († 165), for example, discloses in his most famous opus "Apology" the theory of the "logoi spermatikoi" (scattered seeds of truth), according to which all men have a part of the divine knowledge and revelation.

15 Translation A. M. The original text: "Por fin descubrí que esos hijos de las tinieblas eran verdaderos hijos de Dios, con una historia sagrada no inferior a la bíblica".

16 Translated by A. M. The original text: "Er [der Übergang zum Postkolonialen] verpflichtet uns auch, die binären For-

but the binary opposition between them has never been as pure as it was often described. This applies as well to those Salesian priests who were or are strongly engaged in the formation of the "Autochthonous Church": Thus, the formula of "making something to become one's own" is valid not only for the indigenous but also for the missionaries' perspective. The encounter between the New World and the Old World in the Ecuadorian Amazon has undoubtedly influenced the Jivaroan identity and cosmology; however, it has also affected the religious and cultural concepts of the Christian missionaries and even their personality. The missionaries have sought to redefine the traditional evangelization method among a foreign culture and started to reflect on their role within the societies they are working with – a process that Judith Shapiro calls the "'decolonializing' phase" of Catholic missionary practice (1981: 131). In this perspective, the cultural "Other" is nothing to be stripped off in order to become a Christian but the basis to understand the universal presence of God in every culture. Therefore, the missionary himself is supposed to "go native" and to "become an Indian" (cp. Shapiro 1981: 142 ff.) in order to reread God's action and revelation from the "native point of view." An example of this missionary attitude could be the Salesian Luis Bolla who seems to be not only a Christian who converts the Indian to Christianity, but also a convert to the indigenous way (see above): Living in the Achuar communities and baptized with an Achuar name, he practises and has to know all about the Achuar culture, encouraging the Achuar themselves to strengthen their own customs, as the Achuar Ayui Peas states on the missionary's personality.[17]

The "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar": History and Organization

Many Shuar themselves perceived the sudden positive approach to the indigenous culture and religion as a radical change in the missionary concept and definitely view the Salesian missionaries' attitude with wonder. One of these Shuar is Felipe Wampash. In the 1950s and 1960s he attended the Salesian boarding school in Limón. Today Wampash works as a shaman and is a self-confessed Catholic. Entering his house, one can find a cup of cooked ayahuasca[18] tea next to the open Bible.

> The Shuar have always known that God exists. "Arutam" is the Shuar word for "God." At first the Salesians asked: "Arutam? What is that? That's a fairy tale, a myth." … But now the Salesians have started to write in Shuar, they speak, sing and praise God in Shuar. Some years ago – 1962, 1964 – they did still believe that all this is just a tale. … They didn't want at any time that we speak Shuar and use our own language. … But now, now they are preaching of Nunkui, Arutam, Etsa. How things take their course! It's unbelievable! We have to laugh about that somewhat: At first they preached that all this was a myth. And now they appreciate these [myths].[19]

Remembering the decades of his schooldays, Wampash tells that the missionaries forbade the use of the Shuar language and denied the truth of the content of any myth. However, when he is participating in the service and is listening to the radio today, the Mass is given in Shuar; furthermore, the telling of the Shuar myths and their exegesis has become an inherent part of the liturgy, relates the shaman.

One of these parishes, where the services are celebrated in the way mentioned by Wampash, is the Church of San Papru, located in the small town of Sucúa, mainly inhabited by Shuar and some Mestizo settlers. From the outside the parish seems rather ordinary, but in the history of the "Catholic Autoch-

men selbst, in der die koloniale Begegnung so lange dargestellt wurde, neu zu lesen".

17 Peas (2008: 77–79): "The missionary and anthropologist Luis Bolla Sartorio, a Salesian priest, is also baptized with the Achuar name Yankuam Jintia Peas … Fr. Yankuam Jintia Peas must know all from the the Achuar nation; to drink *wayusa*, to fast before taking ayahuasca, to discourse, to wear Achuar clothes" (transl. by A. M.). The original text: "El misionero antropólogo Luis Bolla Sartori, religioso salesiano y sacerdote, es bautizado también con nombre Achuar Yankuam Jintia Peas … El padre Yankuam Jintia Peas debía saber todo del pueblo Achuar; la toma de Wayusa, ayunar en la toma de ayahuasca, hacer discurso, utilizar vestimenta Achuar".

18 Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic drink (*natém*) prepared from the ayahuasca liana (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) which causes a state of trance. The term "ayahusca" is a Quichua word and means "vine of the dead." Traditionally the Shuar and Achuar participate in an ayahuasca ritual in order to enter the supernatural world, where they contact their ancestors and receive the divine powers of Arutam. To date, for many Shuar and Achuar it is a regular spiritual experience to drink *natém*.

