

*Manifestations of the Dead:
Investigating ghost encounters among the Tsachila
of western Ecuador*

Daniel Dolley
Exeter College

Thesis submitted in compliance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of
Oxford.

Hilary Term
2013

Dominus illuminatio mea.

"Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, und Grün des Lebens goldner Baum."

Mephisto

Manifestations of the Dead:

*Investigating ghost encounters among the Tsachila
of western Ecuador.*

Daniel Dolley
Exeter College

Submitted in compliance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.

Hilary Term
2013

Focusing on the Tsachila, Amerindians of western Ecuador, this thesis examines how competing “common knowledge” accounts of the afterlife (conventional Tsachi, Catholic, and Protestant) are related to experiences of encounters with ghosts. Inspired by conversation analysis it advocates the study of these encounters through close attention to how accounts of them are constructed in conversation, from which they emerge as inherently disruptive and resistant to any definitive interpretation. From this starting point a descriptive account is given of the ways in which these anomalous experiences form the background to everyday life among the Tsachila. Experiential associations are identified linking ghosts with the circadian patterns of sound, light and sociality. Next the thesis examines and compares a selection of myths depicting the dead and animals and it is shown that the boundaries between myth and everyday life and between the living and the dead are uncertain and subject to revision in the light of experience. They cannot be taken for granted but must be constantly reinforced. An example of such reinforcement is provided by the Tsachi celebration of the Catholic Day of the Dead, and it is shown how this intersects with and is inflected by Tsachi attitudes to the dead and their disposal. In the final chapter a selection of accounts of personal encounters with ghosts is examined to reveal ways in which the common knowledge previously discussed is shaped, deployed and contested in the context of these accounts. It is suggested, in conclusion, that personal experience of this kind cannot be treated as simply a cultural expression, but that it exerts a motivating and disruptive force on thought and action.

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	3
I. Introduction	5
<i>Okó</i>	5
<i>Knowledge grounded in experience</i>	8
<i>Contested knowledge</i>	11
<i>Common humanity, anomalous experience and the recalcitrant world</i>	12
<i>Experience, events, and conversation analysis</i>	16
<i>Amerindian Perspectivism</i>	18
<i>Praet on the Chachi, Shapes and Perspectives</i>	20
<i>The Tsachila</i>	25
<i>Ventura on the Tsachila</i>	36
<i>Specificity of knowledge and grammatical features of Tsafiki</i>	41
<i>Methodology and limitations</i>	44
<i>Structure of the thesis</i>	53
II. Encountering an <i>Okó</i>: the dynamics of description and interpretation in the construction of a narrative	55
III. The Diversions of a Quiet Life: <i>Okó</i> and circadian patterns of sound, light and sociality	67
<i>Patterns of sound and habitation</i>	70
<i>Being heard and seen</i>	73
<i>Visual and auditory manifestations of <i>okó</i></i>	75
<i>Going into <i>okó</i></i>	77
<i>Sight, hearing and the deceptiveness of appearances</i>	79
<i>Maintaining an ordinary visibility</i>	83
<i>The sobriety of social interactions</i>	89
<i>The daily round</i>	92
<i>Into the night</i>	96
<i>Summary</i>	103
IV. The Dead and Other Creatures: ancestral accounts	105
<i>Stories about the dead</i>	117
<i>Stories about animals</i>	128
<i>Back to everyday life</i>	136
V. Remembrance or Exorcism: invocatory or apotropaic techniques?	139
<i>The Day of the Dead 2008</i>	144
<i>Incongruities</i>	147

<i>Okobi</i>	151
<i>Sollicitous treatments of the dead</i>	157
<i>Concluding suggestions</i>	163
VI. Good and Evil in the Afterlife: Christian positions and the interpretation of personal experience	167
<i>An Evangelical position?</i>	167
<i>A Catholic position?</i>	182
<i>Good and evil, aggressive and tame</i>	195
<i>Conclusion</i>	200
VII. Conclusion	203
References	217

Table of Maps

Map 1	facing page 5
Ecuador, showing the provinces Pichincha, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas and Esmeraldas.	
Map 2	facing page 5
Showing approximate distribution of Barbacoan languages in the mid-20th century.	
Map 3	facing page 25
Two maps of the Tsachi Comunas overlaid and compared (Moore 1979 & Ventura 2000).	
Map 4	facing page 25
Showing approximate locations of the Tsachi Comunas in accordance with Map 3.	
Map 5	facing page 29
Detail from <i>Carta de la provincia de Quito y sus adyacentes por Don Pedro Maldonado</i> , c.1750.	

Acknowledgments

The happy duty of acknowledging all those to whom I am so gratefully indebted is, I am pleased to say, endless. Here, regrettably, I must be selective. First, my deepest thanks go to Dario and Maria and all their family, who welcomed me so generously into their lives, gave me every possible assistance, and watched over me even when I was unaware. I want to thank their eldest son for his help with the recordings and Reginaldo for his patient and wise guidance through some perplexing subjects and some particularly difficult situations. I thank Timoteo, Margarita, and Séptimo for sharing their stories with me and all the others whose stories have made my thesis what it is.

My thanks go to Héctor Aguavil, Governor of the Tsachila (2006-2010), and to his successor Gumercindo Aguavil, for their generous support and understanding. I thank Connie Dickinson for her invaluable assistance in introducing me to the Tsachila and their language. I thank José Juncosa, Director of Anthropology at the Universidad Politécnica Salesiana in Quito, for his indefatigable support and friendship. To Elisabeth Hsu I am greatly indebted for her timely visit to me in the field, as well as for her tireless intellectual and personal commitment to my work. I also thank Françoise Barbira Freedman for her encouragement through some of the hazards of the field.

To Elisabeth Hsu and Elizabeth Ewart, my long-suffering supervisors, I owe an enormous debt for their encouragement, criticisms and patience in coaxing my *pensée sauvage* into the necessary shape, restraining my rhetorical excesses and continually holding me to account. I thank Laura Rival, Paul Dresch and David Gellner for their encouragement, criticisms and comments along the way. I thank Montserrat Ventura for her generous correspondence and for her meticulous ethnography without which I would have been completely lost. I owe a great debt to Michael Athanson, Geospatial Data Specialist at the Bodleian Library, who was so patient and expert in producing maps according to my every whim. I thank Vicky Dean and Lesley Darcy who, at every crucial moment told me exactly what I needed to do and then helped me to do it.

I thank Exeter College and the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Oxford, whose financial support through the Alan Coltart Scholarship and other funds and grants made my research possible. My special thanks go to Frances Cairncross, William Jensen, Joan Himpson and Meena Rowland, who in different ways gave me such generous help.

I want to thank all those in Congoma, Santo Domingo, Shell, Quito and Oxford, who in various ways, great and small, were so good to me: Carlos Bombón and Carlos Vargas, two lawyers of a very different cut; Ramiro Guerrero, ‘mi hermano’, who fed my soul with conversation and milkshakes; José Juncosa and Narcisca Calahorrano and their family; Gisella Troncozo and Luis Fernando Latorre Tapia and their family; René Asqui and Noemí Asqui and their family; David Pavón and his mother Ana and her family; Ruth and Martin Harrison and their family; Margaret Lebeau; the congregation of Advent St Nicholas; the Comunidad Laico in Andres

Xaura and especially Paulina Bejarano; Jessica Ojeda and Juan Zarria for their help with transcription; Ramón Granell, who gave me the last line.

There are so many people to whom special thanks is due for their friendship and support during the tortuous process of writing up, but here I will mention only a few: my mother and father Mirrlees and Stephen Dolley, my friends Cai Marshall, Ana Margarida Santos, Justin Pearce, Inga Anna-Liisa Saikkonen, Ieva Raubisko, Joy Pachuau, Carolina Wessel, Verónica Cueva-Peralta, Kate Nialla Fayers-Kerr, Tara Kelly and John Newman, Alejandro Reig, Elizabeth Rahman and Carlos Montolla, Fran and Craig Walsh, Mary Mckeone RSCJ (RIP), Carl and Scooby, Misha (RIP), Chris, the stalwarts of the Exeter MCR, the regulars of the Gatehouse, and the devotees of the Aquinas Reading Group at Blackfriars' Hall. Between them they medicated my terminal agonies with patient sympathy, sage advice, delicious food, humour, cake, theology, prayer and alcohol. In particular I want to thank my mother for her unstinting help at every stage of the process through thick and thin and for finally calling time. But I cannot end without mentioning Sheila Leech, my life-long friend who knew the Tsachila before I was born, and Philip Stewart, my tutor for the BA in Human Sciences. I owe them both more than I can possibly say. Between them they are to blame for everything.

Though most of what is good in this thesis owes more to others than to me, all its failings are mine. Lastly, I would like to dedicate it especially to all those human beings who live and work and dance in Congoma, and especially to the children, my constant playmates, who played such an indispensable part in the telling of this particular story.

I. Introduction

This thesis is about ghosts — the post-mortem manifestations of people — and about other associated phenomena which were reported to me by a number of people in a small village in the western lowlands of Ecuador. The people in question were members of a group who call themselves the Tsachila, a small indigenous federation of an uncertain provenance whose forebears for at least the last two hundred years have lived in the tropical foothills of the Andes where they continue to reside in the environs of the city of Santo Domingo de los Colorados approximately 70-80 km west of Quito (see Map 1, opposite). Their mother-tongue is Tsafiki, a language of the Barbacoan family (see Map 2, opposite), but all except some of the older men and women are fluent in Spanish as well. The following chapters deal with some of their attitudes and behaviour towards the dead and other occult creatures and how these are related to aspects of their experience. More broadly we will be concerned with the often problematic interaction between personal experience and various kinds of common knowledge, of which ghosts and other such phenomena provide a particularly piquant example.

Okó

When I began my fieldwork, in August 2008, I went to live in the Tsachi Comuna of Congoma, where I lodged with the brother-in-law of a friend of a friend of mine. I will call him Dario (all the personal names used in this thesis have been changed). He and his wife (let's call her Maria), both in their early forties, had seven children, two of them married with children and houses of their own, and five, all girls between the ages of 17 and 3, who still lived at home. The youngest of these children and their cousins, who lived in neighbouring houses, became my sponsors and chaperones for the first fortnight of my stay until I was well enough known among their parents to go visiting without them. They took me with them on endless forays to pick mandarins, to buy sweets from the shop across the road or just to loiter on the edge of football and volleyball matches. It was in their company that I first encountered the Tsafiki word *oko* being used in earnest. I had already come across it in some of the literature on the Tsachila — Karsten (1924), Moore (1965), and Ventura (2000) — where it is cited as the Tsachi term for a 'spirit' or 'demon'.



Map 1. Ecuador, showing the provinces Pichincha, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas and Esmeraldas (adapted from National Geographic by Michael Athanson).

Map 2. Showing approximate distribution of Barbacoan languages in the mid-20th century — *Tsa'fiki*, *Cha'palaachi* (*Cayapa*), *Awa Pit* (*Cuaiquer*), *Guambiano*, and *Totoró*, the last being moribund. Other languages are marked by name only and are not part of the Barbacoan family (adapted from Adelaar & Muysken (2004:51, 141) by Michael Athanson).

However, according to the children *oko* were blood-sucking monsters ('monstro' [*sic*]) and one of their favourite games was to get me to pretend to be one and to chase them, roaring, around the football pitch or the cleared yard which circled the house. All the better if it was after dark and I would don a red head-torch, adopting the colour of the vampiric *luban oko* (red *oko*), and I would scare them into paroxysms of delighted terror until they really were too afraid to carry on.

I quickly discovered, however, that *oko* were not just the fantasies of children, but that almost everyone in the village could relate instances of coming across them in the forest or around the village, particularly at night-time.¹ These *oko* were not quite the same as the blood-sucking monsters envisaged by my younger companions. They were strange anomalous figures, apparitions and noises that were associated with the dead and the dying. Unusual whistles and cries heard on a jungle path, figures that seemed to disappear abruptly, snatches of conversation that were heard one moment and fell silent the next, the noise of a baby crying with no apparent source, the sight of an uncommunicative stranger standing by the path, their face averted; these were the kinds of phenomena which my interlocutors typically identified as *oko*, and if someone was known to be dying, or found to have died subsequently in the vicinity, it was generally presumed that the *oko* had belonged to them. It was said to go out of them around the time of their death and linger a while on its way to the land of the dead.

¹ It is worth noting that in the course of my fieldwork I found no scepticism with regard to *oko*. Occasionally I came across a Tsachi person who claimed never to have encountered one. However, they did not see in this a reason to doubt their existence. Instead they cited it as evidence of the fact that they themselves, in contrast to their neighbours, were sufficiently strong and fearless as to scare *oko* away. The reader may be sceptical in her turn about the apparent credulity of the Tsachila, but the extent to which this is in fact well-founded in personal experience should become increasingly clear over the course of the thesis. It is worth noting also in this regard how little scepticism I encountered in Ecuadorian society in general beyond a small section of the intelligentsia. Those who are not Catholics, whether devoutly or merely by habit, are very often devout Evangelicals. Besides this there is in Ecuador, as in many other places, a thriving array of quasi-medical, religious, occult and speculative practice from every conceivable origin, centring around the treatment of illness and the maintenance of good health. Here biomedicine jockeys for position alongside hypnosis, acupuncture, herbalism of various kinds, the cults of local saints, charms, shamanism, faith healing, the latest internet memes, sometimes advertised on the same billboards and dispensed by the same people. In this pluralist context, driven by existential exigencies, the idea of scepticism scarcely makes sense. Instead people typically consider and make use of each alternative, either in turn or simultaneously, doing so provisionally and to the extent that it proves efficacious.

Although many of the phenomena associated with these peri-mortem manifestations were fleeting and the kinds of things I might be inclined to attribute to some sort of minor misperception, a number of them were far more complicated. For example, when I expressed my interest in studying *oko* for the purposes of this thesis, Dario told me the story of one of his aunts who had died almost forty years previously. She had bled to death after a phantom pregnancy. In the middle of the night, what was meant to be the delivery of her baby turned into her wake as she bled out onto the floor of the house. Her death had been accompanied by such dramatic disturbances that it was still remembered by many people in the village. Her family signalled the untoward event in the conventional manner by firing a gun into the air, which woke all the neighbours and summoned them to the house to see what was going on. As they began to prepare the body for the wake inside the house, outside they heard the sound of her voice calling to her cows — “Sal, sal, sal” — then the sound of her whistling, and the cows began to low in answer. Later they heard her laughing. Strange noises of other animals were heard too, circling nearby. Then the kerosene lamps in the house blew out one after another with the sound of a loud breath and when they relit them they blew out again. People arriving for the wake reported that sticks and earth had been thrown at them from in front and behind as they walked along the path through the darkness. Some of them had heard the sound of her whistling at them. Others reported seeing an animal beside the path of a species that was known not to occur in the region, and this they took to be the manifestation of a red *oko*, and they averted their gaze from it, fearing that it would take their souls. Various strange happenings and manifestations continued in the following days. One man reported seeing an animal that looked like a bull, but with a large beak in place of a snout; it left no footprints. The family continued to hear the sound of the dead woman laughing in the night, and there was the noise of sticks being thrown against the house, and the dogs would be sent into a frenzy of barking. Eventually they consulted a shaman who determined that her soul had been “taken over” by a red *oko*. He sent the *oko* away and the disturbances ceased.

This, Dario explained, was a very unusual case. Although the dead often make some disturbances they usually only involve the family, and they normally last only a few days. Although this was an unusual case, precisely for that reason it was widely known and well remembered in the village. Such stories provided part of the context

in which more common and less dramatic experiences of *oko* were interpreted, and these were extremely varied. For example, people told me of encounters with strange or unusual animals: one night Dario had come upon a cat on the path that made the sound of a horse as it walked. On another occasion, returning from a night-fishing trip, he and his daughter had heard the sound of a baby crying in the undergrowth. It lasted briefly and then fell silent. He had also come across figures dressed in white, fishing by the river or diving into it, and this was a relatively common experience which other people also reported. Often people described these white figures as floating about 30 cm above the ground. Dario's brother-in-law (let's call him Reginaldo) described how, when bathing in the river at dusk one afternoon, he had heard the sound of a suffocated cry from the undergrowth. Concluding that it was an *oko* he had thrown a stone at the noise and it had retreated. On another occasion, walking along a path at night he and a friend had noticed a black dog walking next to them. It stayed momentarily and then disappeared. Some people reported having come across lights in the darkness like that of a person with a torch which then mysteriously disappeared. Other people told me of occasions when deceased relatives had appeared to them and given them advice. One man told me of an incident from his childhood when he had woken up one night to find a figure crouching over him with its head wrapped in a white shroud. It turned out that a sick man nearby had just died. All these were examples of *oko*.

Knowledge grounded in experience

The aim of the following chapters is to explore the relationship between experiences such as these and people's beliefs about the dead. I should explain that I am using the terms experience and belief here not as a gloss for Tsafiki equivalents, but simply as a convenient way to denote a broad distinction which became very quickly apparent, both implicitly and explicitly, in the discourse of my Tsachi interlocutors between that which people had seen, heard, experienced themselves, and that which they knew, believed, or had been told from the experience of someone else. The fact that experience in this sense is an extremely important component of knowledge in many lowland Amerindian societies is widely attested in various ways in the ethnography of the region. To take one example, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, in her seminal article on Krahó eschatology, addressed this issue directly with respect to

Krahó beliefs about the dead and the afterlife (1981). The situation she describes is so similar to that which I encountered among the Tsachila, and the problem so succinctly posed, that it bears a lengthy citation:

What, then, are the sources for [Krahó] eschatology? Several myths refer to the dead or to the transformations that follow death, but their authority is hardly ever invoked. Direct knowledge of the world of the dead is ascribed to a definite category of people [...] who have personal experience of them. This category seems to include not only active shamans who are already in possession of recognised powers, but also potential shamans. The [soul] of these people may have contacts with the dead, speak to them, go to their village and yet have enough power to return to the living.

Shamans are normally cited as authorities on the subject: they boast of extraordinary excursions and they are a source of fluent, but mostly impermanent, innovation in eschatology: for such innovations are not necessarily accepted and perpetuated in common belief. I wonder if acceptance is expected. Such innovations testify to the *de visu* knowledge which shamans are held to have of the dead, and therefore contribute to their prestige. In contrast to myths, these versions seem to be produced more or less *ad hoc* and not to emerge one from another. Their only consistent feature is a reduced core of shared beliefs [...]

Dreams are another source of speculation, this time open to anyone. [...] a Krahó may soundly infer from what he dreams a knowledge of the activities of the [dead].

Finally, there are also recurrent stories about meetings with [the dead], in the forest or beside the river. This is always a personal experience, since the dead only show themselves to people who are alone. Such a vision may subsequently be more publicly discussed and compared with current ideas in order to reach conclusions about the real nature of the meeting.

Such a variety of sources, available to specialists (the shamans) as well as to non-specialists, generates a wide range of potential eschatological production. Since this production is apparently not meant to be codified into an orthodoxy, or even perpetuated, there seems to be little concern with control over it. The result is a typically unlimited and often self-contradictory corpus of representations. How are we then to analyse such a field?

When I initially enquired about *oko* the stories I was told at first were not myths (although these soon followed), but accounts of people's own experiences. Among the Tsachila, as among the Krahó, stories circulated of encounters with *oko* in the forest and by the rivers, around people's houses, the village school, the cemetery, beside paths, plantain groves and fields. As among the Krahó, so among the Tsachila, dreams emerged as another source of knowledge about the dead and the afterlife.¹ Finally all these sources, "available to anyone", were set in context with

¹ The importance of dreams both as a source of knowledge and as a field for action in the world is widely attested in the ethnography of lowland South America and beyond. See, for example, Guss (1980) on the importance of dreams for the Makiritare (Venezuelan Amazon), Fausto (2004) on the connection between dreams and shamanism among the Parakanã (southeastern Amazonia), and Bilhaut (2003) on dreaming as a primary means for the recuperation of knowledge and group identity among the Zapara, a cultural-linguistic group on the verge of extinction (Amazonian Ecuador and

reference to what was reported by shamans, again from their personal experience. “The result”, to reiterate Carneiro da Cunha’s conclusion, was “a typically unlimited and often self-contradictory corpus of representations. How are we then to analyse such a field?”

This thesis may be read as (among other things) an attempt to provide one possible answer to this question. However, I take a slightly different approach to that suggested by Carneiro da Cunha. She argues that in a society in which the afterlife does not function as a system of rewards and punishments, and particularly where there is conceived to be a radical discontinuity between the living and the dead, the afterlife “may become a free zone in which the imagination can take the bit between its teeth” (p. 172). In the title of her essay she dubs it a “free field of fabulation” (1981). According to this line of thinking the variation and contradictions in such accounts are attributable to a lack of social control over their production. Consequently, apart from a limited common core, they fall beyond the remit of sociological analysis (*ibid*:171-172). However, such an approach, while recognising the *effects* of various kinds of personal experience in the production of knowledge about the afterlife, still leaves us without a clear account of how the process actually works or of how the “unlimited and often self-contradictory corpus of representations” is related to the “central core” which Carneiro da Cunha proposes for sociological (in her case structuralist) analysis. Furthermore, her assumption that the kinds of direct knowledge which she cites as the sources for Krahó eschatology may be unproblematically regarded as the fruits of unfettered imagination would seem to be an over-simplification.

What I suggest is that the kinds of personal experience described above, rather than falling largely beyond the bounds of sociological enquiry in the way that Carneiro da Cunha implies, can and should be thoroughly integrated with it. I want to propose a close attention to narratives of individual experiences which I will develop in the next chapter and revisit in the last chapter. This will allow us to bring into focus the interaction between such experiences and some of the more generalised expressions

Peru). For examples beyond South America, see Willerslev (2004) on dreams as a source of knowledge about spirits among the Yukaghir (northeastern Siberia), and Hallowell (1966) and Ingold (2000:89-110) on the role of dreams among the Ojibwa (Ontario and Manitoba).

of common knowledge which I will present in the middle chapters. In this way we will begin to see how exactly the two are related.