19 Felipe Wambash (12. 01. 06) translated by A. M. The original text: "Los Shuar siempre sabían, que existía Dios. La palabra, que dice 'Arutam', es la palabra en Shuar 'Dios'. Los Salesianos decían primero, cuando llegaron: '¿Arutam? ¿Qué es? Es un cuento, es un mito'. … Pero ahora los Salesianos ya empezaron a escribir en Shuar, hablan en Shuar, cantan en Shuar y alabanzan a Dios en Shuar. Ellos hace unos años atrás – 1962, 1964 – decían, eso es sólo un cuento. … Ellos nunca querían, que hablemos en Shuar, que rezemos en nuestro idioma. … Pero ahora ellos estan predicando a Nunkui, Arutam, Etsa. ¡Cómo las cosas vienen! ¡Increíble! Nos hace reír un poco: Primero ellos predicaban, que todo es un mito. Pero ahora reconocen".

thonous Church of the Shuar" the San Papru community and its parish priest, the Salesian missionary Siro Pellizzaro, play a decisive role: According to a personal letter of Pellizzaro, in the early 1960s he and some Shuar leaders started a catechetical project which was guided by the idea of revaluating the indigenous mythology. Then, Pellizzaro admits, he began to read the myths as "hints of believing in a God within Shuar tradition"[20] (as cited by Broseghini[21]). In the view of the missionary, the myths were no longer considered to be "fairy tales" and that they have eventually adopted a sacral character. Similarly, Pellizzaro and some indigenous catechists have attempted to revive different religious rituals and to adapt them to a Catholic context (Pellizzaro 1978).

In 1971, Pellizzaro established the "Seminario Weá Nekáptai"[22] in Sucúa, where today the Church of San Papru is located. The Seminario Weá Nekáptai is a training centre and seminary for catechists and priest candidates; up to the present about 350 indigenous catechists have been schooled there; at the moment one Shuar deacon preparing for priesthood is working in San Papru. After another seven years, Pellizzaro together with a Salesian sister founded a religious order named "Instituto Religioso Shuar Feminino 'Marí Nua'," [23] which the first Shuar woman entered in 1981. Today three Shuar sisters belong to the Instituto Religioso Shuar Feminino "Marí Shuar;" their main task is to support the catechists in the translation of the New Testament into Shuar as well as in the conception and elaboration of catechisms or other texts used during the liturgy.

In contrast, the formation of the "Autochthonous Church" among the Achuar started when the Seminario Weá Nekáptai was already functioning. By the end of the 1960s, some Salesian missionaries, who at first worked in the Shuar territory, began to establish permanent contacts with Achuar communities. By this time, the missionary policy of the Salesian priests had been already changing, so that the Achuar were spared the traumatic and assimilating effects of the boarding schools that the Shuar had to experience in the first decades of Salesian presence in Morona-Santiago. So, the first missionary activity was to pacify the extended families who were quarreling with each other and to organize the scattered settlements into communal *centros*, where educational centres were built[24] – a process which to date is judged positively by the majority of the Achuar, as it has led to the foundation of the Achuar Federation NAE (Nacionalidad Achuar del Ecuador), representing politically the Achuar nation on Ecuadorian and international levels. Nevertheless, at the same time, the Salesians sought to evangelize the Achuar by forming church communities and training catechists on the basis of the "Autochthonous Church" theology. These days, also among the Achuar, several catechists, deacons, and priest candidates receive their courses in Weá Nekáptai in Sucúa, although the majority of the catechists' meetings are organized in the Achuar zone without Shuar participation.

Within the official structure of the Catholic Church, neither the Salesian missionaries and the sisters Marí Nua nor the indigenous deacons and catechists always have a good reputation. Indeed, the project of a "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" is protected by the so-called status "ad experimentum" – an ecclesiastical term which is assigned by the responsible bishop –, but nevertheless, some wings of the church are concerned about the Catholic character in the "autochthonous church": The "Catholic Autochthonous Church" is a result of negotiation processes challenging both, the Achuar and Shuar, but also the Catholic identity. Thus, according to its own self-definition, the intention of the "Catholic Autochthonous Church" is to be a church for indigenous by indigenous.

To sum up: The basic idea of the "Autochthonous Church" is to establish some guidance formed by a native clergy in the long run. Moreover, Catholic theology and liturgy are to be adopted according to the Jívaro religion and religiousness; Achuar and Shuar myths, rituals, and religious holidays are

20 "… como huellas en la tradición shuar de la creencia en un Dios" [translation: A. M.].

21 Broseghini refers to a personal letter he received from Siro Pellizzaro.

22 One can translate *weá* with "father-in-law" or "person in charge," in a transferred sense with "head of a parish" or "priest." *Nekáptai* means "time of education," "probation," in a transferred sense "seminary."

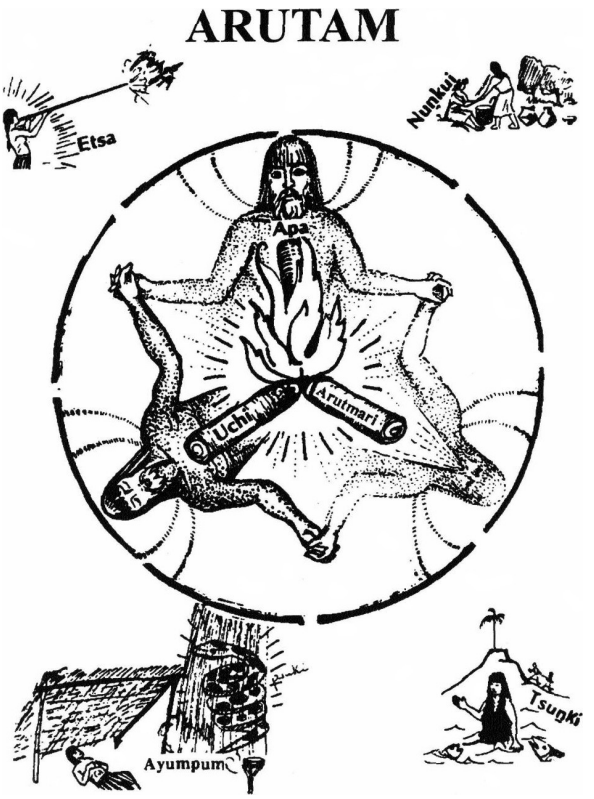
23 The translation of *nua* is "woman," of *Marí* "Mary."

24 Compare Tiu (2006: 36 f.): "The Catholic missionary Father Luis Bolla who was named by the Achuar 'Yankuam,' passed the idea on to unify the Achuar in order to educate their children and to found a *centro*. … The missionary Luis Bolla (Yankuam) continued to visit the *centros*, one time he brought a recorder and made the warriors listen to the voice of his enemy saying that he did not want more dead persons and that they should quietly go fishing and keep doing their works" (translated by A. M.). The original text: "El misionero católico Padre Luis Bolla que le pusieron nombre achuar Yankuam daba la idea de que se reúnan para educar a sus hijos y formar un Centro. … El misionero Luis Bolla (Yankuam) seguía visitando los Centros, en ese tiempo había traído una grabadora y hacía escuchar a los guerreros la voz de su enemigo diciendo que ya no querían más muertes y que estén tranquilos pescando y haciendo sus trabajos."

integrated into the system of faith and into the sacramental and pastoral care. The main aim is to link the indigenous religion to the Christian one and – in a kind of structuralistic manner – to search for common, universal elements and parallels.[25] Admittedly, it is the decision of very few persons – namely, some Salesian missionaries, the sisters of Marí Nua and certain indigenous catechists – to determine the official criteria according to which parallels are defined. Eventually, these actors introduced a new symbolic code into the Achuar and Shuar culture which allows them not to change the content of a myth but to modify its contextual setting and meaning, and finally implements a new indigenous cosmology and comprehension of "Arutam."

"Jesus is the same Arutam": The Indigenization of "Jesus" and the Christianization of "Arutam"

The picture on the right is taken from the catechism which was released as a revised edition for the third time in 1997 and is officially used in the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Shuar" (*Vicariato Apostolico de Méndez* 1997: 16).[26] The depiction introduces the first chapter of the catechism which deals with the concept of God and is entitled *Arutam Chikichkiti* – "God is one." In its centre one can easily recognize the portrayal of the Christian Holy Trinity: Apa – God the Father, Uchi – God the Son, and Arutmari – the Holy Spirit. However, there are also four figures in the corners which deserve special attention: Etsa, Nunkui, Ayumpum, and Tsunki represent the four main protagonists of the Shuar mythology. When asked, one of the Shuar catechists working and studying in San Papru, Domingo Tsapak, clarified for me: "Jesus is the same Arutam. The One, of whom our ancestors spoke, is the same. … He is the same Arutam who has manifested himself in different ways – as Nunkui, Etsa, Shakaim, Ayumpum. He is Christ, he is Arutam."[27]



The premise for comprehending God's action as told in the New Testament is the knowledge of the Shuar mythology, Tsapak continues. Thus, the mythology relates how Arutam has worked among the Shuar, how he appeared to them as Etsa and Nunkui and taught them to hunt and to cultivate the gardens, how he revealed himself as Tsunki to heal the Shuar and initiated the shamans to use the proper medicine, as the catechist in San Papru knows. According to Tsapak, all these mythical protagonists are manifestations of the one God Arutam who disclosed himself in different manners. By these manifestations in the myths, the Shuar were enabled to get knowledge about different aspects of the divine nature. The New Testament, finally, is the last important myth: It tells about the manifestation of Arutam as Jesus Christ. However, Jesus Christ, the catechist admits, completes the revelation of Arutam, since in his character God is presented in the most lucid way.

With these declarations Domingo Tsapak is talking along the same line as Pellizzaro, who together with the Shuar Fausto Náwech had published a Shuar–Spanish dictionary (2005) where one can

25 One could compare Pellizzaro's concern with that of the missionary and much criticized ethnologist Wilhelm Schmidt: To disclose the "original" divine conception of non-European autochthonous cultures, which is the belief in a single deity; according to this, monotheism historically antedates polytheism which is seen as a degeneration of the former monotheistic faith system (cp. Schmidt 1912–1955).

26 The conceptually same painting is shown on a presentation board used among Catholic Achuar. The myths of Etsa, Nunkui, Ayumpum, and Tsunki are also part of the Achuar cosmology.