Contested knowledge

The Tsachila provide a particularly good opportunity for this kind of study. They are the heirs both of a long shamanic tradition and of four hundred years of Catholic missionization. In the last half century they have also experienced a brief but concerted effort at Protestant evangelisation, and so we find among them three very different examples of “common knowledge” accounts of the afterlife jostling one another for position. Although, as we shall see, it is in fact impossible neatly to distinguish a characteristically Tsachi account of the dead and the afterlife from a Catholic one (the Protestant account is much easier to identify because it is more clearly at odds with the others), we can nonetheless observe the “trouble spots” which are produced by the convergence of these different traditions. Here I am taking my cue from Zeitlyn (2009) who argues that it is precisely at “trouble spots” — instances in which meaning is disputed — that we are able to perceive the otherwise invisible taken-for-granted grounds of communication as they are deployed and contested in order to resolve (or to perpetuate) these disputes (Zeitlyn 2009:217).

In broad terms the points of dispute which we will be examining in the following chapters are these: The impulse, which is evident in much of the everyday life and oral tradition of the Tsachila, to expel the dead definitively from the orbit of the living and to maintain the boundary between the two (Chapters III and IV) has to contend with the efforts of the Catholic Church to knit the living and the dead together into a communion of “the faithful” on both sides of death (Chapter V). On the other hand the Protestant teaching that the dead are immediately committed by God to their respective locations in the afterlife and thus do not linger in or return to this world has to contend with the relatively common experience among the Tsachila of encounters with the dead who appear to be doing just that (Chapters II and VI). We will see how in all these trouble-spots, for my Tsachi interlocutors, it was personal experience which was the arbiter.

*Common humanity, anomalous
experience and the recalcitrant world*

The notion that people's ideas about such things as ghosts, spirits, monsters etc. could have such a direct connection to their experience as I am here suggesting has fallen out of fashion since it was first employed by Tylor (1871). Nevertheless it is a difficult intuition to shake off, and has been frequently reprised by more recent anthropologists using a variety of different vocabulary (e.g Horton 1993, Csordas 2002, Willerslev 2007). Tylor famously relied upon it to account for the origins of religion as "primitive man's" attempt to explain dreams, visions and apparitions. Today, however, there seems to be a widespread feeling among anthropologists that to suggest, as Tylor did, that their informants actually see and hear such extraordinary things risks implying that they are in some sense primitive or irrational. It can only be done in the heavy quotation-marks supplied by various forms of cultural constructivism. The phenomena associated with spirits and the like must be treated as in some way being the products of human thought and action rather than as one of its motivations. However, Tylor took it for granted that these phenomena were a common feature of human experience around the globe, and whatever else he may be accused of, he did not imply that they were confined to those societies he called primitive, or that they implied anything odd or irrational about those to whom they appeared; he drew as many examples from the classical and Christian traditions and from his contemporary Britain as he did from the reports of travellers among the natives of North America, Australia and Africa (e.g. Tylor 1871:32-34). In fact, an astounding range of anomalous experience seems to be the common lot of humanity. If we are tempted to think it remarkable to suggest that the Tsachila *actually* see the souls of dead people, we might note that England has a long-standing reputation for having one of the highest densities of ghost sightings in the world (Davies 2007:1, Clarke 2012), and the USA enjoys a similar reputation with respect to alien abductions. Recent surveys in various countries in the West suggest that a wide range of so-called paranormal experiences are relatively common (Wooffitt 1992:3-4). It appears in the end to be not so unusual for people to have experiences which the tenets of modern science teach us to think are outside the bounds of reality. Indeed, we might have more cause to be surprised by a society where such reports were not to be found. What differs from place to place is what these experiences consist of and how the people involved deal with them. What is

regarded to be an anomalous and therefore problematic experience obviously depends to a large extent on what are regarded to be the bounds of ordinary, unproblematic experience. How these problematic experiences are assimilated, talked about, and responded to depends on the particular conceptual tools and social, political and economic exigencies with which people find themselves equipped and constrained. But whatever they consist of and however they are dealt with they are experienced as being part of what Zeitlyn has called the recalcitrance of the world (Zeitlyn 2009). That is to say, their presence to us is as part of that which is already there; they have a certain foothold, so to speak, in the array of things about which we have no choice, the *fait accompli* of our existence. This, I think, is what Zeitlyn has in mind when he talks of the recalcitrance of the world. Here some Heideggerian language is useful to clarify what we mean. Following Heidegger, we can think about our relations with objects in terms of their readiness-to-hand with respect to our various needs and labours (Heidegger 1927:95-102). What we refer to as the world in this case is that web of involvements which is presupposed by the readiness-to-hand of objects as we take them up in our activities, and which is ultimately oriented around our own Being-in-the world (*ibid*:116). In this case the recalcitrance to which Zeitlyn refers is encountered in those instances when objects reveal their presence to us as in some way unready-to-hand or obstructive of our activity. According to Heidegger such instances occasion a certain unveiling of the web of involvements which constitute the world and which ordinarily tend to recede from our attention, being taken-for-granted in the flow of activity afforded by that which is ready-to-hand (*ibid*:103-107). It is precisely this kind of recalcitrance, this obstructiveness or unready-to-hand, I suggest, which confronts us in instances of anomalous experience, of which encounters with ghosts, as we shall see, constitute an example.

For the anthropologist phenomena such as these admittedly pose a considerable theoretical and methodological challenge. And yet it is in fact no more than an extreme example of what is perhaps the central conundrum of social anthropology. Merleau-Ponty, in an essay on the nature of sociological knowledge, puts it this way: “How can we understand someone else without sacrificing him to our logic or it to him?” (Merleau-Ponty 1964:115). The answer is not to be found in cultural constructivism, which in its most extreme forms simply destroys the grammatical

sense of this question and its moral force by denying that the “someone else” is actually a someone in any significantly equivalent sense to the person asking the question. Anthropology is inescapably a moral discipline presupposing a common humanity and when anthropological theory fails to do this it becomes both analytically useless and morally bankrupt. Our responsibility is to recognise ourselves as much as we are able in other people and in the process we must take other people seriously as selves in their own right who can return the compliment; we must let them redefine us until they can recognise themselves in us. It is a process of putting ourselves in the context of others as other selves. Merleau-Ponty puts it like this:

We can expand our experience of social relationships and get a proper view of them only by analogy or contrast with those we have lived. We can do so, in short, only by subjecting the social relationships we have experienced to an *imaginary variation*. These lived relationships will no doubt take on a new meaning in comparison with this imaginary variation [...], but they will provide it with all the sociological meaning it can have.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964:100, his emphasis.)

Sociological or anthropological knowledge is at its root knowledge of others as other subjects. But it is important to note that what we have in view here is not the isolated Cartesian subject who knows others only by a conjecture of analogy with her own self-knowledge. This is a model which Merleau-Ponty elsewhere rejects (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Morris 2012). Here he is talking instead about “our experience of social relationships”, the intersubjective world which he argues in fact precedes the kind of cognitive self-reflection reified by Descartes. The role which Merleau-Ponty identifies in this context for imaginative analogy and contrast is in the expansion of one’s own already intersubjective experience of social relations to include a successively wider field of such relations which, with increasing distance from our own immediate milieu are less immediately graspable for what they are. Hence the increasing need for reflection. But, he argues, until we have brought them back to our immediate experience, by analogy and contrast with the social relationships we have lived, we have not grasped them for what they are: precisely *social* relationships; that is, pertaining to interrelational subjects such as we are. More than this, to know others in this way as other subjects, as other intersubjective selves, is simultaneously to discover ourselves at the other end of their knowing. As Merleau-Ponty writes, in submitting our own experience of social relationships to

the imaginary variation which others propose to us, our experience takes on a new meaning, and we understand ourselves differently as a result. Furthermore, by admitting other people's experience as being that of selves on whom our own selves are a variation, their experience and ours become recognisable, not as something which divides us, but as something we have in common, as our common intersubjective context.

But this is not just how other societies become known to an ethnographer. It is something which applies to a greater or lesser extent in all instances where the easy flow of intersubjective activity is disturbed by moments of unfamiliarity. We all have to do it every day as we seek to interact with friends and strangers, to open up, to maintain or to expand a common context in which communication and cooperation are possible. It is what my Tsachi host, Dario, has to do on those occasions when what his brother-in-law says and does prove not to be transparent in the usual way, as much as what I have to do to make sense of what they say and do. Along these lines Zeitlyn argues,

The models of understanding that people have of their fellow actors is essentially an anthropological understanding albeit unformalized, often unstated and rarely comparative. If it works on the street why not in academe? The understanding I have of my fellow citizens is imperfect, incomplete (partial), *and* partial to my point of view but it works (more or less). It is adequate for my everyday life, and by achieving that adequacy it passed a kind of test and repeatedly so. The challenge for 21st-century anthropology, as I see it, is to abandon the requirements of completeness and certainty for what, after Strathern (1992a), I call merological anthropology. We should continue to attempt to make explicit the complexity and systematicity, the in-consistency, clarity and vagueness of everyday understandings. The accounts should be merological in that they recognize their own partialities; depending on the rhetoric used, such recognition could be described as *either* scientific or postmodern. Anthropological accounts are partial both in that they are incomplete and that they are biased.

(Zeitlyn 2009:214, his italics.)

Zeitlyn argues that this kind of concern with the "everyday adequacy of lay understanding" (p. 216), combined with an acknowledgement of the limited and partial nature of our knowledge, results in a "philosophically insubstantial but workaday anthropology" (*ibid.*). He writes,

In an alarmingly empirical fashion, we examine everyday behaviour and focus on the way that utterances in ordinary, everyday usage are taken to be meaningful. Most of the time most of us succeed in getting our meaning across. If we accept

this, and take it as our object of study, then we abandon the search for MEANING (as it were in capitals) [...]

(Zeitlyn 2009:216.)

It is this kind of workaday anthropology which I am attempting here: examining the way that lay understandings are employed to locate and deal with certain anomalous aspects of experience. It does nothing on its own to elucidate the ontological status of the phenomena described, but merely enables us to trace the ways in which they are talked about as recalcitrant, unready-to-hand, obstructive and how the disputes over meaning which they occasion are resolved. If the kinds of phenomena which I am dealing with in this thesis pose a problem to anthropologists, they also present an opportunity, since they pose similar difficulties to those who experience and report them. They are the bits of life which disturb the taken-for-granted flow of everyday activity and communication. They raise questions, introduce indeterminacy, confusion and uncertainty and, as we shall see, very often challenge the explanatory tools of the informant as much as those of the anthropologist. Faced with such unpredictable and recalcitrant phenomena, the anthropologist finds herself, just like her interlocutors, having to make the best guess at what is going on and how to deal with it.

Experience, events, and conversation analysis

The ethnography of subsequent chapters constitutes a narrative combining my own experience of fieldwork with the accounts given to me by my Tsachi interlocutors. Of these I have selected a handful of excerpts from my interviews for close transcription and a detailed analysis of the way in which people in particular instances presented and interpreted their own experiences in response to my questions about it. In adopting this methodology I have taken my inspiration from Wooffitt (1992), a sociologist who applies the methods of conversation analysis to the study of accounts of paranormal experiences related to him in interviews by people living in the UK. Wooffitt ignores the question of whether and to what extent these accounts reflect something that actually happened and instead analyses the ways in which the speakers construct their utterances. He identifies a number of different ways in which they construct them “defensively” in order to portray them as factual, and themselves as reliable witnesses, in a social context where they can

expect substantial scepticism from their interlocutors. Wooffitt's work is meticulous and fascinating and, as will be evident below, it has inspired much of my own analysis. However, in abandoning a concern with actual events, I would argue, he is only dealing with one aspect of conversation. While all sorts of different agendas and considerations shape the way that people talk to each other, the goal of communicating and acting collectively in response to "the world out there" remains an essential motive of verbal interaction. Although the relation may be complicated, such communication is always inextricably linked to a context of perceived events in the world, and it is only within this context that the various aims of the participants can make any sense at all. In fact, illuminating all the different constitutive elements of such interaction enhances, rather than diminishes, its communicative potential in general, and not least with regard to the reconstruction of actual events. Therefore, although I am taking an approach inspired by conversation analysis and particularly by Wooffitt's use of it, I am not concerned as he is with an analysis of the structure of conversation for its own sake, but as a means to a nuanced appreciation of how it both reflects and represents the experience of actual events. I must emphasise, however, that in talking about reconstructing actual events, I do not have in view the ontological status of events in themselves, but the way in which the recalcitrance of the world (Zeitlyn 2009) *as it is experienced* can be partially illuminated by examining the utterances which people produce in their efforts to contend with it. As Zeitlyn reminds us,

What is at issue is the recalcitrant world and how we inhabit it. If we stress the interestedness of all accounts we are in danger of losing sight of the central, causal nexus that we are trying to comprehend, and if sometimes the causality is unclear then that should not distract us from easy cases... The *Titanic* may have sunk because of commercial interests [...] But to accept all of these is not to reduce to *zero* the role of the iceberg.

(Zeitlyn 2009:220-21.)

Admittedly I am not dealing in this thesis with such easy cases as the sinking of ships, but nevertheless, as a small step in unpicking the complex causal nexus involved in people's beliefs about and experience of ghosts I am attempting to identify where the points of recalcitrance lie, the scope and constraints of the world as they are brought to our attention in those instances where we find it unready-to-hand. How these instances are located and dealt with, as I have already suggested, is

something which may be expected to differ between people, between societies, and over time, but it seems to me that it remains an open question as to precisely how much and in what ways. In the conversation analysis which forms part of my thesis I present an example of one kind of data which I think would be suited to a comparison of this kind. The next step would be to collect similar data from as wide a range of societies as possible, and this would allow us to assess the degree and manner in which such differences occur and thus to suggest where to look for the rest of the causal nexus involved.

However, such a comparative study is beyond the scope of the present thesis. Here I am concerned with the particular case presented by the Tsachila and how it fits in the broader context of lowland Amerindian ethnography. I must emphasise also that, unlike Tylor, I am not here proposing to trace the origins of anything (belief in spirits, religion or whatever it may be). The way in which people interact with and reflect upon the world cannot have the kind of origin Tylor suggests, since these are not simply matters of straightforward induction, developing as it were from an epistemological standing start. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty (along with many others) has pointed out, they inhere in a social matrix which always precedes and constitutes the individual and the terms of reference from which his knowing and doing unfolds (Merleau-Ponty 1964).¹ Nevertheless, this knowing and doing rely upon a certain degree of practical traction, the kind of ‘adequacy’ described by Zeitlyn (2009:215 see above), which allows everyday life and communication to continue in a more or less effective manner. It is this that we will have in view over the course of the following pages.

Amerindian Perspectivism

What I will suggest is that among the Tsachila this traction is maintained by a collection of largely inchoate associations found in everyday experience which when combined with the kinds of personal experiences mentioned above tend towards the

¹ For related points made from different philosophical perspectives see Midgely (2001) and Toren (1993). Rather than the term ‘social’ designating only a subset of human knowledge, Toren argues, “Human cognition is inherently social because human intentionality is predicated on inter-subjectivity, so we cannot make meaning in a way that is non-social.” (1993:467.)

sorts of accounts of the world which have recently been elaborated and systematised by a number of Brazilian anthropologists in the theory of perspectivism, which they propose as a general model of Amerindian cosmological thought (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2005; Vilaça 2002, 2005; Lima 1999). I say “tend towards” since they remain inchoate, which it may be noted is some way from the systematic formulations made by Viveiros de Castro and some of his colleagues. I will return to this point in a moment.

Let me first take the opportunity both to justify and to qualify my own use of perspectivist vocabulary. I employ it here, without the theoretical ambition of Viveiros de Castro, chiefly because the vocabulary it provides appears to me to be suited to the ethnography in one key respect. It side-steps a material/immaterial distinction which, as has been noted by a number of Amerindianist ethnographers, can be misleading in talking about spirits, souls etc. in this region.¹ It does this by giving theoretical weight to a variety of alternative distinctions — between appearance and behaviour, between appearance and bodily capacities and affects, between bodies as they appear from different perspectives, between the body as subject and the body as object, etc. — and at least some of these distinctions, though perhaps not all, seem to me far closer to the ethnographic data which I present here than the material/immaterial distinction which they replace. In the process they open up a more subtle, and I think ethnographically warranted, portrait of bodies, souls, spirits etc. as things which share a common physical substrate which is not passive or inert but a kind of proteiform matter, hovering between appearance and behaviour.

¹ Praet (2006:103-110) identifies the curious paradox of ethnographers using the vocabulary of “spirits” and “immaterial beings” when discussing phenomena which according to their descriptions are often talked about by their informants as physical entities. While some authors appear to be unaware of this contradiction, others, although using the words “spirit” and “soul” as a matter of convenience or as an heuristic device, have taken pains to show how the indigenous terms thus glossed differ from their European counterparts (e.g. Rivière 1994, 1997, Viveiros de Castro 1998; Vilaça 2005). One powerful example of the difference between Judeo-Christian notions of the spiritual (official ones at least) and those of an Amerindian society is given to us by Whitehead (2002). In his analysis of contemporary and colonial-era accounts of “devil assassins” (*kanaimà*) in the Guyana Highlands, he draws our attention to the difference between the colonists’ assumption that “the Devil has no body” and the indigenous insistence that devils can be knocked on the head with clubs (2002:51). Convenient as Judeo-Christian vocabulary may be, Praet and Fausto have recently pointed out how potentially misleading it is (Praet 2006:*ibid.*, Fausto 2007:92). Interestingly, Tylor in 1871 had already noted the peculiarity of the Western metaphysical notion of spirits as immaterial entities in contrast to the material spirits which he saw in vernacular accounts from all over the world (including the Western world) (Tylor 1871:37-41).

This is the kind of body which comes into view if we treat appearance and behaviour as two poles on a continuum, rather than two distinct qualities. What I mean by this becomes clearer when it is seen in comparison with the alternative approach recently developed by Praet under the rubric of “shape-shifting” (Praet 2005, 2006, 2009).

Praet on the Chachi, Shapes and Perspectives

The ethnography I present here has much in common with Praet’s account of the Chachi who live in the neighbouring province of Esmeraldas (see Map 1, facing page 5) downriver from the Tsachila and are culturally and linguistically closely related. As will be seen in certain respects my analyses are greatly indebted to those of Praet. He points out for example that the conventional ethnographic vocabulary of spirits tends to obscure the physicality of the phenomena associated with them. They are in various ways physical presences in the world, he argues (Praet 2006:108-109). Praet describes, for example, how the Chachi expressed a considerable degree of anxiety as to whether he himself was a spirit, until they were able to ascertain that he was not in the habit of eating people (Praet 2006:80-82). He also refers to numerous reports among the Chachi of having encountered various kinds of spirits or their traces in the forest and these form a central part of his analysis of Chachi fears associated with what he calls ‘shape-shifting’. For this reason Praet prefers to talk of monsters and ghosts in place of spirits and souls and I follow his lead in this respect. Such terminology, it may be noted, also coincides with that of the children who first introduced me to *oko* as the Tsafiki word for monsters.

However, while Praet’s thesis is specifically about understanding concrete instances of metamorphosis, what he calls shape-shifting, this is an issue which enters only tangentially into my own ethnography. In one instance his concept of ‘shapes’ and of ‘shape-shifting’ appears to offer a particularly apt description of the data I present in relation to the Tsachila. In general, however, in this thesis I offer what might be thought of as a phenomenological account of an inchoate perspectivism. In calling it inchoate I do not intend to imply any contrast with or criticism of the explicit and highly systematised accounts of perspectivism which have been developed by Viveiros de Castro, Lima, Vilaça and others. I am merely wishing to point out the ways in which certain suggestions of these more systematic accounts appear tacitly

or inchoately in aspects of experience among the Tsachila. This said, the question as to whether, in what ways, and to what degree these are enunciated and systematised in discourse and practice remains to be addressed. It may well be that the kinds of systematic synthetic accounts produced by Viveiros de Castro and his colleagues are ethnographically warranted, but this is something which must be demonstrated anew in each case. With regard to the Tsachila it has yet to be done, since neither my own research, nor that so far presented by Ventura, is sufficient on this point. With this caveat let me now explain why, with the one exception just mentioned, I prefer a perspectivist approach rather than the concept of shape-shifting developed by Praet.

Praet argues that the monsters and ghosts he writes about among the Chachi should not be thought of as beings which are ontologically distinct from humans. Rather they have different and opposing ‘shapes’ to humans, by which he means they are physical beings with a different moral and cultural conduct (Praet 2009:741). Hence the reason why he himself could initially be mistaken for one. Here, he argues, “The emphasis always lies on what one *does* rather than what one *is*” (*ibid.*). Thus what Praet describes as a proper human or Chachi ‘shape’ — one characterised by a tranquil life, industrious labour, strictly monogamous marriage, an ordinary (i.e. non-cannibalistic) diet which is well seasoned with salt, etc. — is something which can be inadvertently lost or purposefully cast off by way of a change in behaviour in favour of the shape of the dead (which he terms Ghosts) and of various kinds of non-humans (which he terms Monsters). It is the fear of inadvertently undergoing such shifts in shape, Praet argues, which underlies the many stories among the Chachi of encounters with Ghosts and Monsters in the forest or along rivers. In fact, he suggests that fear itself is conceived of by the Chachi as an instance of shape-shifting. Again, it is a process of shape-shifting, he argues, which the Chachi purposefully undergo temporarily at Wakes and Weddings when they hold parties involving an otherwise uncharacteristic use of alcohol and tobacco and adopt certain games and behaviours indicative of Ghosts (at Wakes) and of Monsters (at Weddings). In the first case, Praet argues, the aim is to ensure that the deceased thoroughly undergoes his own shift of shape into that of a Ghost and thereby leaves the living alone. In the case of Weddings, usually held at Easter and Christmas, the aim is to avert a cosmic catastrophe associated with the death of Jesus or with divine

judgement, by undergoing it as thoroughly as possible in the form of a generalised act of purposeful shape-shifting.