27 The original text of Domingo Tsapak (06. 01. 06): "Jesus es el mismo Arutam. Sobre que nuestros mayores hablaron, es él mismo. … Es el mismo Arutam, que se manifestó de diferentes maneras – como Nunkui, Etsa, Shakaim, Ayumpum. Él es Cristo, es Arutam".

read the following commentary about the term "Arutam" (142 f.):

> Arútam, noun = Dios. Arútam is God Almighty living in the *Tuna*, the holy waterfall, from eternity (Gen. 1, 2). … He is getting to the Shuar by means of rivers. Therefore the Shuar are calling him by prayers *ánent*, constructing chapels *Ayamtai* close to rivers and waterfalls. … Jesus is the same Arútam becoming man. Arútam is pure spirit *ẃianch*. Since he does not have a body, he manifests himself to the Shuar in different manners. He manifests as the woman *Nunkui* … He manifests as the man *Shakáim'* … He manifests as *Etsa* … He manifests as *Tsunki* … He manifests as *Ayumpum*.[28]

This lexical entry exemplifies once more the manner in which Pellizzaro and Náwech try to interweave the two cosmologies of Christianity and Shuar religion, defining a "God Almighty" who manifested as Nunkui and became man in Jesus Christus and who is venerated close to waterfalls.

This Christianized Jívaro cosmology implies for the liturgy of the "Autochthonous Church" that the first reading – normally taken from the Old Testament – is replaced by an indigenous myth to accentuate in doing so the common divine salvific history in which the Achuar and Shuar have been involved from the beginning – as their myth proves.

According to the American social anthropologist James Boster, today's Jivaroan concept of "Arutam" is broadly influenced by the Salesian missionaries and the theology of the "Autochthonous Church" respectively and underwent a profound modification. Comparing the idea of "Arutam" with the remarks in Michael Harner's famous ethnography (1972), the "important substantive change is in regarding *arutam* spirits not as a general class of spirits, but as a single essence manifested in a variety of forms analogous to the sharing of a single essence by the Holy Trinity" (Boster 2000: 13). In his article "*Arutam* and Cultural Change," Boster directly refers to the above mentioned picture in the catechism, even though he is working with the edition of 1991. For him this picture demonstrates a perception of "Arutam" which is closer to the Judeo-Christian ideas of a supreme being as well as the model of Trinity than to the Arutam visions and the Arutam soul which Harner described (Boster 2000: 15):

> The final stage of the assimilation of the Shuar concept of *arutam* to the Catholic ideas of the trinity is seen in the most recent version of the Shuar catechism (Vicariato de Mendez y Gualaquiza, 1991) … the word *Arutam* is used to refer to the Trinity itself: The Shuar concept of *arutam* is now completely fused with the Catholic idea of the Trinity (Boster 2000: 17 f.).

Concerning Boster's analysis of a broadly spread transformed perception of "Arutam" from a divine power strengthening the warrior's force to a monotheistic-trinitarian, almighty, and benign Supreme Being giving life and productivity, I found an exemplary proof of this in a Bicultural College. In his graduation thesis, the Achuar student Fidel Ujukam, presenting the traditional (!) religious system, writes: "For the Achuar, Arutam is very important, because he is a mysterious superior being who has created the Achuar, who protects and cares for them forever. Furthermore, Etsá, Shakaim, Ayumpum, and Nunkui were the mouthpieces of Arutam" (Ujukam 2005: 5).[29] A conversation with the already known shaman Felipe Wampash leads to the same result: Arutam is the only Supreme Being who embraces all beings. Etsa or Nunkui are his manifestations and not independent deities or spirits. Arutam was speaking to the Shuar appearing as Nunkui, explained the shaman to me. Etsa and Nunkui just have different names, but they are the same Arutam. The statement, that there are multiple Arutams – Nunkui is one Arutam, Etsa another – is false. All is one, asserts Felipe Wampash.[30] According to his own self-image and the image of the other Shuar, Wampash is an important cultural bearer of the Shuar tradition and religion, but he also has adopted a concept of "Arutam" which is far from the first ethnographers' descriptions.

Boster correctly states, that these changed perceptions should not be judged as "deviations from a single cultural truth" but as "complementary alter-

28 Translated by A. M.; the original text: "Arútam, na. = Dios. Arútam es Dios Omnipotente que viven en la *Tuna*, cascada sagrada, desde la eternidad (Gen. 1,2). … Llega a los shuar por medio de los ríos. Por esta razón los shuar lo llaman con las plegarias *ánent*, construyendo capillas *Ayamtai* cerca de los ríos y de las cascadas. … Jesús es el mismo Arútam hecho hombre. Arútam es puro espíritu *ẃianch*. Por no tener cuerpo, se manifiesta a los shuar de muchas maneras. Se manifiesta como mujer *Nunkui* … Se manifiesta como hombre *Shakáim'* … Se manifiesta como *Etsa* … Se manifiesta como *Tsunki* … Se manifiesta como *Ayumpum*".

29 Translated by A. M.; the original text: "Para los Achuar, Arutam es muy importante porque es un superior misterioso quién los ha creado, les protege y les cuida para siempre. Además Etsá, Shakaim, Ayumpum, Nunkui eran portavoces de Arutam".

30 Compare Felipe Wampash (12. 01. 06): "Nunkui era como dar hacer voz de Arutam. Nunkui le anunciaba de su forma. Tiene su [proprio] nombre no más. Etsa también es el mismo, cambia su nombre no más. Todo es Arutam, él conjunta. No se puede decir, que es otro Arutam … Es el mismo Arutam. Sólo el nombre se cambia, pero era el mismo. … Es un solo Dios, Arutam, que abarca al mundo".

natives" which "suggest the robustness and vitality of this cultural complex" (2000: 24). Making the argument of "cultural variation" (2000: 1) to describe the transformation of the "Arutam" concept, Boster argues for the Jívaros' ability to integrate the Christian Trinitarian model of "God" into their own cosmology. In a way similar to Kohl (1988), he emphasizes the flexibility or "vitality" of the indigenous cultural tradition, which eventually allows the idea of "Arutam" to survive. Admittedly, it is modified, but it still exists. It is a concept modified by an external actor, but it is accepted among the natives because it seems to be adjusted to the altered context and the altered cosmology.

What or Who Represents Jesus? The Multivocality of Symbols and the Making of Sense

I have tried to demonstrate that in the missionaries' view the phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" is subjected to an inner logic which follows the postconciliar and postcolonial theology and gives emphasis to local understandings of a global message. Thus, according to the official Catholic reading, the belief in a Christian deity is nothing new to the Shuar, since it has always been imbedded in their religion. Therefore, many Salesian priests engaged in the "Autochthonous Church" would define their mission rather as a Christian reinterpretation of the Jivaroan tradition than as the introduction of a totally new and foreign religious system. Considering this theological approach, one could state that the missionaries dissolve the transcultural flexibility and openness of a particular culture into a primordial, universalistic principle. In their view, the translation and integration of Jesus into the Jivaroan cosmology is possible because the Christian concept of the divine is, in a certain way, proper to the Achuar and Shuar culture, since all cultures are supposed to have the same origin in the same God, or spoken biblically, all cultures are destined to take part in a divine and single salvific history.

However, what are the motivations of the Achuar and Shuar themselves to assert that "Jesus is the same Arutam"? It is a delicate issue to analyze the religious beliefs of somebody else. The personal religious identity is something quite intimate and often difficult to communicate or even incommunicable. As social anthropologists we are interpreters, we are not able to look into the head of another person and to disclose the "real" motivations of his or her special expression or behaviour. So, if the Shuar catechist in San Papru explains to me that "Jesus is the same Arutam," it should not be excluded that he indeed follows the official theology of the "Autochthonous Church" confessing that Jesus is the last and fulfilled manifestation of Arutam. In other words: As a social anthropologist one should accept the possibility that the Shuar catechist "just believes" in this "deliberately researched syncretism" (Descola 1993: 389) and theological construction – apart from all theoretical constructions of culture and cultural contact. It should be obvious that our etic analysis of cultural phenomena is not necessarily the emic point of view.

Nevertheless, as it was shown, it is a widespread conviction among the Achuar and Shuar that "Jesus is the same Arutam," – and is arrived at independently of whether he or she is a self-confessed member of the "Autochthonous Church" or not. The phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" has apparently a comprehensible meaning also for those who are not especially involved in the "Autochthonous Church." According to Lévi-Strauss and Descola, one could argue that this expression exemplifies how the colonial domination over the Jivaroan nations has resulted in a loss of cultural "authenticity." As already stated, I would doubt the exclusiveness of this argument, because it postulates a Herderian concept of culture and ignores the active engagement of the indigenous, defining their role as victims but not as actors. It is an undeniable fact that the primary protagonists of the "Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" are external actors who are influenced by postconciliar or postcolonial ideologies which per se not have been established by the native people. So, the autochthony proclaimed within the "Autochthonous Church" rather may be regarded as a construction and instrumentalization of indigenous culture, which one could judge as a model of "imposed autochthony." However, the Achuar and Shuar do not adopt without question and uncritically the Salesian interpretation of Arutam and their religious tradition. Felipe Wampash, for example, seems to be a little astonished that the missionaries changed their attitude towards the indigenous religion quite abruptly. Moreover, he declares that it has been nothing new to the Shuar to name God "Arutam" (cp. fn. 19). In other words: For Wampash it is not an invention of some Catholic missionaries to parallel the meanings and functions of "Arutam" and the Christian God, but rather the conviction, that the Christian God and Arutam are the same, is a self-evident concept, if one would accurately analyze the Shuar cosmology. Miguel Tankamash is another Shuar who does not really challenge the theoretical approach of the "Autochthonous Church," although he criticizes the role of

the missionaries who in his opinion are undermining the self-determination of the Shuar. Tankamash, the first president of the FICSH (Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar) and one of the founding fathers of the indigenous political movement in Ecuador, accuses some Salesian priests of usurping the Shuar culture, deciding what is right, and reproaches the missionaries for appropriating the cultural sovereignty of interpretation.[31] Even though it would be the missionary's best intentions to revitalize the indigenous tradition and to promote its ethnocultural identity, he defines as an exterior actor what the Shuar culture is or, at least, what is of value to be preserved, according to the Shuar leader.[32] Tankamash strongly disapproves of this heteronomy, yet interestingly, he seems to start from assumptions similar to these which are confessed in the "Autochthonous Church." Thus, also Tankamash equates Shuar creeds with the Christian credo, when he is arguing: "The Catholics thought that Christ was born and they believe in him; there do not exist many differences between our creeds. The powerful spirit gave them force and energy to help the people – we, the Shuar, had the same idea."[33] Apart from his opinion on the Christian missionaries' engagement, Tankamash demonstrates that the comparison between Jesus Christ and the Shuar divinity apparently does not cause any antithetical notion, but is associated by similar concepts.