Although the situation I encountered among the Tsachila was in many respects very different from what Praet has reported of the Chachi, there were nonetheless some notable points of similarity. I did not find any evidence among the Tsachila of funeral games being played, although Karsten mentions them in his brief account from 1916/17 (1924:151-2). Again, I did not find weddings being given anything like the importance described by Praet among the Chachi. Nevertheless, despite all these differences, at every dance I attended, of which there were quite a number marking any occasion of significance from birthdays and Quinciñera parties¹ to Valentine's Day and Christmas, a definite change could be observed for which Praet's vocabulary of shape-shifting seems to be particularly apt. As I shall describe in Chapter III these parties involved the Tsachila, under the influence of copious amounts of alcohol, adopting the eating habits, music and social effusiveness characteristic of Mestizos on a night out in the town. We will see how, in this instance, the kind of shape-shifting described by Praet in specific ritual contexts among the Chachi can be implicitly identified among the Tsachila even in the most prosaic and everyday kinds of parties. An interpretation of these parties as instances of shape-shifting finds support in a number of myths, a selection of which will be discussed in Chapter IV, where we find it made explicit in stories about animals who attend Tsachi dances. Here the animals appear as humans and later as they get more and more intoxicated they lose their human appearance and regain their animal form. In this connection we will see how important behaviour and particularly eating habits are as an indication of identity. This in fact echoes a recurring theme in lowland South American ethnography of the importance of diet in marking, constituting and

¹ Following the custom of their Mestizo neighbours the Tsachila of Congoma have begun holding what are known across Hispanic America as Quinciñera parties. This is a special celebration marking a girl's fifteenth birthday and is explicitly presented as the moment at which she makes the transition from childhood to womanhood: she becomes a lady. I attended two such celebrations hosted by Tsachi households during my fieldwork. One of these involved no alcohol or dancing, because the family was Evangelical. The other, following the usual Mestizo pattern, involved the girl and a selection of young men and women about her age dancing a ceremonial waltz in formal attire: ball gowns and jackets and ties. Then there was a procession in which they presented the girl with presents. Her consort, a friend of the family a couple of years her senior, presented her with a garter and other accoutrements of 18th Century European romance. Her father made a speech in Spanish, she cut her birthday cake, and then the disco and drinking followed and continued until dawn. There were in excess of 500 guests, many of them the Mestizo friends and business associates of her father.

maintaining differences between species, between different human societies and between kin and non-kin (e.g. Gow 1991, Viveiros de Castro 1998, Vilaça 2002).

At this point let me highlight the ways in which I disagree with Praet and why I prefer a broadly perspectivist account. I think he goes too far in emphasising shape-shifting as a primarily behavioural or cultural transformation and downplaying its bodily aspects. It seems to me that although, as Rivière (1994) famously said of Amazonia, behaviour is often a better indication of identity than appearance, nevertheless the relationship between the two which is portrayed in Amerindian accounts of metamorphosis is an extremely close one. Although, in contrast to Praet, I found no evidence of such metamorphoses in the contemporary experience of the Tsachila (with the exception of the implicit shape-shifting involved in parties), it is a recurring theme of Tsachi myths as I have already mentioned, and these provide us with an opportunity to examine in detail the interplay between behaviour, appearance and bodily form. Since the focus of my thesis is specifically on ideas about the dead I have concentrated on certain myths relevant to this. These present us with an account of the dead as walking corpses who have climbed physically out of the grave and who attempt to return to their surviving kin. They exhibit signs of physical decomposition — rotting noses, armpits, teeth, knees etc. — but also what we might term instances of perceptual decay leading to behavioural changes — they no longer know how to wash themselves properly, they don't cut their fingernails, they mistake the moon for the sun, their own rotting flesh for salt, poisonous centipedes for fish, they inadvertently kill their living grandchildren. If we examine these accounts carefully, I will argue, they suggest that such instances of physical and perceptual decay by which the dead are gradually transformed are in fact simultaneous and mutually constitutive processes. Each perceptual and behavioural change exhibited by the dead is attended by a concomitant bodily degradation and at the same time the loss of the ability to care for themselves and to “think properly” as living humans do, is ultimately traceable to a gradual decomposition of the physical organ of the heart. This calls to mind the kind of observations made by Viveiros de Castro (1998), Vilaça (2005) and others to the effect that in Amerindian cosmologies there is no spiritual change which is not also a bodily transformation (e.g. Seeger et al. 1979, McCallum 1996, Conklin 1996, Turner 1995). It is precisely because behaviour and bodily appearance go hand in hand in this way that behavioural and cultural changes

(which often, it may be noted, involve the modification of appearance) are so readily conceivable in Amerindian societies in terms of bodily transformations (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998:481, 2005:60-61, Gow 2007, Grotti 2009).

This criticism of Praet's approach does not, I think, affect his central thesis. He argues that the relationship between humans and spirits should not be thought of in terms of a categorical distinction between different kinds of being, for example material as oppose to immaterial or visible as opposed to invisible. Rather, what we are dealing with is a distinction between different ways of behaving such that a human can "do" a spirit (in Praet's terms a Monster) by acting as one (2006:50-52, 66-68, 110, see also Praet 2009:741-742). The point I am making here is that the kinds of behavioural shifts he describes often involve concomitant modifications of appearance, and when seen in the context of myths depicting the metamorphoses of animals and the dead it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that behavioural shifts of this kind are thought to tend towards the horizon of the sorts of definitive bodily transformations there depicted. What I want to suggest is that the kinds of behavioural changes which Praet identifies as shape-shifting are so significant and so feared precisely because they are understood as part of a bodily change which, if taken far enough, will be resolved in a thoroughgoing transformation of every detail of behaviour and appearance. This is what I mean by a proteiform matter hovering between appearance and behaviour as its two poles.¹ But let us leave this point for now, which should become clearer in Chapter IV. Now let me introduce the Tsachila.

¹ It is perhaps something like this, though couched somewhat differently, that Viveiros de Castro has in mind in his characterisation of the body as a "bundle of affects". He writes, "Between the formal subjectivity of souls and substantial materiality of organisms there is an intermediate plane which is occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities and which is the origin of perspectives" (Viveiros de Castro 1998:478).

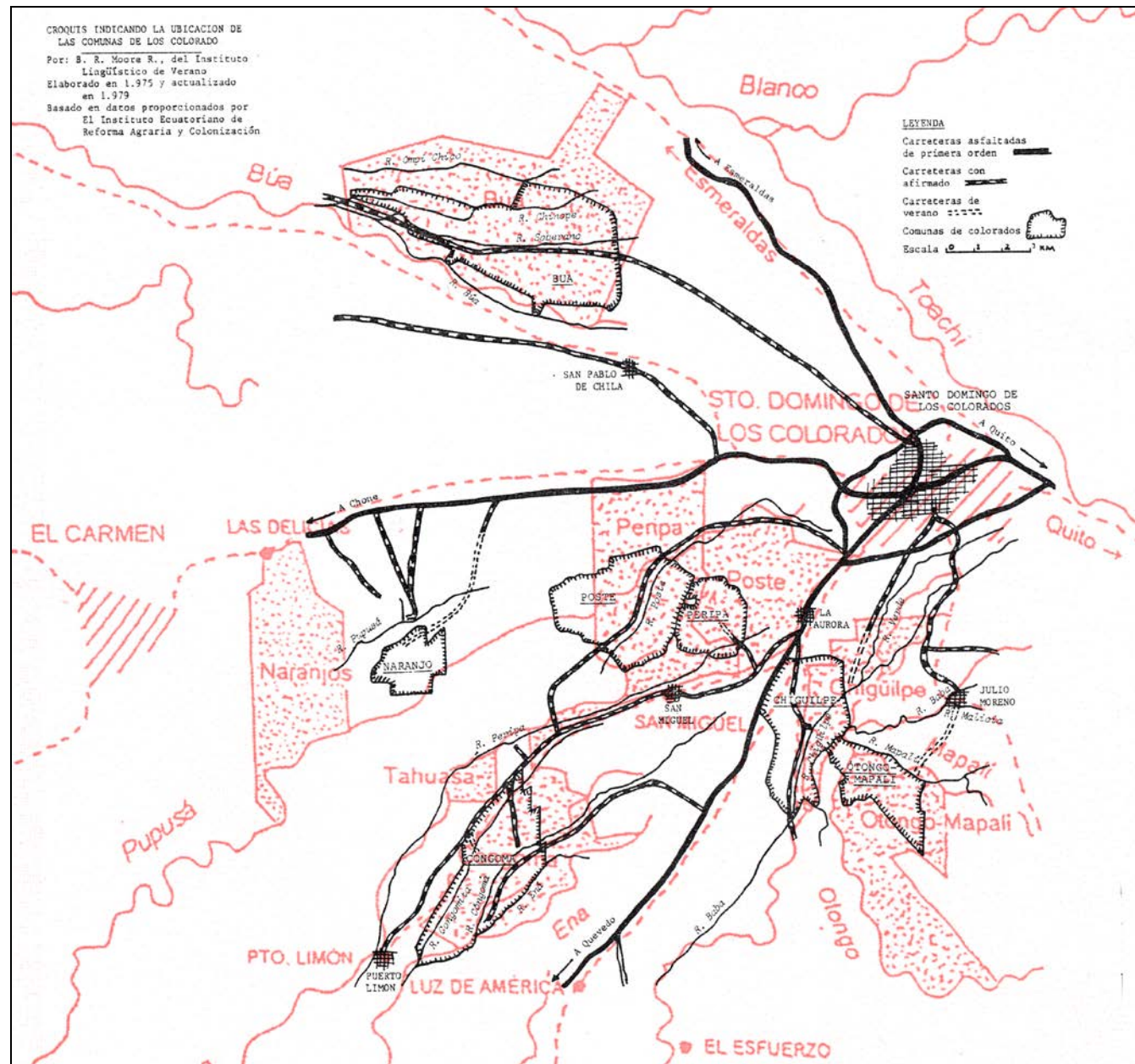
The Tsachila

The Tsachila have historically been referred to as ‘los indios colorados’, by dint of a striking habit of covering large portions of their body and hair with red and black paint. In the everyday lives of contemporary Tsachila only a vestige of this custom survives in the red achiote paste with which many older men still cover their hair. Since the 1990s the ethnonym Tsachila has replaced Colorado in academic publications and has now been adopted in all official discourse within Ecuador. However, the classic image of the Colorado, as an exotic painted Indian of the tropical forest and guardian of powerful shamanic knowledge, is currently enjoying something of a renaissance under its new name in the increasingly globalised and identity-driven arena of indigenous political activism. The Tsachila are currently estimated to number between 1,500 and 2,500 people divided between seven villages,¹ known by the Spanish term ‘Comuna’ (see Maps 3 and 4, opposite).² Estimates of their current territory vary between 8,000 and 9,000 hectares (Ventura 2012:43). They are organised under the *Gobernación de la Nacionalidad Tsachila*, an autochthonously elected governing body with its headquarters in Santo Domingo. Each ‘Comuna’ occupies a distinct area of communally owned territory at various distances to the west of this city which bears their name, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas (formerly Santo Domingo de los Colorados).

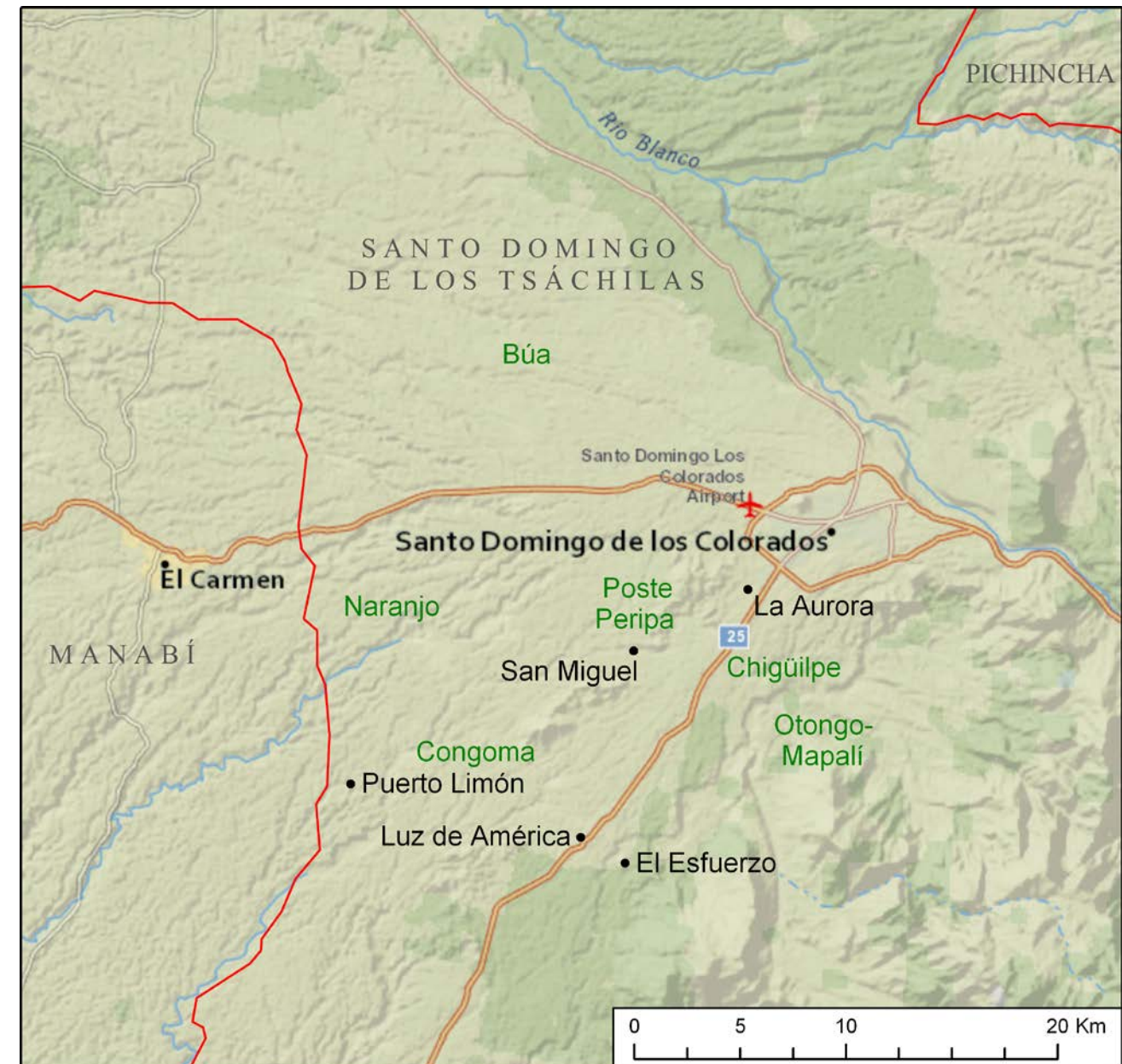
The land of the Comunas was granted to the Tsachila by the Ecuadorian state between 1954 and 1963 during the completion of a national road network which passed through Santo Domingo in order to link Quito with the major ports of the coast (Ventura 2000:33, see Map 1, facing page 5). Technically the land of the Comunas is owned in common by all the Tsachila. They can buy and sell this land among themselves. However, they are not legally permitted to sell it to non-Tsachila. Nevertheless, they do both sell and rent it out to their Mestizo neighbours, and colonisers also squat on those parts of Tsachi land which are not cultivated by them.

¹ An eighth community, named Filomena Aguavil and also known as Tahuasa (see Map 3), had too small a population legally to constitute a Comuna and it has since all but disappeared (Ventura 2000:34-35; 2012:43 n. 5)

² The figures for the total population of the Tsachila and for each Comuna are very unreliable. The same is the case for the total quantity of territory communally owned by the Tsachila and for the size and precise boundaries of each Comuna. For further details on this see Ventura (2000:33-37; 2012:42-44). Also see my comment on Map 3 (opposite) for a discussion of the discrepancies in these sources.



Map 3 (above) shows two different maps of the Tsachi Comunas, one superimposed on the other. Using GIS, Michael Athanson (Geospatial Data Specialist, Bodleian Library) spatially referenced the image shown in red onto the image shown in black. An affine transformation was applied to scale, shift and rotate the red image as a whole to obtain the best fit, using the locations of Puerto Limón, San Miguel and a couple of river confluences as control points. The black image shows the map published by Bruce Moore (1979:2) which, according to the key, is a sketch drawn by him in 1975 and updated in 1979 based on data provided by El Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización (IERAC). In red is the map included by Ventura in her thesis (2000:23) which she informs me (pers. comm. 17 Jan. 2013) was made by her based on the map published by IERAC in 1979, and cross-checked with maps of the individual Comunas from the IERAC Delegation to Santo Domingo, some of which were made in 1984. Since the foundation of the Comunas (1954 -1963) all of them have suffered ongoing invasions and loss of territory to colonists. More precise maps have been produced since then (Ventura pers. comm. 17 Jan. 2013), but I do not have them, and more up-to-date information is extremely difficult to obtain. Comparing the two maps it appears that Ventura's may reflect an older situation than Moore's (1979), since the Comunas are consistently smaller in the latter. Why this should be so is unclear since they are both based on data from 1979. There is reason to suppose that the original IERAC data itself may have been unreliable and it may also have been inconsistent. Naranjo, for example, originally included territory to the north of the river Pupusá, where Ventura locates it (pers. comm. 17 Jan. 13), but Moore shows Naranjo to the south of Pupusá. Tahuasa, now barely existent, is shown by Ventura, but not at all by Moore. Apart from this it may be noted that Peripa and Poste are shown in opposite locations by Moore and Ventura. This is a difference which I have so far been unable to clarify. It is clear that the mapping of Tsachi territory requires further work. However, even with a GPS on the ground it would be impossible to obtain accurate information since the limits of the Comunas are highly contested and the subject of legal disputes. The best I can offer here is presented in Map 4 (opposite), adapted from National Geographic, on which Michael Athanson has labelled the approximate locations of the Comunas in accordance with Map 3.



Map 4: Showing approximate locations of the Tsachi Comunas in accordance with Map 3 (adapted from National Geographic by Michael Athanson).

One Comuna, known as Tahuasa, has been all but lost in this way over the last twenty years. Furthermore, the definition of who counts as Tsachi is becoming increasingly problematic as more people marry outside the group, bringing non-Tsachila to live in the Comuna, or leaving it themselves to pursue work or study elsewhere.

In the wake of the construction of the road network, between 1964 and 1969, a wave of state-sponsored internal migration to Santo Domingo led to the influx of nearly 5,000 families and the cultivation of 150,000 more hectares of land dedicated to agricultural production for the national market (Ventura 2012:42). Over the course of the twentieth century the agricultural and commercial opportunities presented by Santo Domingo and its environs have attracted immigrants from diverse parts of Ecuador, both indigenous and Mestizo, and also from further afield including Germany, France, and most recently from Colombia. It is currently one of the fastest growing cities in Ecuador with an estimated population of 450,000 in 2010.¹

Over the last hundred years, as a result of territorial pressure and increasingly close contact with the national society, the Tsachila have moved from a tropical forest economy based on slash-and-burn cultivation, hunting, gathering and fishing, to one of small-scale plantation farming (Ventura 2000a:61). Today almost all the Tsachila make a living by growing cash-crops including plantains, cocoa, coffee, manioc, taro, chillipeppers, balsa wood, pineapples etc. These they sell to middle-men on their way to national and international markets. They raise chickens and occasionally also cattle and pigs largely for local and personal consumption. All but the poorest employ at least one or two labourers, sometimes several more, to help with clearing, planting and harvesting, which is mostly carried out with machetes. Some of the more well-off use petrol-powered trimmers as well which they purchase in Santo Domingo. Herbicide is usually applied using a portable water-tank with a hand pump, a piece of equipment which is also available in Santo Domingo and widely used among small-scale farmers in the region. The tank of herbicide is carried on the back like a rucksack and the pump operated by the right hand. Many of the labourers

¹ Website of the Municipal Government of Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas:
<http://www.santodomingo.gob.ec/index.php/laciudad/situacion> (consulted 19 Dec. 2012).

employed by the Tsachila are Mestizos, some are Chachi (Cayapa) and Afro-Ecuadorians from the neighbouring province of Esmeraldas (see Map 1, facing page 5) and some are young bachelors from other Tsachi families or Comunas. They are paid in cash by the day, provided with food and very often with lodging.

A number of Tsachila supplement their income by administering various kinds of traditional medicine to non-Tsachi clients (Ventura 2000a:61-62). The roads leading out of Santo Domingo towards the Comunas are spotted with billboards advertising the services of numerous Tsachi ‘curanderos’ and ‘vegetalistas’. They trade on a long-standing reputation enjoyed by the Tsachila for producing extremely powerful shamans some of whom historically have attained national and international fame. But there are others in the Comunas whose business is conducted far more discreetly and whose personal reputations alone are sufficient to win them a large clientele by word of mouth from as far afield as Quito and Guayaquil.

Many Tsachila are themselves well-travelled within Ecuador, having visited Quito, Esmeraldas or Guayaquil, for bureaucratic, business, or medical purposes, or simply on a group outing or family holiday. A handful of young men have spent time in Ecuador’s armed forces. Those who have been involved in indigenous politics, which includes a large number of Tsachila at one time or another in their lives, have often had the opportunity to travel farther afield within Ecuador and beyond on political and cultural exchange missions organised with other indigenous groups or NGOs. Some have visited the United States. A few have married Mestizos and one or two of these have emigrated with their spouses to the United States and to Spain, receiving occasional visits from their relatives back home in Ecuador. Over the last few years the Tsachila have become increasingly involved in local, provincial and national politics. In November 2007 the rapidly expanding city of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas with its surrounding conurbations was elevated from an adjunct of the Province of Pichincha to form a province in its own right, La Provincia de Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas. At that time every politician in this new Tsachi province took pains to assert some kind of indigeneity: “We are all Tsachila now” was one of the refrains of the 2009 provincial elections.

Since my own fieldwork, the presence of the Tsachila on the internet has also grown considerably, as both individually and with the help of various NGOs they have begun to avail themselves of the opportunities it affords for self-broadcasting. Over the last two decades they have become enthusiastic consumers of international popular media, to which they are connected through national radio and television and more recently by a cheap and abundant supply of pirate DVDs, freely available in Ecuador. Nowadays in the homes of most Tsachila a default background of Mexican telenovelas is punctuated by everything from Walt Disney to Chinese kung-fu thrillers, from Puerto Rican hip-hop to K-pop. To this riot of globalising popular culture the Tsachila are now adding their own contributions via Facebook and YouTube at an impressive rate.

Although the variety and reach of all these connections with the rest of the world has grown dramatically over the last fifty years, and the electronic media by which they are now driven is something entirely new, the Tsachila have long stood at the confluence of traditions. This is one of the reasons why their origins are so hard to trace. They are the descendents of a once numerous and diverse mosaic of indigenous societies which since pre-Colombian times connected the sierra with the coast in a complex series of trade relations. Montserrat Ventura, whose monograph constitutes the most comprehensive ethnography of the Tsachila to date, describes them in the title as a people “at the crossroads” (2000, 2012). As she observes in her introduction they conform to few of the typologies of traditional ethnography (2000:17). They are neither highland nor lowland Amerindians, but are geographically and culturally poised between the two. Their history appears to be characterised neither by direct colonial subjugation nor by resistance or isolation, and their most distinctive traditions betray the marks of diverse long-standing interethnic contacts. For example, what today constitutes traditional Tsachi music centres on the marimba and drums which appear to be of African origin through the Afro-Ecuadorians of Esmeraldas; Tsachi shamans make use of techniques typical of the coastal lowlands, the highlands and Amazonia; much of their traditional medicine employs a hot/cold distinction which some authors have suggested is of

Andean or even Spanish origin;¹ and the single biggest event of the Tsachi calendar, a communal feast with competitive games, takes its date from the Catholic celebration of Easter.

However, the historical processes lying behind the distinctive features of contemporary Tsachi tradition remain obscure. One does not have to go back very far before they fade from view. Ventura's research shows that references to the Colorados of Santo Domingo begin to appear in the colonial record from the middle of the 18th century (Ventura 2000:46-47). About 1750 they are marked on a map which Pedro Vicente Maldonado produced as part of his ultimately frustrated efforts to build a road linking Quito with the coast (*ibid.*, see also Salomon 1997:99-113, see Map 5, opposite).

In 1825, William Stevenson, a British traveller and long-term resident in South America, wrote of having visited Santo Domingo de los Colorados in 1820 on his way from Ibarra to Esmeraldas. He describes the place as follows:

The settlement or reduction of the Colorados is merely the house of the cura, and a small church ; the indians live dispersed in different parts of the surrounding woods, generally on the banks of the small rivers, and only appear on the Sundays and holidays at mass.

(Stevenson 1825:431-432.)

From Stevenson we learn that the curacy of Santo Domingo, which included the 'semi parroquias' of San Miguel and Cocaniguas (see Map 5, opposite), contained about three thousand Indians, and that they "are called *colorados* from the quantity of achiote with which their bodies are besmeared" (p. 432, his italics). However, his description of their appearance in other respects differs markedly from the traditional dress now claimed by contemporary Tsachila. This suggests a certain amount of caution in drawing too direct a connection between the two. On the one hand these Colorados may not be the ancestors of the Tsachila at all, in which case they might simply give us an indication of a certain diversity of groups at that time and in that region who were known as Colorados. On the other hand the Tsachila's traditional

¹ Ventura discusses the various hypotheses put forward in this regard, but she argues that a more in-depth study is needed before any conclusion can be reached (2012:227-228).



Map 5: Detail from *Carta de la provincia de Quito y sus adyacentes* por Don Pedro Maldonado, c.1750 (from Salomon 1986:11, see also Ventura 2000:46). It shows both *Colorados de Angamarca* and *Colorados de Santo Domingo*. One can just make out that Angamarca and Santo Domingo themselves are both marked with crosses indicating an ecclesiastical presence.

dress, over a period of a hundred years, may have undergone just such a transformation.

A considerable amount of uncertainty surrounds even the longevity of the now characteristic use of achiote among the ancestors of the contemporary Tsachila. Some Tsachila maintain that the practice of permanently covering the hair with achiote, for which they are now famous, was introduced by one of the most powerful shamans of recent times at the end the 19th century as a defence against an epidemic of dysentery. Ventura indicates that this is a plausible account both historically and in terms of the significance of achiote in shamanic curing rites among the Tsachila. She notes, also, that documentary sources prior to the 20th century, while they mention body paint, are highly equivocal as regards any further details of the appearance of those to whom they refer as Colorados (see Ventura 2012:72, n. 15).

We are presented, then, both with the difficulty of identifying a cultural lineage by such cursory criteria, and with the spurious relevance of doing so. What kind of continuity do we hope to identify in this way if habits of clothing and personal adornment might change so quickly? We know that they can, and furthermore that under the right circumstances so can all sorts of customary behaviour, methods of subsistence and ways of thinking. None of these things amounts to the sort of essential germ of 'Tsachiness' which must be presupposed by a search for their ancestors. We need to be a little careful then, about attempts at historical reconstruction (see Gow 2001:7-8).

Following the ethnohistorical work of Frank Salomon, Ventura argues that the contemporary Tsachila are the product of a process of colonial ethnogenesis involving several of the indigenous groups west of Quito who were known to the Spanish as Yumbos, and another referred to as Colorados, who appear to have moved north from Angamarca (what is now called Angamarca la Vieja, west of Latacunga) over the course of the seventeenth century (Ventura 2012:45-47, 1995:441-42, Salomon 1997:11-13, see Map 5, opposite page 29). Using a wide variety of archival materials Ventura constructs a plausible account of how this process might have occurred. Yet, given the sparseness of information and the multiple possibilities for ambiguity, it must remain fairly speculative. Until the end

of the nineteenth century none of the sources gives enough detail to allow any kind of meaningful identification of this or that group of “achiote besmeared indians” with the Tsachila of today.

Despite this necessary caution, what the archival record shows very clearly are certain long-standing characteristics which were common to the groups in Ecuador’s western piedmont over the colonial period and many of these are also present in the oral history of the contemporary Tsachila. So, for example, a pattern of living in dispersed settlements along the banks of small rivers, and of cultivating certain crops, particularly capsicum pepper, for the purposes of trade between coast and sierra; a combination of long-standing commercial and tributary relationships linking them to the indigenous and imperial economies of the sierra; sustained and sometimes volatile interactions with the Afro-Ecuadorians of Esmeraldas, and significant though less frequent traffic with the societies of Amazonia (Salomon 1986, 1997; Ventura 1995, 2000).

Another feature well attested in the colonial record, particularly in connection with the groups known as Colorados, is a long history of Catholic influence, the roots of which date back to a Jesuit mission founded in Angamarca at the end of the sixteenth century (Ventura 1995:441-42). This history appears to have been characterised on the one hand by considerable enthusiasm among the Colorados for the services of the priests, and on the other by long periods during which these services were very seldom supplied as a consequence of the Colorados’ successive retreats into the forest to avoid exploitative encomenderos¹ (Salomon 1997). So for example, while the passage cited earlier from the travels of Stevenson describes a priest permanently stationed in Santo Domingo, and celebrating Mass every Sunday, both older and more recent sources suggest that the region was served much more infrequently (see Salomon 1997:109-110). Rivet (1905), for example, writes that the Colorados were visited only once or twice a year, or even once every three years, by priests who

¹ An ‘encomendero’ was someone entrusted with an ‘encomienda’ This was a title of trusteeship over a specific sector of native population. It was granted by the Spanish imperial authorities sometimes to an individual, sometimes to a convent or a religious order, and it conferred the often lucrative privilege of collecting tribute from the natives and the responsibility of converting them to Catholicism (Salomon 1986:238).

were intermittently dispatched from Quito for the purpose.¹ According to him, this dearth of an ecclesiastical presence had much more to do with the reluctance of priests to minister in such an inaccessible and unprofitable location than with any hostile attitude on the part of the Colorados. He describes them as readily incurring themselves on the occasions of the priest's visits in order to secure his services for baptisms, weddings and Masses for the dead, and he criticises the charges made by the priests for these (pp. 204-205).²

Summary of historical events and dates (receding from the present)	
<i>Formation of the new Province of Santo Domingo de los Tsachilas</i> ³	2007
<i>Completion of National road network linking Santo Domingo with Quito, Esmeraldas, Portoviejo, Quevedo and Guayaquil</i> ⁴	1962 - 1965
<i>Ecuadorian Government mandates the creation of the Tsachi Comunas</i> ⁵	1954 - 1963
<i>Rivet visits two groups of Colorado near Santo Domingo and notes the absence of state or ecclesiastical presence (Rivet 1905). He compiles the first word-list of Tsafiki (Beuchat & Rivet 1907, 1910).</i>	1903
<i>Stevenson visits Santo Domingo and describes the Indians in the parroquias of Santo Domingo, San Miguel and Cocaniguas as "Colorados" although their dress is different to the traditional dress of contemporary Tsachila. Steveneson reports that these Indians supported a permanent priest and chapel in Santo Domingo (Stevenson 1825)</i>	1820
<i>Santo Domingo de los Colorados marked on map of coastal plain made by Pedro Vicente Maldonado (see Map 5, facing page 29)</i>	1750
<i>Foundation of the Jesuit reduction of Angamarca de los Colorados (at the site of present-day Angamarca la Vieja)</i> ⁶	1593

¹ Ventura, having consulted the *Archivo Parroquial* of Santo Domingo and the *Libro de Bautismos, 1906-1933*, reports even rarer visits by priests, every five or ten years (Ventura 2000b:214).

² A similar enthusiasm for Masses for the dead has been reported, both historically and very recently, by ethnographers of the Chachi (Praet 2006:201).

³ Ventura (2012:42)

⁴ Ventura (2012:42)

⁵ Ventura (2012:42-43)

⁶ Ventura (1995:441-42)

The work of Paul Rivet to which I have just referred is the first explicitly ethnographic account of the Colorados, and it is the first in which the traditions of the contemporary Tsachila are clearly visible. The renowned French ethnologist and medic made a brief visit to their territory in August 1903 (Rivet 1905). He was followed over the course of the twentieth century by a number of others, including Rafael Karsten (1924), Wolfgang Von Hagen (1939), Antonio Santiana (1951), Alfredo Costales Samaniego (1956), and Bruce Moore (1979).¹ From these authors it appears that prior to the founding of the Comunas the Tsachila consisted of a population of a few hundred individuals. They lived in highly dispersed settlements of single houses or groups of houses. Each house or homestead was largely autonomous, typically consisting of a single extended family cultivating its own fields at some distance away in the forest. Karsten and Von Hagen talk of a loose degree of co-ordination between Colorado households divided regionally between two or three powerful shamans in a manner similar to that found among the Shuar. Rivet, on the other hand, reports that the Colorados elected a Governor from among themselves who was responsible for the maintenance of morality, the settling of disputes and officiating at civil marriages pending the visits of the priest (Rivet 1905:204).

Despite the institutionalisation of a political system imposed by the state in the 1970s and 80s (Ventura 2000a:62), and the dramatic reduction of their territory, the Tsachila continue to live in highly autonomous households. They are generally virilocal and when couples marry they usually live in the house of the husband's parents until after the birth of their first and sometimes second child at which point, if funds allow, they construct their own house nearby (Ventura 2012:96). Between these household groups, as we shall see in Chapter III, the Tsachila continue to maintain as much distance as is possible over a limited area with a growing population. Generally each adult couple farms their own fields located at some distance from their house in various parts of the Comuna. The amount of land owned

¹ In addition to these there is a short ethnography by Guillermo Robalino (1989) entitled *La Verdadera Gente* and a collection of myths published by Robert Mix (1982), both of which I have unfortunately been unable to obtain, and two compilations of myths published in 1982 and 1985 respectively by the Museos Banco Central del Ecuador in collaboration with Tsachi narrators, translators and editors (Calazacón, Orazona et al. 1982; Calazacón et al. 1985).

in this way varies considerably and this has to do in part with the way that land is inherited, being divided between all one's children, male and female, so that large families bequeath small farms. This is a consequence of the land titles introduced by the state and would not have been a factor when the Tsachila practiced swidden agriculture over an abundant territory. At that time fields were temporary and moveable as, to a lesser extent, were houses. As a result of Tsachi population growth the amount of land available per family is gradually decreasing. Ventura reports that the amount of land currently exploited by each family ranges between 5 and more than 50 hectares, the average being 20 hectares (Ventura 2012:44).

In common with many lowland South American societies before sedentarisation, the Tsachila would typically abandon a house upon the death of one of its principal members and construct a new one at a considerable distance away. Rivet (1905:202-03), Karsten (1924:151) and Moore (1979:45) all refer to this, but only Rivet writes of burial occurring in the house itself. Karsten reports that the dead were buried in the forest. At some point between 1924 and 1956, when the Ecuadorian ethnologist Alfredo Costales Samaniego visited them, the Tsachila began burying their dead in a cemetery in San Miguel which Costales describes in detail (1956:79-81).¹ Today the Tsachila bury their dead in a number of local cemeteries, and they no longer abandon the houses of the deceased except sometimes temporarily in response to specific disturbances associated with their *oko* (or ghost). We will examine something of the significance of this change in mortuary practices in Chapter V. What is clear from all the descriptions given of these practices over the course of the last century is that they combine a concern to dispatch the dead definitively from the orbit of the living with various apparently long-standing Catholic elements, and in chapter V we will also see some of the ways in which this combination works out in practice.

In the second half of the twentieth century various Evangelical missionaries established themselves among the Tsachila. One of the earliest of these was the

¹ I have been unable as yet to ascertain the age of the Tsachi cemetery at San Miguel. Some of my enquiries have suggested that San Miguel was the place where the Tsachila used to hold their annual festival at Easter (it now rotates among the Comunas), presumably coinciding with the annual visit of a priest, and that for this reason they decided to locate a cemetery there, perhaps as many as 200 years ago. I have some oral testimony from the Tsachila to this effect, but it is not clear how this fits with the reports of Rivet and Karsten in which no mention of the cemetery is made. It is quite possible that some of the Tsachila were using it long before it was adopted more generally and this could account for the discrepancy, but more research is needed to clarify this.

missionary linguist Bruce Moore (referred to above), of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, who lived among the Tsachila from the end of the 1940s until the end of the 1980s and was actively involved in the formation of Congoma as a Comuna. He became highly proficient in Tsafiki and taught a number of the young men of the Comuna to read and write the language, and with their help produced a Tsafiki Bible. There were other Evangelical missionaries also based in Congoma, Bua and Naranjo until the end of the 1980s. One of these, a friend of mine, gave me my introduction to the Tsachila and from her I learnt that at the height of Evangelical influence from 1980 to 1987 there were between 120 and 130 Tsachila who regularly attended Evangelical services. Of these around 80 came from Congoma and could be accounted for by a few key extended families. Subsequently, however, this attendance declined and at the time of my fieldwork in 2008 only a handful of people from Congoma continued to practice. Ten years previous to my visit a group of Seventh Day Adventists, another sect of Evangelical Christianity, arrived in the area and established a church in the Mestizo village along the road from Congoma and one in Congoma itself, but they have so far had very little impact in the Comuna. Most people are at least nominally Catholic, although the extent to which they engage in Catholic devotions is highly variable. There is a Catholic Chapel in Congoma, but during my fieldwork, to my knowledge, it was only used at Christmas. In the lead-up to Christmas a series of nine prayer meetings known as Novena services were organised in the houses of the most active Catholics in the village. I was able to attend one of these and counted about forty people present from perhaps seven or eight families. However, certain Catholic practices as we will see have become so institutionalised that they are part of a Tsachi tradition which to some extent includes everyone regardless of any explicit religious affiliation. Such is the case, as we will see in Chapter V, with respect to the annual celebration of All Soul's Day, known across Hispanic America as the Day of the Dead.

Ventura on the Tsachila

Ventura's monograph (2000, 2009, 2012), as I have already mentioned, constitutes the fullest account of the Tsachila to date. She gives an overview of all the key elements of Tsachi society, based on detailed archival research and long periods of fieldwork conducted between 1991 and 1997 (Ventura 2012:22). Her study is historically and linguistically informed to a degree to which I unfortunately cannot aspire in this present study, based as it is on a much shorter period of fieldwork. I have not attempted to repeat here what she has already done far better than I would have been able. In my own study I have set out only to add some detail and indicate some preliminary conclusions on the very specific subject of how people experience and encounter *oko*. In so doing I have relied heavily on Ventura's monograph for contextual data throughout. Here I will give a summary of some of the relevant points of her work by way of introduction.

Ventura's principal concern is to outline the constituent features of the Tsachila's collective identity and to account for its persistence in the face of the various exterior pressures brought to bear by Spanish and Ecuadorian colonisation. Almost every ethnographer preceding Ventura had confidently predicted the imminent demise of the Tsachila as a distinctive society. At the beginning of the last century, in view of their small numbers, the rapidly increasing encroachments of Ecuadorian colonisation and the increasingly close dealings with the national society which this brought with it, such a prognosis was all too easily made. However, the reverse has in fact proved to be the case. The population of the Tsachila has grown over the last hundred years from a few hundred at the beginning of the 20th century to current estimates ranging between 1,500 and 2,500 (Ventura 2012:44).¹ Although many changes have occurred the Tsachila remain, as Ventura demonstrates, a highly distinctive society.

¹ The various figures concerning the demographic history of the Tsachila, including their current population are contradictory, incomplete and unreliable. I refer the reader to Ventura (2012:43-44) for a more detailed discussion of the figures. Nevertheless Ventura's assessment is that the population of the Tsachila has grown considerably since the foundation of the Comunas, though it is impossible to say precisely by how much. Ventura indicates elsewhere that the birth rate among the Tsachila has decreased (2012:82). It seems safe to assume that the mortality rate has also decreased and that this would account for the increase in population, but I do not have any figures to substantiate this.

However, they are not an easy people to write about anthropologically. Although few in number, they display an often bewildering diversity of practice and opinion. Ventura describes Tsachi society as displaying an “extreme internal diversity” (2000a) and being “composed of heteroclite, sometimes contradictory elements”¹ (2009:25; 2012:33). She argues that this heterogeneity is not attributable merely to varying degrees of acculturation, for example between the different Comunas or from one generation to the next. Rather, it reflects, on the one hand, a history and a cultural logic constituted by interactions with diverse exterior influences and on the other an affirmation of individual personalities and points of view which is a constant of Tsachi thought (2012:30-33). She writes:

The Tsachila are not simply a conglomeration of generic beings that act according to norms inscribed in a supposed collective unconscious. Individuals are very present. Not only those who derive from preeminent social positions, like the shamans, the leaders, or those who exert a function within the community in relation with the exterior. Given the size of this society, one could go through the biography of all its members and there discover that all the Tsachila, at least the men, are endowed with an entirely singular social function.

(My translation, Ventura 2012:30.)²

Despite this internal diversity, however, they share a number of common reference points (see also Ventura 2012:165) which distinguish them as a group from their Mestizo neighbours. Ventura reports:

[...] all of the Tsachila to whom I posed the question defined their ethnic identity in the first place by their appearance, followed by their language and their alimentary practices, among which the essential characteristics were the habit of sitting on the floor to eat and the consumption of *ano ila* (mashed plantain).

(My translation, Ventura 2012:76-77.)³

¹ “[...] une société composée d’éléments heteroclites, voire contradictoires.” (Ventura 2009:25)

² Ventura (2012:30):

Los Tsachila no son solamente un conglomerado de seres genéricos que actúan según normas inscritas en un supuesto inconsciente colectivo. Las individualidades están muy presentes. No sólo las que se derivan de posiciones sociales preeminentes, como los chamanes, los líderes, o los que ejercen una función en el seno de la comunidad en relación con el exterior. Dado el tamaño de esta sociedad, se podría recorrer la biografía de todos sus miembros y descubrir en ella que todo Tsachila, al menos los hombres, está dotado de una función social completamente singular.

³ Ventura 2012:76-77):

De hecho, la totalidad de los Tsachila a los que planteé la cuestión, definía su identidad étnica en primer lugar por su apariencia, seguida por la lengua y la prácticas alimentarias, entre las cuales los rasgos esenciales eran comer en el suelo y consumir *ano ila* (el plátano molido).

It is important to note, as Ventura points out, that the characteristics of appearance which the Tsachila typically identify in this regard are not the sort of phenotypic criteria which were once the stock-in-trade of anthropology, but instead a matter of clothing and adornment (Ventura 2012:74, 77). From Ventura's analysis we can conclude that they are aspects of appearance which are susceptible to a certain amount of intentional alteration and thus indicative of the manner and degree of one's socialisation rather than of a given biological lineage. Thus, the most distinctive feature of Tsachi appearance in the opinion of Ventura's informants was the traditional use of *achiote* and they identified Mestizos with the wearing of trousers. These marks of differentiation are increasingly more theoretical than actual as Tsachi men now routinely wear trousers and many no longer apply *achiote* to their hair except on special occasions. Thirty years ago, however, the adoption of Mestizo styles of clothing was a matter of bitter controversy among the Tsachila (Moore 1979:21-23).