As it was shown, Achuar and Shuar do not have any problems in using the terms of "Arutam," "Jesus," and "God" interchangeably as do the protagonists of the "Autochthonous Church." These linguistic terms however may not necessarily be filled with the same meaning and functions as those which are attributed to them by the official theology of the "Autochthonous Church." It is the multivocality of linguistic and religious signs, respectively, which allows the indigenous to interpret these in a self-contained manner. Culture is a process during which meaning and sense are constantly negotiated and the categorical separation of one's own and the other is continuously being dissolved. Taken this in mind, "Arutam" as well as "Jesus" become a "transcultural product" with ambiguous meanings and functions. Thus, every translation is a divergence from the "original" (Bhabha 1994a: 224 ff.): "original" meaning gets lost, new meaning is created. In the same manner, the processes of translation between the two religious systems, which have met in the Ecuadorian Amazon, generated new, i.e., transcultural spaces of meaning, which go beyond the cultural boarders of Jivaroan and Western Christian tradition.

In a brochure, which was published by political representatives of the canton Taisha – all of them are either Achuar or Shuar –, one can find a chapter entitled "El Arutam" introducing the Jivaroan conception of "God" (*Gobierno Municipal del Ecológico Cantón de Taisha* 2008: 18). The first paragraph can be read like a Christian credo: "God Father, generous and benign, since the creation of the earth and the universe, he has no limits in presenting us his profound love and giving proofs of his infinite mercy, he has created us in his image and likeness, infusing into us the breath of life."[34]

The idea of Arutam presented here is far away from Harner's definition of "arutam" and the "arutam soul" (1984). Arutam in this brochure is a monotheistic God, Father, and Creator, merciful and affectionate, and not an obtained power which enables the individual to be an honest man and a successful warrior. Unquestionably, the meaning and function of Arutam is adapted to the Christian idea of God; Arutam is equated to God in the biblical narrative. However, further the text relates Arutam's epiphany with the Achuar and Shuar people, and here, at the latest, the plotline of the Old and the New Testament is strongly modified. Thus, Israel and the Hebrew nation in the days of Caesar Augustus are left aside. Instead, God manifests himself during the ayahuasca visions of the *cacique* and warrior Tutrik Mashu who dwells in the canton Taisha. Revealing himself to Tutrik Mashu, God announces his name – "Arutam" – and indicates the place of the encounter with him – the "Sagrada Tuna."[35] Although the

31 Compare Miguel Tankamash (03. 04. 08): "Alguien por más antropólogo que sea no puede entender a fondo la cultura de un pueblo, pero el padre quiere entender la esencia de una cultura y decir que eso está bien y qué eso no – y con eso yo no estoy de acuerdo".

32 Compare Pellizzaro (1978: 125): "Para salvar al Shuar es necesario librarlo del complejo de inferioridad. Valorizar su cultura utilizando todos los medios y asegurarle un mínimo de territorio en el que pueda vivir tranquilo y organizarse según su manera de ser, su visión del mundo y sus creencias".

33 Miguel Tankamash (03. 04. 08), translated by A. M. The original text: "Los católicos pensaron que Cristo nació y creen en Él; no existen muchas diferencias entre nuestras creencias. El espíritu poderoso les daba fuerza y energía para ayudar a la gente – los shuar teníamos este mismo pensamiento".

34 *Gobierno Municipal del Ecológico Cantón de Taisha* (2008: 18), translated by A. M. The original text: "Dios Padre Generoso y Bondadoso, desde la creación de la tierra y el Universo, no ha tenido límites para entregarnos su profundo Amor y dando muestras de su infinita Misericordia, nos creo a su imagen y semejanza infundiéndonos el soplo de vida".

35 *Tuna* is the Jivaroan word for "waterfall." According to the belief of the Achuar and Shuar the waterfall is the dwelling of Arutam as well as of the spirits of the ancestors. Therefore, many Achuar and Shuar take the ayahuasca drink nearby a waterfall.

self-revelation of the godly proper name is a famous biblical motif (cp. Ex 3:14), nothing else reminds of the God's incarnation in the Christian tradition. From the Christian perspective, the here presented godly manifestation is quite alien to the plotline in the Bible. At the end of the chapter the reader will eventually find the following sentence, which exemplifies impressively how the two religious traditions are interwoven and also modified: "The physical presence of Jesus Shuar and Achuar is the living faith of the present, [he] who has already been announced by the proper voice of Arutam in the different temples or Sacred Tuna, where they also call on the spirits of the past by appealing to those present today."[36]

For the first time, the term "Jesus" is used in the text, and, interestingly, the name is accompanied by the attributions "Shuar" and "Achuar" respectively. This linguistic arrangement exemplifies the "transcultural product" of these mutual modifications: the Jívaro believe in Jesus, but they believe in him according to an Achuar and Shuar version. Jesus is identified as revelation of God Arutam, but the "circumstances" of this godly manifestation are obeying the Jivaroan tradition. As here presented, Jesus is not identical to the Christian "original" nor is the described Arutam identical to the "authentic" Jivaroan concept. Both religious symbols are translated into a new context and so adopt altered attributions and meanings.

In his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1994b), Homi Bhabha argues that the Bible in the hand of the colonized can perilously undermine the interpretative authority of the colonizers; the Bible is reread and misread, translated and appropriated, according to the context of the indigenous. The repetition of the text displaces the value of the symbols once defined by the colonizers and thus establishes spaces of resistance.