The importance of clothing can also be seen in the examples Ventura cites of contemporary marriages between Tsachila and non-Tsachila. These are still relatively few in number and the subject of interminable discussions in communal assemblies. The objections raised centre upon the ownership of land and its inheritance, and on fears that women will be treated badly by non-Tsachi husbands and that children will be badly brought-up by non-Tsachi mothers (Ventura 2012:83-84). Nevertheless, Ventura indicates that the learning of *Tsafiki* and the wearing of traditional skirts (*tunan*) by women are considered to be effective means of integration (*ibid*:71). This said, most Mestizo women who are married to Tsachi men refuse to wear the *tunan*, and many of the younger Tsachi women rarely do so either, preferring jeans. Furthermore bilingualism is an increasingly quotidian aspect of life even in the households of Tsachi couples, thanks to their employment of Spanish-speaking labourers and to the notionally bilingual schools in each Comuna where their children are educated primarily in Spanish (Ventura 2012:61, 84).

However, while change is occurring in these other areas, alimentary habits remain a constant common feature by which the Tsachila are united. Even the youth, writes

Ventura, “cannot contemplate many meals in a row without the presence of the Tsachi dish *par excellence*, mashed plantain” (p. 84).¹ During my own fieldwork this dish was similarly ubiquitous. It consists of boiled green plantains which are mashed and rolled into bars using a wooden rolling-pin and board on the floor. The bars thus produced are called *ano ila* and they are prepared as required over the course of most meals as a staple accompaniment to whatever else is being served. This is a job exclusively performed by women and the ability to do it well is considered one of the necessary qualities of a good wife (*ibid*:84). Non-Tsachi women married to Tsachi men, even if they do not conform in other ways, find themselves nonetheless obliged at least to understand Tsafiki and on a daily basis provide their families with *ano ila* (*ibid*:84).

The importance of clothing and of food in constituting group identities is made explicit in the stories passed down among the Tsachila concerning animals and other creatures which are said to populate the cosmos. A selection of these stories will be discussed in Chapter IV in so far as they illuminate people’s attitudes towards the dead and what separates them from the living. Here bodily transformations between species and between the living and the dead are connected with eating habits, appearance and the putting on and off of clothing in a way which is powerfully suggestive of the kind of perspectivist formulations made so frequently now with respect to Amazonian societies, and Ventura repeatedly alludes to this (Ventura 2012:85, 123, 165). Seen against the background of these stories the quotidian dealings of the Tsachila with their neighbours (who, for the purposes of this thesis, are Mestizos and *oko*) take on a similar perspectivist hue. However, I am cautious about pushing this too far, for while it is implicit in many respects as I shall suggest in later chapters, it lacks the systematicity which Viveiros de Castro in particular has attempted to draw from similar ethnographic data in Amazonia. I will return to this point in a moment.

Beyond the more visible marks of their collective identity Ventura describes the features of what she calls a characteristic ethos by which the Tsachila are united

¹ My own translation from Ventura 2012:84:

Incluso la juventud tsachila no puede concebir muchas comidas seguidas sin la presencia del plato tsachila por excelencia, el plátano molido, que preparan las mujeres.

(Ventura 2012:32, 167). Central to her analysis in this regard are a series of conventional behaviours by which the Tsachila avoid any possibility of open conflict both among themselves and with their non-Tsachi neighbours:

In general terms, the life of the Tsachila unfolds in an extremely pacific manner. The traditional dispersion of the habit, far from encouraging antagonisms, has favoured moving away each time that a social conflict erupts. [...The Tsachila] deploy many linguistic and behavioural mechanisms to reduce any possibility of violence in everyday life, from the avoidance of eye-contact and the sobriety of greetings, to discreet disappearance when a fight threatens to erupt.

(Ventura 2012:78, see also *ibid*:166.)¹

Ventura's ethnography repeatedly shows how the Tsachila's dealings with one another and with outsiders are permeated by a kind of extreme discretion, and with reference to the archives she suggests that the same strategies of silence and disappearance also characterised their ancestors' responses to the pressures of colonialism, which they met with a calculated combination of engagement and evasion. She proposes this both as being one of the basic elements by which they are constituted as a group and a crucial reason for the persistence of their collective identity (*ibid*:166-167). The difference which this characteristic discretion makes, and the distance which it interposes (often quite literally) between the Tsachila and their Mestizo neighbours was something which powerfully impressed me during my own fieldwork and it will be a recurring theme of Chapter III. Ventura talks of it as a kind of pacifism "guiding every cultural practice" with the one exception of shamanism (p. 166) and indeed it appears to be the core of what might be called a Tsachi style of sociability, in marked contrast to the more florid temper of the Mestizo equivalent. If I understand Ventura correctly she argues that it is this which maintains the cohesion of this otherwise highly diverse society, and which continues to distinguish them from their neighbours. My own experience in the field certainly supports this argument. It seemed to me that it was the recognition of this common habitus of discretion, a common appreciation of what makes for a tranquil life (see

¹ My own translation from Ventura 2012:78:

En líneas generales, la vida de los Tsachila se desarrolla de una forma extremadamente pacífica. La tradicional dispersión del hábitat, lejos de suscitar antagonismos, ha favorecido la mudanza cada vez que estallaba un conflicto social. Como veremos más adelante, se despliegan muchos mecanismos lingüísticos y comportamentales para alejar toda posibilidad de iniciativa violenta en la vida cotidiana, desde la evitación de la mirada y la sobriedad de los saludos, hasta la desaparición discreta cuando amenaza estallar una pelea.

Chapter III below), which gave to the other more visible elements of Tsachi identity much of their affective import.

Specificity of knowledge and grammatical features of Tsafiki

Among the Tsachila one of the correlates of this characteristic discretion, as well as geographic dispersion, is a high degree of personal autonomy together with the kind of heterogeneity of practice and opinion to which we have already referred. The extreme particularity of knowledge and practice among the Tsachila is reflected in two key aspects of their language. Thanks to the pioneering work of the linguist Connie Dickinson it has been shown that Tsafiki “exhibits a complex pattern of both evidentiality and mirativity” (Dickinson 1999:29). What this entails is that every proposition in Tsafiki, using a system of obligatory suffixes, encodes both the degree to which the speaker is a participant in the event being communicated (evidentiality) and whether or not it is congruent with her expectations (mirativity). These two systems are in fact closely related and the relationship can be thought of in terms of distancing:

An inferential evidential marker indicates physical distancing from the event — the speaker did not see it. A mirative marker indicates psychological distancing — the speaker did not anticipate the event or state.

(Dickinson 1999:29.)

The evidential system in Tsafiki has a strong mirative dimension which we will return to in a moment. There are, however, two specifically mirative suffixes which occur only when the speaker may be regarded as a primary participant in the event being related: one marks the event or state as congruent with the speaker’s expectations and the other as non-congruent (i.e. unanticipated). The meaning they convey varies considerably depending on the verbs with which they are used. They can mark states or events as anticipated or unanticipated, likely or unlikely; they can mark actions as intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious; they can indicate ignorance and even irony (Dickinson 1999).

The evidential system in Tsafiki distinguishes three different types of information: that obtained through direct sensory experience, that obtained by inference from physical evidence, and that which is deduced from the speaker’s general knowledge

(Dickinson 1999:37). To this is added a hearsay marker which can be used in conjunction with any of the other three evidentials thus indicating both the number of informants involved and the type of information which was available to the original informant. This marker can be repeated to indicate up to three people between the speaker and the original event, and if more than three people are involved the plural form is used (Dickinson 1999:38). Ventura points out that this evidential system does not carry the kinds of connotations that would be associated with indirect reporting of speech in Spanish, French or English where one often uses this register to suggest the unreliability of information (Ventura 2012:153). Rather, it simply identifies the source of information, and in fact, someone can be accused of lying if the evidential they use is inappropriate (*ibid*:153; Dickinson 1999:39).

However, the direct evidential does not always indicate that the person using it has actually seen or participated physically in the event related (Dickinson 1999:38). Dickinson gives the example of a man who reported the place of his own birth using the direct evidential, even though he could not remember it himself, because having asked his mother he said he now knew this information very well. In this instance the evidential is being used to mark what is essentially a mirative distinction concerning the degree to which the information is integrated with the speaker's knowledge (*ibid*:38-39). Similarly a woman can report the activities of her husband using the direct evidential even though she did not witness them herself. If, in this situation, she does not in fact use the direct evidential this indicates that he did not discuss his plans with her or that she is not in agreement with him. Here again an evidential is used to make a mirative distinction. Her invocation of a physical distance from the event amounts to a psychological distancing (Dickinson 1999:38-39). On the other hand, speakers who have directly witnessed an event can nonetheless report it using the inferential evidential, in which case the statement would communicate a sense of surprise. Thus we can see how the evidential system indicates not simply the speaker's degree of physical participation in events, but the degree of their social and psychological participation as well (Dickinson 1999:41).

Ventura has observed the way in which the use of the evidential system coincides with household membership. Thus, not only is the direct evidential used by spouses to report each other's activities, it can also be used in a similar way when reporting

the activities of anyone who is a permanent resident of the same household as oneself, and this is the case whether or not there is an additional kin-relationship involved (Ventura 2012:154). The household, Ventura argues, may be considered the basic “unit of participation” of Tsachi society (*ibid*:151-155). Such a characterisation is suggested in other ways too, for example, with respect to prohibitions of incest which include all but the most transient members of a household even in the absence of genealogical relationships (*ibid*:151). A similar logic may be noted in the practice of shamans who are prohibited from treating members of their own household, but are nonetheless able to treat their own kin who live in separate households (*ibid*:151-152). This leads Ventura to suggest that “the household is a more pertinent unit of participation than kinship” (p. 154). She emphasises that this is a working hypothesis requiring further investigation. However, it is a suggestion which finds powerful echoes in the ethnography of Amazonia where it has been frequently noted that kinship (consanguinity or consubstantiality) is conceived of as something which is produced and maintained by the exchange of substances and participation in common activities with co-residents rather than being given by fixed genealogical relationships (e.g. Rival 1998, Vilaça 2002, Overing & Passes 2000, Gow 1991, McCallum 1996). Thus, it is commonly reported of Amazonian societies that co-residents and adoptive children gradually become real kin while kin who move away to live elsewhere gradually cease to be kin at all. Among the Tsachila a similar logic may be observed in what Ventura calls the “systematic forgetting”, not only of relatives who have died, but also of those who for whatever reason have ceased to be part of one’s everyday life (*ibid*:154-155).

The connection Ventura proposes between the evidential system and the household as the “basic unit of participation” is not to suggest that there is a conflation of personal experience with the cumulative experience of the various members of a household. In the examples Dickinson cites, for instance, it remains clear that the speakers have not witnessed the events they relate, and it is by virtue of this that their use of the direct evidential signals a mirative rather than an evidential distinction, indicating not how they came to know the information, but how well they know it. What this mirative dimension of the evidential system indicates is the way in which knowledge grounded in personal experience comes to be regarded as the common knowledge of a household. Even within families, however, considerable differences

of opinion and practice co-exist. Each individual, Ventura argues, “becomes the point of reference of their surrounding universe”,¹ and for this reason she counsels against making generalisations (2012:165). Thus, although there were certain things that people told me “everyone” — all the Tsachila — knew about, I found that even in these instances multiple versions existed based on people’s own experiences and the various accounts of their relatives and friends. Likewise the reference point of the evidential and mirative systems was the experience of the individual. In this sense “common knowledge” always revolved around the individual, consisting of a sort of in-gathering of experience, rather than being drawn from a set of conventional authoritative statements.

Methodology and limitations

The marked evidential and mirative qualities of Tsafiki encode into the grammar of the language an extremely detailed concern with how and how well one comes to know about the world. They are of obvious relevance to the questions dealt with in this thesis and by far its greatest weakness is the fact that, due to my lack of proficiency in Tsafiki, I am unable to take them into account in any of my analyses. Due to a combination of lack of funds and various unforeseen circumstances the period of my field research ended up being very short. I lived in the Tsachi village for a total of just seven months from August 2008 to April 2009. Given the short time at my disposal and the fact that the vast majority of my Tsachi interlocutors were fluent in Spanish it was unrealistic for me to aim at any useful degree of proficiency in Tsafiki. Instead I stuck to Spanish and learnt only a handful of words and phrases in the vernacular which were relevant to my investigation (mostly related to ghosts and monsters) and to the niceties of everyday life (the majority related to food). Hence the best I can do, with respect to the evidential and mirative dimensions of Tsafiki, is to point out the hints of these which are detectable in the way the Tsachila use Spanish, which I will do where appropriate in the course of the thesis.

¹ My own translation from Ventura (2012:165):
[...] las individualidades se convierten en punto de referencia de su universo circundante [...]

Working in Spanish rather than Tsafiki obviously limits the depth and breadth of my analyses, and means that I cannot attempt an analysis of Tsachi narrative, that is to say of the style and construction of narratives in Tsafiki produced by native speakers (for that see Dickinson & Ventura, in press). However, while there is admittedly a problem of translation here, I think it is less complicated and less extensive than might be assumed. When my Tsachi interlocutors and I were talking to one another in Spanish we were not producing translations. We were not working as if we were off a hypothetical original of what we would have said to one another in Tsafiki and English respectively. Most of the time, at least, there was no such untranslated counterpart of what we said to one another. In that sense, though we were both using languages which were not our mother-tongue and not our most comfortable, nevertheless we were not working “in translation”. Rather, we were simply talking in Spanish about things that had happened to us and what we thought about them. We were communicating quite directly with one another in a common language, using the utterances which it afforded. In so doing we opened up the kind of common context which I alluded to earlier, the achievement of the kind of largely unformulated lay anthropological understandings which Zeitlyn talks about, and the arena of the kind of workaday anthropology whose business it is to make these explicit. Within this context the problem of translation only arose at trouble-spots, those points at which the easy flow of communication broke down (see above) and where we found that we could no longer make ourselves adequately understood in Spanish. In this sense they provided an opportunity to attend to the normally taken-for-granted assumptions as they came to light in such disjunctions of meaning. In those instances we usually resorted to words in Tsafiki, and generally I have left these words untranslated, in an attempt to allow their meaning to emerge from their usage, rather than attempting to impose it by giving a translation. The principal example of this, of course, is the word *oko*. Although for the sake of readability I often translate it as “ghost” and sometime as “monster,” and my Tsachi interlocutors typically spoke of ‘espíritu’ (spirit) in Spanish, I have tried as much as possible to let it sit like a semantic lacuna at the centre of my ethnography, gradually acquiring connotive valence as the various narratives progress. Its meaning, I suspect, is somewhat mysterious to most Tsachila let alone to me, but as with most words we learn how to use them correctly by using them to communicate long before we bother to ask ourselves what they mean. As Zeitlyn reminds us, invoking

Wittgenstein, “Meaning is emergent from the morass of social activity” (2009:216). Words are what we do with them, and their meaning is acknowledged implicitly and continually renegotiated in the interaction of talking. It is only made explicit, if at all, after the fact (Zeitlyn 2009:214-219).

The following chapters, then, are specifically dedicated to an exploration of the notion of *oko* through an examination of how people used it (in Spanish) to talk about and explain their own experiences, what they claimed to know in connection with it and how they came to know it. It is, of course, the product of how I came to know about it too. Over the period of my fieldwork, between the football matches, fiestas and endless children’s games which constituted the bulk of my participant observation, I recorded a total of approximately 60 hours of interviews with around 30 adults, 10 women and about 20 men. These were loosely structured open-ended conversations which ranged in length from 30 minutes to two-and-a-half hours depending on the loquaciousness of my interlocutors, and most of them centred around the subject of *oko*. I paid for these interviews in cash an amount per hour which was in accord with the going rate among the Tsachila for such assistance. One might expect that payment for stories of this kind would encourage people to make them up and would render the data thus gathered unreliable. However, it seemed only fair to offer remuneration, and in order to minimise any distorting effect this might have had, I was ready with a range of additional topics for conversation of a more mundane kind — funeral practices, dreams, myths or ancestral stories about *oko* and about animals, the traditional celebration of Easter, Christian beliefs, anything that would get my interlocutors talking — so that there was no need for them to tell me only about firsthand experiences of *oko* in order to fill an hour or two. In fact I found that many of my interviewees were either unable or unwilling (it was often impossible to tell which) to talk about *oko* for more than 20 or 30 minutes and if they wished to continue the interview we would simply move on to another topic.

What my investigations yielded was not a comprehensive exposition of the place of *oko* in some kind of definite Tsachi cosmology, but a series of vignettes of personal experiences, people’s most memorable encounters with *oko* and other occult creatures, and the stories that they had heard from relatives, friends, and in particular

from grandparents. This had, of course, as much to do with the kinds of questions I was asking as it did with what people felt able or inclined to tell me. Certainly the nature of my enquiries, in accordance with my interests, elicited a particular form and development of knowledge over the course of the interviews. But on the other hand the interests and expertise of my interlocutors were no less decisive in directing our conversations and the trajectory of my ensuing research.

While all the Tsachila I spoke to had either seen or heard about *oko* and could give me some idea of how they manifested, I never came across a hard notion of what they *ought* to be like. The descriptions people gave me were extremely varied and sometimes contradictory, but they would generally refrain from passing comment on other people's accounts when I related these. As the conversation continued they would make a point of speaking only about what they knew, citing their own experiences and those of parents, grandparents, respected friends or relatives, and would decline to speculate about things which fell outside of such accounts. Despite my promptings people consistently refused to generalise except in the most minimal ways from their own experience or from the stories passed down the generations by their grandparents. As I continued to press them for more examples of whatever type of *oko* we were discussing, we would reach a point where they would reply that they did not know about this or that, they had never themselves encountered such-and-such. They would often ask rhetorically, "And why would I lie", before referring me to a neighbour or relative who they thought might know better. At which point I assumed that I had reached either the limit of their knowledge or their candidness on the subject and we would move on to something else. Again and again I found that experience was the arbiter of knowledge and abstraction and metaphysical speculation appeared to be all but irrelevant to *oko*. This situation — the reluctance to generalise and the lack of a generic notion of *oko* — seems to reflect the highly evidential grammar of Tsafiki, discussed above, in which it is impossible to make statements without making reference to the chain of people and inferences from which they are known.

With respect to *oko*, as we shall see, the difficulties which this particularising tendency poses to any attempt at a synthesis are exacerbated by the nature of the category itself. As will become clear in subsequent chapters *oko* are almost by

definition anomalous and surprising phenomena, and are therefore prone to an indefinite variety of manifestations. Faced with such material I have shied away from imposing upon it too much order of my own. I do not wish to suggest a structure or coherence which it does not in fact possess. During the course of my fieldwork I gradually became familiar with some of the characteristics of *oko* and other creatures, and encountered examples of them at second, third or fourth hand in the experience of my Tsachi friends and neighbours. I have decided to present them here in a similar way so that, like me, the reader may encounter them to begin with in the reportage of experience rather than in the artifice of a so-called final analysis. To this end, after giving a general account of everyday life in the village in Chapter III, thereafter, in Chapters IV, V and VI, I rely heavily on transcriptions of extracts from my interviews which I have interspersed with my own commentary and supplementary descriptions. This is, as the reader will have ample cause to note, a laborious way of constructing an ethnography, and one might think it excessively pedantic. However, in adopting this method I am attempting to convey both the specificity and ambiguity which seemed to me characteristic of people's knowledge of *oko*, and which, to a certain extent is also characteristic of ethnographic interviews in general. My aim is to demonstrate, through a close attention to individual narratives, the way in which people's knowledge of *oko* is explicitly grounded in personal experience and the way in which narratives of this experience both constitute and challenge common knowledge about *oko*. What I mean by this can be best communicated using an example of just such a narrative, which I will present in the next chapter as a brief interlude to avoid overburdening the introduction.

Let me conclude here by saying that in order to prevent the thesis becoming unreadable under the weight of such close transcriptions I have had to be highly selective about which examples to use and have had to limit my analyses accordingly. For the sake of readability and brevity I have also used different kinds of transcription depending on the kinds of analyses I am offering in each case. Thus where my principal concern is with the general thrust of a narrative, such as for the stories of animals and the dead presented in Chapter IV, I have given English translations which I have made directly from the original Spanish recording, and from these I have removed questions, interjections and repetitions which are not material to the story itself. On the other hand, in cases where I am concerned with a

more fine-grained analysis of the structure of a narrative, or of a specific exchange, as it emerges in conversation, I have presented a verbatim Spanish transcription accompanied by an English translation. For most of these verbatim transcriptions, for the sake of speed, I relied upon a Spanish transcription company to provide me with the first draft, which I then edited myself to make sure that it reflected the recording as accurately as possible. In these transcriptions I have done my best to preserve repetitions, unfinished words, sounds and non-verbal communication, and have indicated with question marks those places where the recording is unclear. I have not, however, provided the length of pauses, although I indicate where these occur with "...". In all the translations, whether made directly from the Spanish recording or from a transcription, I have erred on the side of literalism, giving a word for word translation in order to minimise the amount of interpretation which they introduce. For this reason they are often difficult to read, and can appear strange. But even the original flow of conversation in Spanish appears somewhat broken on the page. The rather disjointed nature of the Spanish, however, along with its translation, while it is partly due to the idiosyncrasies of my interlocutors' use of this language, should not be taken to suggest a lack of proficiency. More than anything it is an artefact of the process of transcription itself which highlights the difference between spoken and written language in general. If, during almost any conversation you begin to listen to your own and your interlocutors' utterances as if you were going to transcribe them, you will quickly realise how incomplete and disjointed they are. What you hear when you listen in this way to what is actually being said turns out to be far more ambiguous than what you hear when you are fully engaged in the back and forth of conversation. In our concern to communicate we tend automatically to assume far more of the other person's meaning than is warranted by their utterances alone: we hear them say far more than they actually do. Because of the common context of our communication, most of the time the assumption that we do indeed know what they mean is fairly well warranted. It is adequate for the purposes of everyday life. However, the decidedly partial quality of verbal communication, in the sense both of its incompleteness and its bias (Zeitlyn 2009:212), becomes painfully apparent when it is transferred literally onto the page. I have decided that the difficulty this introduces for the reader is a price worth paying in order to highlight the ambiguities of precisely what was and wasn't said, and what the transcriptions lack in terms of

the context of the original utterances I have done my best to supply in the commentary.