When a political representative of the Achuar points out during the Christmas Mass that Jesus Christ was born as precursor of the indigenous emancipation, then he obviously reinterpreted the official theological understanding of Jesus Christ's birth. Thus, Jesus Christ was born as a weak and poor child but has changed the world – similarly to Socrates, Plato, Gandhi, and the native Bolivian president Evo Morales –, argues the leader during the Christmas service of 2009. Therefore, the Achuar can also look self-confidently ahead! They may be born poor and weak as well, but this fact will not prevent them from revolutionizing the world – as did Jesus! With this appropriation of "Jesus Christ" during the Christmas Mass, the Achuar politician did not follow the regular Christian interpretation, but he integrated comprehensibly the foreign symbol into his own cultural tradition.

To sum up: The encounter between the Old World and the New World in the Ecuadorian Amazon is not structured by dichotomies and oppositions but by mutual borrowing and appropriation. The tropics do not have to be a "monoculture of sugar-cane" as Claude Lévi-Strauss feared (see 1961: 39), but they are a space of transcultural negotiations. The Achuar and Shuar do not necessarily regard the "Autochthonous Church" as a "deliberately researched syncretism," as they are able to interweave "Jesus" and "Arutam" into and within their cosmology; the phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" does not seem to contradict their inner logic. This could be supported by the following reasons:

1. The Jivaroan Concept of the Supernatural

It would be difficult to identify a precise definition of "Arutam" in the relevant ethnologic literature.[37] The term is "multidimensional," as Mader indicates (2008: 99 ff.): it designates a "particular form of spiritual power," "acquired aspects of identity," "epiphanies" during hallucinogenic visions, and "mythical figures." Furthermore, the cited quotes demonstrate that an idea of "Arutam" has prevailed which is compared directly with the Christian concept of God and seems to enforce a monotheistic understanding of the supernatural power, wherein – according to Mader's observation – the mythical figures, such as Etsa, Nunkui, Tsunki, are regarded not to be separate deities but manifestation of the one God, called "Arutam." It is this multidimensionality of the term "Arutam" which allows the Achuar and Shuar to integrate a foreign cultural entity like "Jesus" comparatively easily into their cosmological order. In this case, in the end it is irrelevant if "Jesus" is considered as an additional spiritual power, a mythical figure, or the last fulfilment of God. According to Kohl (1988), the point is that "Jesus" has become part of the narrative mythological Jivaroan tradition. Jesus does not substitute the belief in Arutam, but extends it by a further aspect.

36 *Gobierno Municipal del Ecológico Cantón de Taisha* (2008: 18), translated by A. M.; the original text: "La presencia física de Jesús Shuar y Achuar, es la fe viva del presente, ya que fue anunciado en los diferentes templos o Tuna Sagrada con la propia voz de Arutam, donde también exclaman los espíritus del pasado, dirigiéndose a los hoy presentes".

37 Descola (1993); Harner (1984); Karsten (1935); Mader (1999, 2008); Stirling (1938); Taylor (1993, 1996).

2. The Appropriation of a Theological Nomenclature

The expressions made by the catechists Domingo Tsapak, Felipe Wampash, Miguel Tankamash, and the Achuar pupil Fidel Ujukam (see above) demonstrate that the Achuar and Shuar themselves positively seek to compare their religious tradition with the Christian one. In order to exemplify this comparison, they employ attributes and metaphors which are especially known from the Christian context: Arutam is "God Father, generous and benign, since the creation of the earth and the universe" – this introductory sentence to the quoted chapter in the brochure of the canton Taisha may be an outstanding example, but it is not a singular case. The encounter and confrontation with a foreign belief system does not have to eliminate the "traditional" religion or to question it; rather, the new system can be used to systematize the old one – applying the introduced terminology. So, similarly to the holiness of the Christian scripture, the sacral character of the indigenous mythology is emphasized and considered as a corpus of divine manifestations. When the Achuar pupil writes, "Etsá, Shakaim, Ayumpum, and Nunkui were the mouthpieces of Arutam," the relation between these religious entities seems to be classified quite definite. On the one hand, the "multidimensionality" of the term "Arutam" gets lost, on the other hand, it is unequivocally identified. The Achuar und Shuar not only appropriate the content of the Christian religion but also its formal structure, i.e., the idea of systematizing their belief by an unambiguous terminology (theological categories, dogmas), by which especially written religions are characterized (Goody 1968, 1986). The systematization of one's own belief system by using non-autochthonous categories is as well a translation process, as it makes own communicable to others. Every translation is aimed at the understanding, i.e., to put the own and the foreign on a same, equal level of comprehension: "… there do not exist many differences between our creeds," Miguel Tankamash stated. "Jesus is the same Arutam," several Achuar and Shuar affirmed to me. The use of the Christian terminological system to identify indigenous religious entities equalizes the Jivaroan tradition with the Christian one – it *equalizes* them in the sense of making them of *equal value*. So, the application of the Christian terminology is a self-confident expression of the conviction that Achuar and Shuar religion is not in any way less valuable than the Christian one and can be even described in the same manner and with the same theological system.