Two further caveats are required before proceeding. The first concerns the absence from my thesis of any discussion of the role of modern science in the lives of the Tsachila, and of what bearing this might have on their attitudes to death and the afterlife. I do not wish to give the impression, while focussing on Christian and shamanic accounts, that the Tsachila were ignorant of the claims of Western science. Many of my interlocutors were as well- or better-versed than myself in contemporary concerns about climate change, environmental degradation, the latest medical breakthroughs, cloning and space exploration. Via radio, television, public health campaigns and most recently the internet they encountered the same combination of cutting-edge technology, misinformation and charlatanism which is rapidly becoming the staple-diet of global popular culture. However, while they discussed the latest scientific discoveries and speculations as a matter of interest and were adept consumers of its benefits wherever these were available, they made no use of scientific accounts in any of our discussions about *oko*. It was not that they discounted a scientific explanation in this regard, but simply that no such explanation was current among either the Tsachila or any of their neighbours. In this regard the clinic provides an instructive example of the way in which the Tsachila, and indeed most of their compatriots, appeared to engage with modern science. The clinic or the hospital offered the hope of treating and avoiding ill-health, but it did so in concert, rather than in competition, with a whole array of other therapeutic techniques supplied by shamans, local herbal experts, Catholic saints and sacraments, Evangelical faith healing, and whatever else might happen to be available. One or all of these might prove to be helpful and they were all worth a try. But once a person is dead the clinic offers no remedy for their unquiet soul or spirit. Modern science has no practical traction here, at least not among the Tsachila or their neighbours, and it was absent from their discussions of *oko*.

The second caveat concerns another glaring absence. Throughout this thesis I have made only the most general references to the practice of shamanism among the Tsachila and have nowhere discussed the detailed descriptions of this practice which Ventura has given (2000:chapters 8-10, 2000b, 2012:chapters 5-7). It may be thought

that in a thesis about ghosts and beliefs about the afterlife such an omission is odd to say the least. However, there are two reasons for this absence. First, and most importantly, the Governor of the Tsachila made it a condition of his permission for my research that I studied neither the use of plants nor shamanism. “The Tsachila can’t go to the US and study Western science,” he pointed out, “so why should you be able to come here and study our shamanic science?” His concern was with the question of intellectual property rights, a subject which is increasingly exercising indigenous political movements across the globe even as it rises up the agenda of big business and national governments. The Tsachi Governor wished to ensure that I could not simply mine the Tsachila for their knowledge and expertise and then return home to make money from what I had learnt. He had in mind particularly the kind of research that could be carried out by an ethnopharmacologist who, returning to the US perhaps, might transform the shamanic and botanical finesse of the Tsachila into multimillion dollar drugs, without them receiving more than a pittance in compensation. Indeed, the Governor and several of my Tsachi interlocutors suggested that they had already suffered precisely such exploitation, and while this was the paradigmatic example of the kind of abuse they feared, any possibility of an anthropologist or other researcher being able to profit at their expense in whatever respect was, quite understandably, a source of consternation. In this context shamanic knowledge and the botanical expertise which was closely associated with it were particularly sensitive subjects and, in compliance with my agreement with the Governor, I was careful to avoid both.

Some readers may regard the consequent omission of shamanism from my thesis to be a serious flaw. If indeed it is, it will simply have to be borne, since it is unavoidable. It may be thought that I could make more use of Ventura’s work in this respect, since it is already in the public domain. However, it was clear to me that the Governor, in prohibiting my own study of Tsachi shamanism, wished to forestall its dissemination in general. It would thus seem rather disingenuous of me to attempt to circumvent his intention simply by reference to existing research. Furthermore, his sensitivity was in accord with the tenor of extreme discretion which generally surrounded the subject among the Tsachila, and I do not feel that I am in any position to be less discreet.

Having said all this we come to a second reason. As far as it was possible for me to ascertain, given the discretion to which I have already alluded, shamanism did not play a prominent part in the everyday lives of the majority of my interlocutors. It was, as is suggested by the Governor's comparison with Western science, a highly specialised pursuit. Among the Tsachila this is perhaps more the case than for any other group in the region, a point which is underlined by the unusual length and rigour of the period of shamanic apprenticeship. Traditionally the process would begin in early childhood, involving dietary restrictions and the segregation of meals and, in adulthood, an abstinence from sexual activity, the supervised ingestion of tobacco and ayahuasca, and times of complete seclusion in the forest. Additionally apprentice shamans are prohibited from attending the periodic dances which are so much a part of Tsachi social life. Instead they cultivate a parallel life, dancing and drinking with the spirits "in *oko*" (see Chapter III below and onwards) (Ventura 2012:192-197).¹ This apprenticeship would continue as long as was necessary to produce the requisite skill and endurance to survive a final ordeal of tobacco and ayahuasca consumption. It would typically take seven years of adult life to become a fully-fledged shaman among the Tsachila, but in some cases as much as fifteen, and it seems that apprentices would often withdraw before their training was complete.

Perhaps understandably then, there was a general consensus among my Tsachi interlocutors that there were very few "proper shamans" left. In accordance with the conditions of my research permission I did not seek them out, neither did I look for any opportunity to observe them in action, and in any case there did not appear to be many such opportunities. But from my general discussions with the Tsachila concerning the dead, spirits, monsters, the afterlife and the occult dimension which separated these from the living, it was clear that the shamans, whose skill it was to navigate this dimension, experienced the world and acted within it in a range of ways of which lay people were almost entirely ignorant.

Particularly among the Tsachila, then, I would contend that to study shamanism is not to study ordinary life. I do not dispute the notion that shamanic activity is that upon which, as Ventura argues, ordinary life to a great extent depends, but, perhaps

¹ Gow makes some strikingly similar observations regarding shamans among the Piro (Gow 2000:57).

precisely because this is the case, it is not in itself ordinary life. To study Tsachi shamans, I would suggest, is not to study the life of the Tsachila, but a life at a certain angle to theirs, poised between them and a life “in *oko*” of which most Tsachila appear to know very little.¹ In view of this, not only is it incumbent upon me for the reasons previously given that I should refrain from a study of shamanism, but I believe that it also makes methodological sense, in a thesis dealing with different kinds of “common knowledge,” to exclude this specialist knowledge. The lay person, as I indicate in the course of this thesis, receives a certain amount of knowledge second-hand from shamans and only to this extent do I deal here with shamanism. Indeed, it is part of the point I am trying to make to give an indication of the extent to which people’s common knowledge of the dead and the afterlife is drawn not from the extraordinary experiences of the shaman obtained with the aid of tobacco and ayahuasca, but from the commonly available experience of ordinary life.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter III, following the narrative interlude to which I have referred above, will be devoted to a description of everyday life, and here I will attempt to show first of all how *oko* are present as a potential threat which is tacitly indicated by the whole tenor of social interaction, conventions of greeting, patterns of habitation, by the experiential axes of day and night, sunlight and darkness, and the various activities associated with these. In Chapter IV I will introduce the stories that are passed down the generations from grandparents and parents to their children, and will examine what they contribute to the imaginative valence of *oko*. We will set them in the context of stories of a similar kind concerning metamorphic animals which will give us the opportunity to examine Tsachi understandings of the relations between death, personhood, and bodily change and decay. We will also encounter some of the ways in which my Tsachi interlocutors talked about history which will lead us on to the central theme of Chapter V. Here we will deal with another way in which *oko* are present, this time as a chaotic and constantly threatening history which must be kept

¹ For some similar indications of the specificity of shamanic experience in other parts of South America, and of the notion of shamans as, to a greater or lesser extent, other-than-human beings, see Harner (1972: 134-166), Langdon & Baer (1992), Whitehead & Wright (2004), Gow (1991:238-241), Viveiros de Castro (2007:162), Fausto (2004).

at bay by repeated apotropaic action, the kind of practice which as I will explain makes even the absence of *oko* an indication of their existence. We will examine one of the most prominent examples of such action, the annual visit to the cemeteries on the Day of the Dead. We will see how the introduction of this Catholic practice has modified people's relationship with the dead and has in turn been modified and inflected by its use among the Tsachila. Finally in Chapter VI we will look at what happens when all the "common knowledge" discussed in previous chapters comes up against the experience of specific encounters with the dead, how it shapes the interpretation of those experiences but is also changed and challenged by them. We will observe knowledge of *oko* in flux, in the process of being constructed and reconstructed in response both to personal experience and the variable usefulness of Catholic and Evangelical accounts of the afterlife.

II. Encountering an *Okó*: the dynamics of description and interpretation in the construction of a narrative

We will begin by examining an account of an encounter with an *oko*. I have selected an example which highlights particularly vividly the tensions between the experience of the speaker, his professed beliefs and his apparent ulterior intentions. It is taken from an interview I conducted with a Tsachi man who was one of the most active Evangelical Christians in the village. We will call him Timoteo. In his youth, when the Evangelical influence in Congoma was at its peak, he had converted along with many of the young people to the nascent church of *Jesus Miya*, founded by the missionaries. As their influence waned he lapsed into what he referred to as a mad life of drinking and dancing. When the Seventh Day Adventists arrived, nine years prior to my fieldwork, he said he had “understood again” and accepted their way of life and teaching. Since then he and his family had entirely given up both drinking and dancing, they attended regular services and prayer meetings and were active in proselytising missions of the Adventists in the village and the local area. The standard Evangelical line on *oko* was that they were demons or evil spirits, and if they appeared to be the spirit of a dead person, this was simply part of their attempts to deceive and frighten the living. According to Evangelical teaching they could not in fact be the spirits of the dead since the Bible says that these are immediately committed to their respective locations in Heaven, Hell, or Hades, whence they are not permitted to return to this world. When I asked Timoteo about *oko* he began by giving me a version of this standard Evangelical account, before relating an experience from his youth by way of illustration. As we shall see, however, what his account reveals is something far more ambiguous than a straightforward religious orthodoxy. A detailed examination of the dynamics of the narrative will allow us to begin to tease out a certain difference between that which is given, the recalcitrant world which begs the questions as something to be explained, and what is made of it by a process of interpretation, the attempt to supply an explanation. We will arrive at a certain kind of distinction between what, for ease of discussion, we will call descriptive and interpretive elements of discourse. As will become apparent, it is in the way that these two elements are related within the narrative that its authority is established, and it emerges as both generative and potentially subversive of discourse about *oko*.

Daniel Dolley:

- 1 Mm, bueno, mm, ¿puede contarme de una experiencia que ha tenido con... con *oko*, o...? Bueno, me, me dijo que hay bastante *oko* pue, 5 que sabe andar, ¿no? Mm, well, mm, can you tell me of an experience that you have had with... with *oko*, or...? Well, you, you told me that there are a lot of *oko* right, that are used to walking [around], no?

Timoteo:

- Sí. E..., bueno, según, según la, los que creemos, ¿no?, e Tsáchi creemos nos mucho en *oko* y bueno, viendo lo realidad, ¿no? 10 *oko* de una persona que sale tal vez no podía a ver, no pueda a ver, a lo... legalmente. Pero, hay espíritus, malos espíritus que a veces hace miedo a las persona. 15 Entonces, esos espíritus puede ser los espíritus del demonio, algo así ¿no? Le cuento, una vez yo muy jovencito, unos dieciséis años tenía yo, [...] Yes. E..., well, according, according to the, those [of us] who believe, no, e, we Tsachi believe very much in *oko* and well, seeing [what is] reality, no, the *oko* of a person that goes out perhaps one couldn't see, can't see, it... legally. But, there are spirits, bad spirits that sometimes make people afraid. So, these spirits can be the spirits of the Devil, something like this, no. I'll tell you, one time when I was very young, some sixteen years I had, [...]

Here at the beginning of Timoteo's account we find an oblique reference to Evangelical teaching. He says "the *oko* of a person that goes out perhaps one couldn't see, can't see it legally" [10-12], and then he gives the standard Evangelical explanation for *oko*, using the Christian vocabulary of Spanish: "But there are bad spirits that sometimes make people afraid. So, these spirits can be the spirits of the Devil, something like this" [12-16]. His use of the word "legally" is interesting. In the present context, immediately prefacing a version of the Evangelical attitude to *oko*, it may be understood as an implicit reference to the authority of the Bible, invoking a kind of authority which, like law, is prescriptive, ideal, moral: it dictates the way one *ought* to behave or how things *ought* to be. This is the kind of prescriptive *a priori* knowledge that prejudices experience. It tells you what you can and cannot do, what can and cannot exist, what you can and "cannot see.... legally" [11-12], in an ideal world. But "legally" is a strange word to use as a qualifier for sight. One might talk about clear sight or poor sight, but what is legal sight? This is

¹ The italicised rubrics preceding each transcription refer to the interview from which it is extracted, indicating the pseudonym of the interviewee and the date and time of the interview.

the kind of phrase, like “technically” or “properly speaking,” that one uses to introduce ambiguity, to give oneself room for manoeuvre, and here it does just that. The notion of “seeing legally”, whatever that may be, implicitly suggests its counterpart: the similarly vague possibility of “seeing illegally”. Having tacitly made this alternative available, Timoteo, in the subsequent narrative, makes repeated references to “seeing” in an instance for which just such a category would be extremely useful. He sees something which appears to be precisely the kind of thing one is not supposed to see, *legally* speaking. As our analysis develops this will emerge as the dominant theme of his account, and we will observe also how his references to what he saw are repeatedly paired with contrasting comments about what he believes or expects that he ought and ought not to be able to see.

TIM:	[...] Le cuento, una vez yo muy Jovencito, unos dieciséis años tenía yo, y mi papá no le gustaba que yo ande así tomando, emborrachando, nada. Y una vez me fui con uno amigos [a un baile] Me fui con los amiguitos ahí entre buscachones y pusimos tomando. Primera vez que tomé me emborraché	[...] I'll tell you, one time when I was very young, some sixteen years I had, and it didn't please my dad that I should walk like this drinking, getting drunk, nothing. And one time I went with some friends [to a dance] I went with the buddies there between buscachones [??] and we set ourselves to drinking. First time that I drank I got drunk.
20		
25		
DD:	¿Sí?	Yes?
TIM:	Y qué miedo que me daba mi papá. Y llegué a las cinco [sic] de la mañana a la casa, ya, y ahí mal. Y de ahí para que el no enoje, [...] [...] tal vez yendo como a las seis de la mañana, más o menos antes de seis, por ahí, cogí mi machete, salí con una olla, y me fui sacar cacao. Entonces tenía amontonado allá y fuimo sac— me fui sacar solito, y cada caso oscuro todavía, y de ahí... de ahí... Buen yo no creía en <i>oko</i> ... pero... esa vez, no sé, algo en— me pasó, ...y... le ví, ...	And what fear I had of my dad. And I arrived at five in the morning at the house, right, and there bad. And from there so that he wouldn't get angry, [...] [...] perhaps going like at six in the morning, more or less before six, about there, I got my machete, went out with a pot, and I went to extract cocoa [from the pod]. So one had it piled up there and we went to take— I went to take it out on my own, and in any case it was dark still, and from there... from there... Well I didn't believe in <i>oko</i> ... but... this time, I don't know, something— happened to me, ... and... I saw her, ...
30		
35		
40		

Having begun with the ideal prescriptions of Evangelical belief about what can and cannot be seen, Timoteo begins to give an account of what he himself once saw. Here the particular and personal character of his narrative is evident. He opens with a fairly long preamble, setting the scene with self-referential details of time, activity and place and explaining how he came to be in a certain situation: he was about sixteen, came home drunk from a party and in order to avoid his father's wrath went out early in the morning to extract cocoa beans from their pods. "And from there..." [39]— here Timoteo breaks off with a parenthetical comment: "...Well, I didn't believe in *oko*... but... this time, I don't know, something— happened to me, ...and ...I saw her" [40-42]. He thus announces the denouement before he begins the story, thereby giving a frame of reference for its interpretation: It is a story about *oko*. But he indicates at the same time that for him this was an unexpected outcome, and this gives us the first and most explicit example of a contrast between belief and sight which is reiterated throughout the account: "I didn't believe.... but... I saw her..." [40-42].

TIM:	Buen yo no creía en <i>oko</i> ... pero... esa vez, no sé, algo en— me pasó, ...y... le ví, ... una mujer... venía caminando de adentro, y... con	45	chumbillina que pone las mujeres así, ...y tenía bota, bota mojada con, con agua, y venía sonando así. Venía sonando con bota— [...] Por el	Well I didn't believe in <i>oko</i> ... but... this time, I don't know, something— happened to me, ... and...I saw her, ... a woman... was coming walking from the bush, and... with the skirt that the women wear like this, ...and she had boots, wet boots with, with water, and she was coming making noise like this. She was coming making noise with boot— [...] On the
50	Camino. Yo estuve cerca de camino debajo de un árbol de cacao. Estuve ahí. Y —	50	Path. I was near the path underneath a cocoa tree. There I was. And—	
DD:	¿Es— eso estaba aquí mismo en	55	Congoma?	This— this was here in Congoma?
TIM:	Sí aquí. Ahí donde vive mi hermano [...], ahí, por ahí. Y... y yo vení, y estuve sentado ahí, y le ví chumbillina, le vi las	60	bota, pero no le ví... vea, la, cabeza la cara no, n— nada no le ví porque tapaba acá, las hojas de cacao, ...	Yes here. There where my brother lives, there, over there. And... and I came, and I was sitting there, and I saw the skirt, I saw the boots, but I didn't see... you see, the head, the face, no, n—nothing [of it] I saw because it was covered here, the cocoa leaves, ...

As Timoteo continues he makes what are in themselves a perfectly ordinary set of observations; he reports that he saw a woman approaching on the path [42-44]; he recalls that she was wearing a ‘chumbillina’ [44-45] (the traditional Tsachi skirt), and boots, that her boots were wet, and making a sound on the path, [46-50] and her face was obscured by a leaf of the cocoa tree under which he sat [60-63]. All these are the kinds of observations that we make, remember and pass on routinely without question; they are what we might call a “description of experience,” in accordance with conventional usage. It can very easily be demonstrated that all words are in fact interpretive, imputing meaning rather than simply reflecting reality. However, the interpretive acts evoked by words like “woman”, “boot” and ‘chumbillina’, in the context of the present narrative, are so automatic, intuitive and commonplace that they convey perceptual judgements of the kind which in everyday life are rarely contested. We know what it is like to have the sort of experience we have learnt to call “seeing a woman” or “hearing boots on the path” and we operate on the tacit assumption that by using such words we are referring to experiences which are for all practical purposes generally the same for everyone. In the vast majority of cases we find that making such an assumption is well warranted: it rarely leads us into confusion and yields a world which behaves most of the time just as we expect. It is these kinds of conventional perceptual judgements which, in common parlance, we understand as being descriptive; that is, we accept them as reflecting what we or others actually saw, heard, smelt, touched etc., on a given occasion unless we have some particular reason to suspect that they are mistaken.

TIM:	Y...	And...
	y yo vení, y estuve sentado ahí, y	and I came, and I was sitting there, and
	le ví chumbillina, le vi las	I saw the skirt, I saw the
60	bota, pero no le ví... vea, la,	boot[s], but I didn't see... you see, the
	cabeza la cara no, n— nada no	head, the face, no, n—nothing
	le ví porque tapaba acá,	[of it] I saw because it was covered here,
	las hojas de cacao, ...y [DD: Aha.]	the cocoa leaves, ...and [DD: Aha.]
	...y vino caminando, [DD: Ya.] y	...and [she] came walking, [DD: Ya.] and
65	de ahí para acá era má— más,	from there to here it was mor— more
	claro al... la mata era...hoja era	clear, to... the tree was...the leaf was
	más alta [DD: Mm.] y esperé para	higher [DD: Mm.] and I waited
	ver quién era... y... y no pasó.	to see who it was... and... and [she] didn't pass.
	Ahí quedó y... y no...	There she stayed and... and didn't...
70	no cruzó. [DD: Aha.] Entonces,	didn't cross. [DD: Aha.]
	me hizo algo medio raro.	So, it made me something somewhat strange.
	Me levanté y quedé...me, me salí a	I stood up and stayed... I, I went out to

75	mirar [DD: Mm.] al camino, y no encontré nada. [DD: Aha.] A... no encontré nada,...y ...y yo di [sic] ¿qué será, pue?¿no? [DD: Mm.] y nunca imaginaba de <i>oko</i> ,	look [DD: Mm] to the path, and I didn't find anything. [DD: Aha.] Ah... I didn't find anything, ...and...and I said what will it be, then? No? [DD: Mm.] And I never imagined <i>oko</i> ,
----	---	--

Hearing Timoteo's account I, and I suppose many of my readers, will be tempted to see his being drunk or hung-over as sufficient reason to question the reliability of his perceptions: we associate intoxication with the impairment of the senses and the risk of hallucination. However, at no point does Timoteo himself make such a connection. I will return to this question later on, but here let us follow Timoteo's own logic. He himself gives no suggestion that he was mistaken about what he saw while sitting under the cocoa tree. Rather, he repeats: "And... and I came, and I was sitting there, and I saw the skirt, I saw the boots..." [59-60]. He has already mentioned that at that time he did not believe in *oko*, and he indicates that he expected to see her face as she continued passed the tree: "and I waited to see who it was", he says [67-68]. It is her failure to show on the other side of the leaves, rather than anything unusual in her appearance, that makes him feel strange [69-71], perhaps sensing that something is amiss. Up until this point Timoteo's account gives us no reason to expect that the figure being described is anything other than a woman, perhaps one of Timoteo's relatives who, like himself, is out early to work on her farm. It is only when she has already disappeared that Timoteo begins to question what is going on and here again he asserts even more emphatically that he had no thought of *oko*: "And I said, what could it be, then? No? And I never imagined *oko*" [75-77].

TIM:	A... no encontré nada,...y ...y yo di ¿qué será, pue?¿no? [DD: Mm.] y nunca imaginaba de <i>oko</i> , ...y ...vine a la casa y me dijo [sic] a mi mami le digo, "Este me pasó 80 ¿Qué será?" Ya. Y de ahí... de ahí me dijo "Así pueda a ver <i>oko</i> ." Algo así, ¿no? me... mi mami me dijo. Y pasa que de ahí al mes murió mi bisabuelita, mi 85 bisabuela. Ella vivía adentro,	Ah... I didn't find anything, ...and...and I said "what will it be, then?" No? [DD: Mm.] And I never imagined <i>oko</i> , ...and...I came to the house and I said to my mum I tell her, "This happened to me. What will it be?" Ya. And then... then she told me "like this one might see <i>oko</i> ." Something like this, no,... my mum told me. And it happened that from there in a month my great granny died, my great grandmother. She lived in the interior,
------	---	---

	allá en Ená, y...que también tenía otra casita pue, aquí arriba donde... vivía con [mi finado tío]. Entonces, eso es	there in Ená, and... also she had another little house, right, here up [the road/river] where... she lived with [my late uncle]. So, this is
90	tal vez...venía, ¿no? Sería mal espíritu. ¿Qué será,no? Pero yo le vi eso [...?].	perhaps... she came, no? It could be a bad spirit. What will it be, no? But this is what I saw [...?].
DD:	Y ¿a eso la gente dice <i>puyan oko</i> ? o... ¿cóm— cómo se dice?	And for this the people say <i>puyan oko</i> ? ¹ or... what— what does one say?
95		
TIM:	La gente dice <i>puyan oko</i> , pero no había muerto todavía. Ahí vivía. [DD: Aha.] De ahí al mes murió. [DD: Aha.] Y no sé, ¿qué será	The people say <i>puyan oko</i> , but she was not dead yet. There she lived. [DD: Aha.] From then after a month she died. [DD: Aha.] And I don't know, what will it be
100	pues, no? Pero viendo, viendo ¿no? después de que muera, hay— ¿hay— hay persona que dice después de que muera hay <i>oko</i> pero no, el espíritu del	then, no? But seeing, seeing, right, after one dies, there are— there are— there are people who say after one dies there is <i>oko</i> but no, the spirit of the
105	muerto, creyendo a la Biblia no existe. [DD: Mm.] El espíritu Dios lo lleva. Mm... Claro que hay demonios que a la gente hacen creer que hay	deceased, believing the Bible doesn't exist. [DD: Mm.] God takes the spirit. Mm... Of course, there are demons that make the people believe that there are
110	<i>oko</i> . Eh... salga, salga el alma de, [DD: Aha.] del cuerpo y anda llorando. Eso para mí, no, ahora, que creo en la Biblia que es	<i>oko</i> . Eh... that the soul goes out, goes out of [DD: Aha.] of the body and walks around crying. This for me, no, now since I believe in the Bible that it is
115	mentira. [DD: Mm.] Pero aquel tiempo yo le vi eso. [DD: Mm.] ¿Eso será <i>oko</i> ? [ríe él] No sé qué será ¿no?	a lie. [DD: Mm.] But at that time I saw this. [DD: Mm.] Will this be <i>oko</i> ? [he laughs] I don't know what it will be, no.

Having related the initial encounter Timoteo goes on to suggest possible interpretations. First he reports what his mother said, and here we have another mention of sight: “And then... then she told me, “Like this one might see *oko*.” Something like this, no,... my mum told me” [80-83]. He then mentions a further event, the death of his great grandmother a month later, which appears to support this interpretation; the implication is that it was her *puyan oko* (“dead *oko*”) that he had

¹ *Puyan oko* is a Tsafiki term specifying a type of *oko* within the broader category of such creatures. *Puyan oko* are the *oko* of dead people, usually of specific dead people, *puyan* being translatable as “dead” or “dead one”.

encountered: “So, this is perhaps... she came, no” [89-90]. This is a pattern that I heard again and again in people’s accounts of *oko*: an encounter with a strange human figure, or with human noises, voices or cries, followed by news of a death in the vicinity or among one’s kin. The standard interpretation was that one had encountered the dying person’s *oko*, which people told me “goes out” (e.g. ‘*oko sale de la persona*’) around the time of death. Very often the *oko* was said to have gone out of the person before their death, and an encounter with it was regarded as prescient of their demise. However, having given this interpretation, Timoteo adds, in direct contradiction and without so much as a pause: “It could be a bad spirit (*i.e. not his grandmother’s oko*). What will it be, no?” [90-91] This statement, a non sequitur made without any attempt at justification, performs no apparent explanatory function. Instead it refers back to the Evangelical account with which he began and which, by his own admission, he is supposed to believe. Here Timoteo baldly suggests it as a possibility, but by immediately professing ignorance he avoids committing himself to either interpretation. Thus he ensures that he can neither be accused of contradicting his mother on the one hand nor disbelieving the Bible on the other. It serves his purpose in this respect that the interpretation of his account should remain uncertain. He has already told me what he *ought* to believe, but at no point does he say what he does believe, and here he is simply avoiding a conclusive interpretative judgement and passing the question rhetorically to me: “What will it be, no?” [91]. The nearest we come to an answer from him is simply a further reassertion of what he saw: “But this is what I saw...” [92]. Belief or understanding, in this case expressed in the alternative interpretations, is again contrasted with sight in an echo of Timoteo’s earlier comment: “I didn’t believe in *oko*... but... I saw her” [40-42]. In the present instance Timoteo makes sure that what he believes and what his account requires him to believe both remain uncertain, while what he saw is reemphasised as beyond doubt. But why does he bother, at this point, to reassert the certainty of what he saw? I think there is a defensive dimension to what he says here. Whatever he believes, there are people who could accuse him of being wrong — myself perhaps, or his mother, or his church pastor, and these people do not have to be present for their views to count — but no-one can blame him for what he saw. Furthermore, by reiterating it here he tacitly refers me back to his mother’s response: “Like this one might see *oko*” [81].

As the reader may have noticed, I have introduced the notion of interpretation above without making the least attempt to define the term or justify my use of it. As with “description”, I am employing it in accordance with conventional usage as a convenient label with which to identify certain elements of Timoteo’s account which differ in important respects from those that I earlier called ‘descriptive’. I have already suggested that Timoteo himself implicitly identifies a contrast between belief and sight, and the distinction I wish to make between description and interpretation follows this closely. As I have highlighted above, while Timoteo is clear at the outset of the interview about what he believes, and ought to believe, with regard to *oko* in general, when it comes to the particular instance of his own experience he makes sure that this question of belief becomes obscure and uncertain. He does this, as we have seen in the example above, by pairing references to belief with professions of ignorance and contrasting them with reiterations of what he saw. This same pattern appears repeatedly throughout his account [see 40-42, 76, 79-81, 89-92, 100-106, 112-115]. But the ignorance, the uncertainty, is expressed in relation only to certain elements, while others remain unquestioned. It is the former that I will label “interpretative” in contrast to the latter which, in line with my earlier usage, I call “descriptive.” In the following paragraphs I will show how these two types of discourse can be distinguished within the account, and how they function in relation to one another.

First, whereas Timoteo’s initial description which we identified above consists of a single account of what he saw, his interpretive comments present us with two contradictory alternatives side by side: “*puyan oko*” (“dead *oko*”) and “evil spirit”. We can see, then, how Timoteo uses the single descriptive narrative as an arbitrating authority in relation to the alternative interpretations. It is by reference to the details of the narrative that the relative merits of each are contested. However, as I have suggested, in this instance Timoteo’s interest lies not in establishing which is the correct interpretation, but rather in establishing them both as possibilities, both questionable and inconclusive. It is this uncertainty which justifies the ignorance by means of which he avoids the sensitive question as to whether his experience was consistent with the conventional wisdom expressed by his mother or with the teachings that he attributes to the Bible. In fact, his rhetorical rebuttal of conventional wisdom — “The people say *puyan oko*, but she was not dead yet” [96-

97] — is scarcely anything more than that; Timoteo was certainly just as aware as I was of what most people actually said about *puyan oko*. With the exception of himself in this one instance, for everyone else I spoke to, the order of events made very little difference to the identification of a *puyan oko*.

It is important to note how the authority exercised by the narrative here differs from that which Timoteo attributes to the Bible. The authority of the Bible, as has been suggested, is *a priori* and general, a legal kind of authority; one's experience must be interpreted in such a way as to render it consonant with the unchangeable diktats believed to have been already laid down therein. Thus it is interpretively determinate, or perhaps we might say pre-determinate. That is to say the Biblical prescription limits the kinds of interpretations which can be considered valid; so it leads Timoteo to suggest that whatever the apparition may be it cannot be a ghost. His own narrative, by contrast, while presenting an uncontested account of a series of events, the description, is interpretively speaking indeterminate. That is to say, it is open to more than one interpretation and while its authority may be invoked to challenge one alternative or another it does not rule out any altogether. Of course, as I have argued, this is precisely what Timoteo intended. However, there is more to this indeterminacy than Timoteo's attempt to evade a difficult question. It is in fact a product of the narrative process over which he, although the author, has only limited control.

Let's consider it in this way. The narrative poses certain questions. For example, Why did the figure fail to appear on the other side of the tree? This is the question that motivated Timoteo to get up from where he was sitting and look for the woman on the path. The fact that he did not find her leads Timoteo to ask himself another question: What was it that I saw? These questions are internal to the narrative itself, the first being the implicit motivation for Timoteo's response to what he saw, the second explicitly stated by him as the question that he posed to himself when he could not find anything and to his mother when he returned home.

Timoteo then begins to suggest answers: it was an *oko*. This answer appears to be confirmed: according to conventional wisdom it predicts a death, and a month later his grandmother dies. The narrative is thus extended to include the death of his

grandmother. But this extension, mandated by Timoteo's first answer "*oko*" makes room for a further question. Why did he see the *oko* before his grandmother died and not after? His answer to this question is that perhaps it was an evil spirit (i.e. not his grandmother's *puyan oko*). This answer assumes the same narrative but transforms the significance of the last detail from a confirmation into a contradiction of the first answer.

One could ask a different question of the narrative. For instance, was Timoteo hallucinating? This is not a question which is ever raised, even implicitly, within the narrative itself, but the narrative is open to it, and if we ask it, it extends the narrative in a different direction: the fact that he was drunk now appears as an important part of the narrative, while the death of his grandmother becomes an irrelevant coincidence, not properly part of the narrative anymore.

So we see that the narrative begs certain questions explicitly in accordance with the author's intentions, but the answers to these questions, changing the significance of narrative events, may provoke further questions. Furthermore, the kinds of questions that one can ask of the narrative change according to one's presuppositions and these can alter the narrative itself. Thus authorial presuppositions and intention shape the construction of the narrative, but the narrative itself, when subject to questioning, becomes generative of questions which go beyond the author's intention. Thus it becomes, as it were, something one might call a disruptive cultural artefact. This, it would seem, has to do partly with the presence of redundancies in the narrative which allow it to pose more questions than the author intended, and also with something which I can only think of calling a dialogical construction of meaning between "question" and "answer."

But there is a further point. A narrative such as this is not merely capable of being made to disrupt the author's intentions under questioning. It already has an implicit dialogue within it between a disruptive element (the recalcitrance of the world, to use Zeitlyn's language referred to above) and the effort of the author to control this. It is this dynamic, which is the same dynamic between anomalous experience and its assimilation in general, which provokes and constitutes the narrative in the first place. The narrative is thus inherently disruptive, and only partially subject to the

narrator's intention. And this holds true for further retellings also. For whatever purpose to which the story is put by means of retellings according to new intentions, there is a limit to what it can plausibly be made to say, and this is dictated by the same dynamic between what is considered to be incontestable within the narrative and what are regarded as legitimate ways to assimilate its problematic or recalcitrant elements. This dynamic is shaped by, but also significantly constrains and often challenges, each new attempt at assimilation.

This kind of stripping down to an uncontested backbone, locating the points of recalcitrance, can be applied similarly to any narrative (including, of course, the narrative which constitutes this thesis). It is the process whereby, in the context of narrative discourse, we can hope progressively to distinguish description from interpretation and thus work towards the kind of account advocated by Zeitlyn (2009), which does justice both to the partial and interested nature of our understandings and to the recalcitrance of the world by which they are engaged, motivated and constrained. My point here is that in any such account of *oko*, anomalous experiences such as the one described above form part of that recalcitrance with which some workable engagement of interpretation and action is required. Whatever one wishes to call it, religion, cosmology, the symbolic world, the supernatural, it is not, among the Tsachila at least, simply a matter of belief, conjecture, discourse, but of attempts to assimilate problematic instances of direct personal experience.

III. The Diversions of a Quiet Life: *Okó* and circadian patterns of sound, light and sociality

When I began writing this chapter I had the idea that a description of the uneventful daily round alluded to in the title would constitute the backdrop and stage onto which I could then call forth all the various monsters, ghosts and ghouls whose characteristic activity seemed to be the disturbance of an otherwise remarkably quiet life. But as I wrote, trying to put into words the rationale behind the commonplace and the everyday, I began to suspect that I had things the wrong way round. Upon reflection it became increasingly apparent that the tranquillity and evenness so characteristic of life in Congoma was not simply the way things were, but the way they were meant to be, and that behind village layout, the conventions of greeting and visiting, and the routines of daily work and relaxation, lay an anxiety about the ever-present possibility of their disruption by the antisocial, the extraordinary and the deadly. Monsters and ghosts were not the occasional cameos providing an instructive contrast to the reference points¹ of Tsachi personhood and social life; they were the background whose presence was tacitly acknowledged in the whole tenor of everyday social interaction.

The reader may note that such observations are more than a little reminiscent of the analyses offered by Overing and others of a kind of loose and self-consciously tranquil sociality which they have suggested is characteristic of lowland South American societies in general, and which they argue “is achieved at great effort against a cosmic background of danger and folly” (Overing & Passes 2000:12). The echoes are not accidental. I owe to the analyses of Overing (1989, 2000, 2003), Rivière (1969, 2000), and Gow (2000) in particular the inspiration which in large part has prompted me to make something, perhaps even anything at all, out of the humdrum, the incidental and the ordinary which seemed to characterise the bulk of my fieldwork.

¹ Here I am using Ventura’s vocabulary (2012:64-65, 165) which is also picked up by Praet in his analysis of the Chachi (Praet 2006:66).

Life in Congoma was worryingly quiet. Far too often, come sundown, there seemed to be nothing more interesting to write in a field diary than a brief account of what had been eaten that day. Almost invariably this consisted of a large quantity of rice, plantains, and eggs, often accompanied by a modest amount of tinned tuna or pilchards, and punctuated by the occasional soup, a bucketful of local fish, some chicken, a slice or two of rubbery cheese purchased from a travelling salesman based in one of the neighbouring Mestizo villages, and sometimes some beef on the bone brought back from Santo Domingo or from one of the small towns lining the via Quevedo. Every now and again a little delicacy would appear: a small game animal, a piece of palm heart, homemade maize humitas, a handful of dry-fried larvae, a net of brightly coloured crabs from the market in Santo Domingo, or some novel fruit from the forest that I had never seen before. On particularly special occasions, when a large party was called for, a pig was killed and there would ensue a week-long tour-de-force of the porcine anatomy, from snout to tail and literally everything in between.

Life may have been quiet, then, but I would not go as far as Rivière when he wryly entitled a pair of chapters, “LIFE’S DULL ROUND—i” and “LIFE’S DULL ROUND—ii” (1969) (see also Gow 2000:59-60). Despite being mostly uneventful, the daily round was rarely dull. There was always some party or other to be anticipated in the near future, and plenty of football matches, and fishing and hunting trips to keep one occupied in the meantime. As for me, any spare moment I had vanished all too quickly at the hands of a coterie of persuasive and seemingly inexhaustible children who could always be relied upon to find me something to do or something new to chew on according to their whims. Meanwhile, behind and between the tranquillity and evenness of this quiet life, always a little too close for comfort, lurked the noises, sights and terrors that people referred to among other things as *oko*.

As Gow (2000) has observed writing about the Piro of Amazonian Peru, the uneventfulness of everyday life in light of the alternatives begins to appear as something highly desirable and dangerously precarious. He writes:

The flatness of everyday life turns out to be fully intentional, it is an achievement. It is won from a cosmos that is governed by other kinds of reason, and which invades Piro people's lives with dramatic events of emotional extremity. [...] 'Living well' is the key value of an aesthetic of social life in which mastery lies in making sure that nothing ever happens for, like every plateau, this one is surrounded on all sides by sharp descents into very different regions.

(Gow 2000:61.)

The significance of a quiet or tranquil life among the Tsachila can I think be described in similar terms. Life in Congoma, as I was repeatedly told by my hosts, was 'tranquilo'. Indeed this was something which was immediately apparent to me, coming as I had from the harried and traffic-choked suburbs of Quito, and one might think it hardly needed to be so frequently remarked upon. But more often than not, what my hosts had in mind when they invoked the quietness of life was not the contrast between the city and the village which was to me so palpable. They were referring to something different, something not so immediately apparent: the contrast between the way things had been before — 'más antes' — and the way things were now — 'ahorita'. They would tell me: "Más antes había tanta bulla, pero ahorita todo queda más tranquilo" —Before, there was so much noise, but now everything stays quieter. This would seem to be a strange thing to say considering that the lives of contemporary Tsachila, with their radios, televisions and hi-fi systems, jeeps and motorbikes, must actually be far noisier than those of their parents and grandparents fifty or even twenty years ago. But the noise, the 'bulla', which my interlocutors most often contrasted with the tranquillity of a good life had little to do with the cacophony of modernity. It was the noises of *oko* that they had in mind, the disturbances of the dead and of an array of deadly creatures who, according to the accounts of their forebears, and even occasionally within their own memories had wreaked a "noisy" and terrifying havoc among the living. Indeed, 'bulla', whether fleeting and unexceptional or prolonged and extraordinary, was so routinely and automatically associated with *oko* that any reference to 'bulla' where the source was not otherwise indicated seemed to imply them. One man explained to me, "todo lo que hace bulla, o cosas extraño que hace por aquí es *seton oko*...": "everything that makes noise, or does strange things around here, is *seton oko*..." The phrase "making noise", 'haciendo bulla', evoked the activity of an *oko* akin to the way in which one might talk of haunting in English with respect to ghosts. And as in English haunting implies ghosts, since it is the activity of which they are the paradigmatic example, in

a similar way “making noise”, ‘*haciendo bulla*’, as I quickly discovered, was the indicative and quintessential activity of *oko*.

But before we get too quickly diverted by the “cosmic background” I want to convey something of the experience of the quiet life which was maintained against the threat of its intrusions. Over the course of the following pages it should become clear how intimately involved this experience is, not only with a certain style of sociality and habitation, but also with the diurnal qualities and rhythms of sound and light and with a cosmological perspective which fosters a particular kind of anxiety with respect to perception, personal interaction and identity.

Patterns of sound and habitation

When I first arrived in Congoma, having come from the noise and strife of urban life in Quito, one of the first things I noticed was the quietness both of the rural environment and of the Tsachila themselves. The placidness of my hosts was all the more remarkable because of the stark contrast it afforded with the fraught lives of the middle-class Ecuadorians I had left behind in the sierra. Domestic life in the capital seemed to carry on against the backdrop of almost constant conflict between children and their parents and the absence of such conflict in the household of my Tsachi hosts made an instant and powerful impression on me. Throughout my stay in Congoma I heard a raised voice only once, except when it was to summon someone from a distance, and even then this was extremely rare. As a rule people did not raise their voices. Neither did they conduct conversations over large distances. They spoke at close quarters where moderate tones could be maintained, and although people would sometimes shout greetings to Mestizo truckers as they drove in and out, passers-by were more often acknowledged with a wave of the hand if at all.

The traffic up and down the road was infrequent, and the nearest houses were hundreds of yards distant and screened from their neighbours by plantain groves and pockets of jungle. There were plenty of background noises, the occasional screeching of birds from the forest, the barking of dogs from the porches of houses, the crowing of cockerels and the clucking of ever-present hens, the buzz of a strimmer used for clearing undergrowth drifting across from a nearby field, the

shouts of children from the football pitch between their lessons. From time to time I would hear the distant sound of reggaeton blaring out of a neighbour's radio or hi-fi system far away on the other side of the road; a balladic fusion of Caribbean and Latino pop genres, this seemed to be the default soundtrack on the streets of Latin America from Puerto Rico to Peru. Life was full of noise, but unlike the cacophony of Quito, the noises of Congoma were infrequent enough to be readily distinguishable from one another. It was as if they took it in turns to break over the unobtrusive hum of the jungle. They could be heard clearly even when only faintly, and served to highlight the prevailing tranquillity of which they were discrete and momentary interruptions.

The relative quietness of Congoma bespoke, not only the rural environment, but also a certain style of communal life and interaction which distinguished the Tsachi village from its Mestizo neighbours. This was reflected, too, in the spatial organisation of the village which was markedly different from those of the colonists just a few hundred yards distant. Congoma stretches along and between two roughly parallel roads both of which take you to the provincial capital of Santo Domingo to the northeast and the Mestizo town of Puerto Limón to the southwest. My hosts, Dario and Maria and their family, lived beside one of these roads. During my fieldwork the road was still unmade and as it passed through the village toward Puerto Limón it became progressively narrower and more deeply rutted. There were times in the wet season when it was impassable. The school, roughly in the middle of the village, was the last stop on a bus service that went back and forth to Santo Domingo three times a day, and as the bus turned off the main road to head 'adentro', into the jungle, it passed through a string of Mestizo settlements, Congoma Cooperativa, Congoma Chico, Congoma Medio, before finally arriving at the Tsachi Comuna known as Congoma Grande. The view from the bus was instructive. The Mestizo houses were generally built close to each other in a relatively even distribution along the road, and in the more developed sector nearest to the motorway they abutted one another to produce long stretches of uninterrupted habitation and commerce on both sides of the thoroughfare and around village squares, small football fields and volley-ball pitches. As the road became narrower, the city more distant and colonisation more recent, the houses grew fewer and farther between, until the road passed through a brief stretch of apparently uninhabited

mixed jungle and plantations before encountering the first of the Tsachi houses, distinguishable from its Mestizo counterparts only by the traditional multi-coloured skirts hanging out to dry in front of them.