3. The Multivocality of Symbols

Symbols are ambiguous and multivocal. One symbol holds several meanings, for which reason "the same symbol may be understood by different people in different ways" (Kertzer 1988: 11). What or whom does Jesus Christ symbolize? Probably many Christians would answer that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who descended to earth in order to become man in ancient Israel and to redeem humankind. And what would characterize the understanding the Achuar and Shuar Catholics answer? For sure, several indigenous would have a similar thought: Jesus is the Son of God. However, one also can hear answers such as: Jesus is the same Arutam, or, Jesus is the precursor of the indigenous emancipation. Even though religious symbols are defined unambiguously by theological doctrines, they will evoke multivocal associations and will be interpreted differently, according to the particular context. As already mentioned, the Jesus of the "Autochthonous Church" is a "transcultural product" whose global, universal significance has been appropriated to the local, native context. "The complexity and uncertainty of meaning of symbols are sources of their strength," Kertzer writes (1988: 11). It is this strength of multivocality and *translatability* which allows the Achuar and Shuar to be as well actors within as authors of this process of appropriation.

Conclusion

In order to let no doubts arise: The fewest cultural contacts of humankind probably have been free of tension, conflict, and domination. And it would be wrong to play down the physical and psychical suffering of the indigenous people caused by the encounter between the Old World and the New World. In America, the perception that cultures are different has quite quickly led to the judgement that cultures are unequal (Todorov 1999: 146). When Lévi-Strauss writes that the "charcoal skies and louring atmosphere of the doldrums summarize the state of mind in which the Old World first came upon the new one" (1961: 78), I understand by this "state of mind" that Eurocentric perspective which turned the encounter of two cultures into a relationship of cultural repression and domination. Similarly, neither the Achuar nor the Shuar have been spared from this cultural discrimination and social marginalization. The Jivaroan culture and religious tradition have definitely been changed by the presence of the Salesian missionaries, but they have not disappeared or been dissolved into a homogenized pabulum, as Lévi-Strauss lamented.

The phrase "Jesus is the same Arutam" exemplifies the irreversible impact of the missionary activities, but at the same time it points to the fact that cultural boundaries of "the own" and "the other" are negotiable. Within the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" this negotiation is a process in which, first of all, the missionaries themselves are engaged, but also the indigenous who are ready to accept, to promote, and to discuss the Christian reinterpretation and re-functionalization of the indigenous culture and religion. In contrast to Descola, I argued that the concepts and beliefs confessed in the "Autochthonous Church" can not necessarily be judged as a "deliberately researched syncretism" (Descola 1993: 389), as they are subjected to the inner logic of the natives as well as of the missionaries. The latter have been influenced by churchly, conciliar reforms, which correspond to the paradigms of postcolonial discourse and are orientated towards the recognition of the cultural "Other," i.e., to local, non-European traditions. For sure, the "Catholic Autochthonous Church of the Achuar and Shuar" is primarily founded and based on a theoretical concept developed by (European) Christian theologians and applied by the Salesian missionaries in Ecuador; in that way, the reproach is often raised that the refunctionalization of the indigenous cultural practices of the "Autochthonous Church" is a means to an end and exclusively serves the evangelization of the indigenous (Colajanni 2008: 157, 159). Also, several Achuar and Shuar, some of them church members, are critical of the missionaries' domination and cultural heteronomy, but they do not seem to mind the general confrontation with a foreign religious system. Therefore, agreeing with Boster (see above), I find it almost irrelevant to discuss to what extent the cited contemporary concept of "Arutam" differs from the "original" one. Thus, it is rather interesting, that such "complementary alternatives" exist and are applied by many Achuar and Shuar.

Meaning and sense are not fixed categories, since they are continuously modified according to a given historical and cultural context. In the Ecuadorian Amazon, the role and function of Jesus Christ as well as of Arutam are negotiated and defined in a new way, although in the context of Jivaroan and Christian tradition. The symbols of Arutam and Jesus have become transcultural, i.e., they have generated new senses "trans" and beyond the cultural boarders of the Old and the New World. The integration of Christian cultural elements into the Jivaroan cosmology has become a local tradition among the Shuar, creating local meanings (Hahn 2008: 199).

The transcultural approach does not imply that differences between cultures are irrelevant or nonexistent for the people affected by the encounter between the Old World and the New World, but it emphasizes the openness of culture and underlines the human capability to handle actively the cultural "Other." It is obvious for the Achuar and Shuar that "Jesus" is an imported symbol which has not been native to their culture. However, the indigenous are able to appropriate "Jesus" into their culture in the sense of "making him own." This appropriation process implies that Jesus is given a place in the native cosmic order and that he is assigned to altered role functions according to the Jivaroan tradition. Translations never display the exact "original" meaning, but rather create new meanings – transforming both, the symbol which is newly interpreted as well as the context into which the symbol is transferred.

From this point of view, the impact of the "Autochthonous Church" does not dispossess the Achuar and Shuar of the "originality" their relationship to the supernatural holds (see above), as Philippe Descola stated. Rather, this "originality" becomes particularly apparent, as it demonstrates the indigenous' inner logic and their creativity to handle the Christian and missionaries' influences – by integrating the concept of the Trinitarian God into the "multidimensionality" of Arutam, by adopting the theological language, and by attributing new meanings and functions to Jesus Christ. It is due to this indigenous "originality" that one eventually will find in the Amazon less tristes but rather transcultured tropes.

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