In contrast to Congoma Cooperativa, Chico and Medio, Congoma Grande did not constitute a single identifiable cluster of dwellings. Houses were scattered in groups of three or four generally consisting of the households of close relatives, each group separated from the next by a five or ten minute walk, sometimes more. There was no single discernible centre, but a series of little centres strung out along roads and paths, around small grocery shops and family volleyball and football pitches, each one screened from its neighbours by banana groves and manioc plantations, every household having its own well and latrine. Even within these groups the houses were often hundreds of yards apart such that the noises of people's daily activities rarely impinged upon one another. Their dwellings seemed positioned to maintain as much privacy and visual and auditory isolation as possible over a fixed territory with a growing population.¹

The effect of such relative isolation was that most noises could be easily attributed to a particular source because they were not obscured by a general clamour of human activity. Furthermore, in the absence of long visual horizons, noises were the first heralds of the approach of people and animals, and thus had a particular significance in presaging social interactions and advertising potential dangers. The effort to attribute noises to their sources was often quite explicit. People would sometimes stop mid-conversation to attend to a sound so faint that I had not yet heard it, and would proceed to discuss with those present what it might be, whether it was the noise of an approaching motorbike, a jeep, a lorry, the bus from Santo Domingo, or the sound of an unusual bird or insect that could be heard in the nearby trees.

The sounds of vehicles, and the barking of dogs, both of which announced the approach of people, provoked most interest and they would draw everyone to a door or window in order to see who it was, and to speculate upon where they might be

¹ Ventura gives a very similar description of the first impression afforded by the Tsachi Comunas in contrast to neighbouring Mestizo villages. She notes the same pattern I have described here of clusters of houses widely dispersed without an obvious centre (2012:37-38).

going and why. Those who came to speak to a member of the household would pull up their motorbike or jeep on the dirt clearing in front of the house, and wait there while the sound of their engine summoned someone from indoors. Pedestrian visitors, particularly adult Tsachila, if their approach had not already been noticed, would commonly announce their arrival with a cry of “Hoo!” at a pitch high enough to carry across the clearing and above the background noises of the house. The practice of knocking on someone’s front door was unconventional, although some of the younger generation occasionally announced themselves in this way. When Bruce Moore, an evangelical missionary and linguist with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, arrived among the Tsachila in the 1940s and began to translate the Bible, he rendered Christ’s famous words from the Apocalypse with the paraphrase, “I stand in your clearing and hoo.”

This manner of announcing one’s arrival was as much a matter of self-preservation as it was of social nicety. To get too close to a house before being noticed by its occupants was to risk being bitten by the dogs who patrolled the clearing. Hooing from the edge of the clearing allowed one to maintain an appropriate distance from the house and avoided pushing the dogs beyond their tolerance. Once someone from the house came out and could see you, you could approach beneath the shade of the veranda, while they remonstrated with the dogs to ensure safe passage.

Being heard and seen

The importance of being heard and being seen was palpable in such everyday encounters. By hooing as one approached a house one made oneself heard as soon as possible and then usually waited to be seen by one’s host. Furthermore, hooing ensured that one was heard in a way which advertised one’s humanness and sociability. Unless one hooed one’s approach would be announced only by the barking of the dogs, and dogs would bark at strangers whether their intentions were good or ill, and also at animals and *oko*, the latter of which, in particular, were potentially deadly to humans. The dogs’ warning was therefore dangerously ambiguous. Hooing, however, was a distinctively Tsachi vocalisation. Since the Tsachila were routinely engaged in social and commercial relationships with Mestizos, it marked them out not only from animals, thieves and *oko*, but also from

non-Tsachi humans. However, I hesitate to couch it in such categorical terms, since I often observed Tsachila who did not hoo and Mestizos who did. What was evoked by this behaviour was not a categorical distinction between Tsachi and non-Tsachi, referred to as *feto* in Tsafiki, but a distinctive style of sociability. It was a marker of a certain kind and degree of socialisation, which could be adopted by Feto just as it could be abandoned by Tsachila. The Mestizos who hooed were typically a handful of labourers, all men, who had been employed so frequently and for so long in the village that they seemed to spend more time lodging in the houses of their Tsachi employers than in their own in Puerto Limón or San Miguel. They ate the same food, they went to the same parties, drank and danced together, and sometimes were so much part of the households for whom they worked that there was nothing to distinguish them except the fact that they did not speak Tsafiki and never painted their hair or bodies. By the time I did my fieldwork these differences were far less noticeable than they would once have been, since very few Tsachila continued to paint their hair except to attend special cultural and political events, and many people, although they had been brought up speaking Tsafiki, routinely used Spanish, reverting to their mother-tongue only for the sake of older monolingual relatives, or where intimacy, politics or tact demanded it.

In this context then, when a person hooed, whether Tsachi or Feto, they signalled at least a certain degree of adherence to a style of socialisation characteristic of the Tsachila. In my case I tended to substitute a cry of “buenos días” or “buenas tardes” in place of a hoo, since it felt presumptuous of me as such a recent arrival to assume the degree of belonging which seemed to be implied by hooing. But whatever words one used, the most important thing was to vocalise in such a way as to convey one’s intention to be heard and seen by one’s host, and hence to demonstrate that one’s approach was not meant to be covert; one thus announced oneself as a human with good intentions, as opposed to an animal, *oko*, or thief. Where familiarity could not be presumed upon it was both sensible and tactful, having hooed, to underline this by stopping at some distance from the house and allowing oneself to be clearly seen before completing the approach.

The intention to be heard and then seen, especially when announced with a hoo, was indicative of a human seeking to engage in a normal interaction with another human.

The contrast this affords with other types of encounter is instructive. For instance, an animal approaching the house, perhaps a fox attempting to poach a chicken, would do his best to conceal his presence. His arrival, typically after dark, would be given away by the barking of the dogs, and their subsequent pursuit. Alerted by the commotion a man emerges from the house with a torch in one hand and a gun in the other, and if the intruder has not already escaped, he will typically find him cornered by the dogs at the top of a tree near the edge of the patio. One or two well-aimed shots will bring him down. The man then confirms his identity and goes back to bed, leaving the dogs to make the most of the carcass. A thief, approaching in a similar manner, by all accounts receives remarkably similar treatment, though his disposal is less haphazard, but I did not pursue the subject.

Visual and auditory manifestations of oko

If the dogs were roused to action and no hoo was heard, and a trip to the veranda revealed no sign of a human there, and neither did the dogs give any indication of having come upon an animal, then it was possible that an *oko* had arrived. Dogs, I was told, can see *oko*, though they are normally invisible to humans, and dogs barking in an empty clearing was commonly cited by my interviewees as an example of a routine encounter with an *oko*. In such an instance the silent invisible visitor may be assumed to be either a *luban oko* (red *oko*) or a *puyan oko* (dead person *oko*). The first is a predatory creature which sustains itself by sucking human blood, the second the manifestation of a dying or recently dead person which lingers in the environs of their erstwhile dwelling, unwilling to be parted from their family. The decision as to which type of *oko* one was dealing with in this context seemed to depend principally upon whether or not anyone was known to be dying or recently to have died in the vicinity. If this was the case typically the *oko* would be attributed to the deceased, otherwise it could be taken to be of the vampiric variety, not the product of a person's death, but its harbinger, presaging the bloody demise of a relative or neighbour in subsequent days, weeks or months.

A creature such as a *luban oko* (red *oko*) intent upon sucking human blood would be understandably disinclined to advertise its presence when approaching a human dwelling, and so it should be no surprise that they usually do so silently and

invisibly, betrayed only by the special vision and alertness of the dogs. Nevertheless they would often manifest in a visible form, appearing in front of the house as a strange animal: one who evinces none of the usual timidity, perhaps also looking wasted or diseased. Such a creature, for example a lone agouti who appears in front of a house in broad daylight, starved or fly infested, was typically identified as the transformation of a red *oko* which was said to be able to manifest visibly in a variety of forms. Its arrival was expected to be followed shortly by a sanguigenous death somewhere nearby.

Oko were also routinely cited as being responsible for a range of otherwise unattributable noises: the sound of knocking on a door, window or wall, the noise of clods of earth or sticks being thrown against the outside of the house, whistles or cries, laughing, gasping, coughing or rustling in the forest where the presence of a human or animal is not subsequently discovered. Such noises, most of which it may be noted are non-semantic and suggest an antisocial intention to disturb and frighten the occupants of the house, were commonly attributed to the *oko* of the dead rather than to red *oko*. These were a typically frightening and disruptive presence in the lives of their surviving kin, sometimes intentionally so, but often inadvertently. If they lingered too long they could provoke the sickening and eventual death of one of the household. Ventura makes reference to this as an instance of the evil eye, ‘mal de ojo’, the initial symptoms of which are sadness and an enfeebling melancholy (Ventura 2000:309; 2009:94). She writes:

In this case, it attacks especially in the days following a death, and in places near cemeteries or the house of the deceased. The spirit of the dead person is then considered to be mischievous and enraged and produces bad air and fright in infants, sometimes even evil eye, infants reputedly being too feeble to erect an efficacious barrier. That said, adults are also afflicted by bad air.

(My translation, Ventura 2000:450; 2009:198, 2012:233-34.)¹

¹ Ventura (2009:198):

Dans ce cas, il attaque notamment les jours suivant un décès, et dans des endroits proches des cimetières ou de la maison du défunt. L'esprit du mort est alors considéré taquin et enragé et produit du mauvais air et de la frayeur aux enfants, parfois même du mauvais œil, les enfants étant réputés trop faibles pour ériger une barrière efficace. Cela dit, les adultes aussi sont atteints du mauvais air.

But it would seem that it is not always anger or a desire to harm that makes the *oko* of the deceased potentially deadly to their surviving kin. One of my most eloquent interviewees, a man who had once been a shaman's apprentice but had broken off his apprenticeship in order to get married, once explained to me that the *oko* of dead people used to go about unable to find their kin. They would wander around in the places where they used to live, looking for their family but unable to locate them, and a shaman would have to go to them in *oko* and persuade them to leave.

Going into oko

Here I use the phrase "in *oko*" to translate the Spanish 'en *oko*'. This was the construction my interviewees typically used in place of the Tsafiki word *okobi* where the suffix *-bi* performs the function of the English preposition "in" (compare *pibi*: "in water/in river"). The same interviewee who had been an apprentice shaman told me that to go into *oko*, a shaman would meditate beside his table and, sometimes with the aid of ayahuasca and tobacco, enter a somnolent state of clear vision not unlike lucid dreaming. He would then be in *oko*, and his own *oko* would go out to make contact with the *oko* of the deceased. I asked him what these *oko* looked like. The shamans, he said, reported that they appeared like the deceased person transformed to be young and strong as they were before the ravages of illness and death had wasted them. But they are pining for their lost kin, he told me. A man longing for his wife among the living was the example constantly given to me of the yearning that kept an *oko* from leaving his surviving family in peace. In *oko* the *oko* of the shaman converses with the dead *oko* and persuades or deceives him into falling in love with another dead *oko* already living in the land of the dead, or with an *oko* transformed into the likeness of his wife. By persuasion, seduction and trickery the longings which held the deceased person's *oko* to the dwellings of the living are replaced with new attachments among the dead and at last he leaves the living to themselves and the noises and disturbances cease. This account would suggest that it is the continuance of affective attachments between the living and the dead, and not always any malevolence on the part of the latter, which threatens the former's wellbeing and may lead to them following their erstwhile loved one to the grave (see also Gow 1991:184, Praet 2006:182-183). This process of sending a deceased person's *oko* to the land of the dead is known in Tsafiki as *tenka ereka*

(from *ereno*, to send),¹ referring not to *oko* but to the heart, the thorax, the pulse. All these are covered by the word *tenka*, which is the organ of life, energy, intellect, emotion and affection (Ventura 2000:305-311). A *tenka ereka* might thus be translated as a ‘heart-sending’ with all that that implies about the transference of allegiances, energy and affection over to the land of the dead.²

Shamans in *oko* not only practice deception upon unhappy ghosts but, as my interviewee went on to explain, they are also able to see and converse with other types of *oko*, good, bad, red etc. After having attained a certain clarity of vision by means of a long and arduous apprenticeship a shaman is able to enter into a kind of dream in which, as my interviewee put it, they are with the *oko*, but as normal, like we are here, and able to see as normal. The shaman’s dream, in which he is said to be in *oko*, is distinct from ordinary dreams by virtue of its clarity, its apparent normality. My interviewee likened it to the two of us sitting there talking. By contrast he described the dream-vision of non-shamans as being partial, confused, even mystical, but rarely clear.³

When I enquired of my interviewee as to what the other types of *oko* looked like to the shaman in *oko*, he replied immediately that they were like people, although there were distinct forms, but more than this he either would not or could not divulge and, without ever refusing me, he answered my repeated questions on the subject with reference to the *oko* of shamans and the deceased instead. What he did tell me was that there was a time when red *oko* would transform into Tsachila, complete with body paint, and it was said that they killed a great many people. They would look at a person and with no more than a glance carry away their spirit or heart, and the victim would die a bloody death in consequence. That night or the next day, their heart already gone, some accident would befall them, perhaps they would be crushed by a falling tree, or bitten by a snake, and they would die bleeding. This was the work of a red *oko*, and it could be prevented only by a communal curing ritual, called

¹ Moore (1956), *Diccionario Castellano-Colorado*.

² For a description of a *tenka ereka* ceremony which supplies more detail of the process from the shaman’s point of view see Ventura (2012:244-245).

³ Rivière makes a strikingly similar observation with respect to the Trio: “The power to see into the invisible world is the Trio shaman’s essential qualification: ‘seeing is believing’, on condition that your sight is good enough” (Rivière 1994:257).

a *mu kika*, orchestrated by a shaman over the course of four nights, in which everyone would take ayahuasca (see also Ventura 2000:399, 469; 2009:159, 213). This, too, was in *oko*, he explained, conducted under the cover of darkness; he described it as a cloud or a bomb of darkness. Perhaps he was referring to tobacco smoke, though quite what he meant was unclear. But whatever kind of darkness it was, its purpose was to protect the assembled company from the gaze of red *oko*. At that time, years ago, he said, there were so many of them, and the shamans had to fight so hard to keep them at bay, that they were constantly performing *mu kika*.

And then one day they devised an ingenious way to prevent red *oko* from looking at humans in the first place. The shamans drove arrows up under the red *oko*'s chins emerging from the top of the skull so that their heads were pinned back leaving them looking permanently upwards. Because of this, red *oko* are no longer able to cause much trouble, their lethal gazes fixed upon the sky. And yet it would seem rather rash, even now, to take such protection for granted. One thing I quickly learnt when asking the Tsachila how the world worked was that axioms were few and far between, and experience could be relied upon to yield numerous exceptions for every rule. Hence, the fact that shamans long ago had pinned the eyes of red *oko* to the sky was no guarantee that you would not one day meet one staring you full in the face. Neither were they the only creatures whose gaze was potentially fatal. Certain kinds of dead *oko* were also said to be able to carry your heart away if they caught your eye.

Sight, hearing and the deceptiveness of appearances

It may be noted here that in connection with *oko* we encounter the faculty of vision associated with the antisocial and the dangerous: sight is identified as a lethal tool of predation, and it opens to the shaman the arena of an occult knowledge and power. The association of extraordinary vision with the spiritual and shamanic, the anti- and the extra-social, is a repeating motif of ethnographies the length and breadth of lowland South America and beyond (e.g. Harner 1972, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975, Chaumeil 1983, Langdon & Baer 1992, Gow 2001, Whitehead & Wright 2004). For example Antony Seeger (1981) in his seminal work on the Suyá in Mato Grosso, Brazil, cited numerous Suyá idioms in which eyes and sight were invoked with

reference to belligerent chiefs, animals and witches (p. 87). He concluded: “The eyes are literally the seat of antisocial power” (*ibid.*). This would seem to be a fitting description of the anatomy of shamans and *oko* among the Tsachila also, and it is tempting to follow Seeger in contrasting a characteristically antisocial vision with an eminently social hearing and speaking (p. 83). However, I met with no such clear distinction in Congoma. In the conventions of greeting and visiting which I have described above what seemed to matter most was not a privileging of hearing over vision, but the clarity, coherence and reciprocity of perception, both visual and auditory.

Ewart (2008) has argued that a consideration of “the socially embedded implications of seeing or being seen or [...] of hearing and being heard”, (p. 507) suggests that these two faculties, conventionally contrasted in Western discourses, are in practice mutually implicated (see also Ingold 2000:243-287). As she has shown for the Panará in Central Brazil, similarly among the Tsachila reciprocal visual availability is as much a predicate of normal human social relations as is proper verbal communication (Ewart 2008). We find here also notable echoes of Taylor’s (1993) analysis of ghosts and spirits among the Achuar, in which the reciprocity or otherwise of intersubjective perception and communication is shown to be of paramount importance in identifying, reporting and interpreting one’s encounters with the various denizens of the cosmos. At issue in this case is not simply the relative moral qualities attributed to different faculties or modalities of perception, but an anxiety about what is revealed in the acts of perceiving and being perceived in general. As Erikson has suggested in connection with Amazonian greeting rituals, this seems to derive from an uncertainty attaching to the ontological identity of visitors as much as to their sociability (Erikson 2000, cited by Surrallés 2003:777). In Tsachi greetings too, as we have seen, much more than the nature of one’s intentions is at stake when humans must be distinguished from animals and *oko*. Describing Tsachi accounts of the cosmos Ventura writes:

There exists, in effect, a large range of personages habitually manifesting anthropomorphically with the aim of tricking humans, and the myths offer us excellent descriptions.

(My translation, Ventura 2009:55; 2000:103; 2012:68.)¹

Ample illustration of how deceptive appearances can be is provided, not only in myths, but also by one's own experience and those of relatives and neighbours. Ventura mentions reports of encounters, not only with strangers, but also with doppelgangers of the living who were later identified as *oko* (Ventura 2000:459; 2012:241). She describes the danger involved in such encounters as follows:

In practice when *puyan oko* take human forms it is to trick people and take them to *Pipwa* [...] These encounters, among children and adults, provoke *seiton wu*, bad air, also called *puyanko wu* or *wu kika*. So the victim starts to feel a general malaise, headache, loss of appetite, shivering, pain in the body, sometimes fever.

(My translation, Ventura 2012:241)²

It is wise, therefore, to reserve judgment and to avoid committing oneself in the initial stages of an interaction until first appearances have been sufficiently borne out. As Rivière (1994) has observed with respect to Amazonian cosmologies, behaviour is a better guide to a person's true identity than their appearance (also see Taylor 1996:204, Vilaça 2005:451).³ Black (1977), writing about similar concerns among the Ojibwa, argues that according to "Ojibwa taxonomy" identity can only be definitively determined post hoc by the outcome of encounters, following what she calls a rule of "consequences validation" (1977:103). However, although a similar logic was often employed by my Tsachi interlocutors in their accounts of *oko*, it was typically used to justify a decision which had already been made in a split second, inspired by fear and consonant with the need to beat a rapid retreat from danger.

¹ Ventura (2009:55):

Il existe en effet un large éventail de personnages ayant la manifestation anthropomorphique pour habitude dans le but de tromper les humains, et les mythes nous en offrent d'excellentes descriptions.

² Ventura (2012:241):

En la práctica, cuando *puyan oko* toma formas humanas es para engañar a la gente y llevarla a *Pipowa* [...] Esos encuentros, entre niños y adultos, provocan el *seiton wu*, mal aire, también llamado *puyanko wu* o *wu kika*. Entonces la víctima empieza a sentir un malestar general, dolor de cabeza, pérdida del apetito, escalofríos, dolor en el cuerpo, a veces fiebre.

³ Praet (2006) makes the same point with respect to Chachi 'shape-shifting' when he observes that "one's identity derives from what one does rather than from what one looks like" (p. 67). However, as I explained in the introduction I think that while emphasising behaviour Praet underplays the importance of appearance.

While as Rivière (1994) suggests it may be “better to wait and see what transpires” (p. 261), it is also advisable to not to wait longer than is absolutely necessary. It is, after all, in the very first moments of an encounter, before it is possible to observe behaviour or reflect upon consequences, that the question of identity is most urgently relevant. It is important, if not to reach a definitive judgment, to be able to gauge as quickly as possible the reliability of appearances, and among the Tsachila the conventions surrounding visiting seemed to be directed towards this end. A truly human identity and sociability was most readily signalled by clear, coherent and reciprocal perception and communication, each party allowing themselves to be heard and seen in precisely the manner in which they expected to be able to hear and see in their turn. What characterises encounters with *oko*, by contrast, whether they be red or dead, visible or invisible, silent or noisy, is that in one way or another, they negate this kind of reciprocal and unambiguous perception which is the requisite for the establishment of an ordinary social interaction. On this point it is important to note that a lack of face-to-face vision could be as indicative of a dead *oko* as was the deadly gaze of the red *oko*. In fact, with the exception of red *oko*, most *oko* whom the Tsachila reported having visibly encountered were described to me as people who had their faces turned away or for some other reason obscured from view. Such figures were often seen in the brief periods of twilight at the beginning and end of the day, or in particularly remote and dense parts of the jungle, from which all but the most attenuated rays of sunlight are permanently excluded. The people thus encountered were usually strangers, almost always with their faces obscured from view, and if they were spoken to they would not respond. *Oko* who manifested audibly, on the other hand, were typically invisible, and people sometimes suggested that although we could not see them they could see us, and perhaps they could hear our conversations too, though we could not hear theirs. In all of these instances it is important to note that what is operative is not a characteristic representation of what an *oko* should look like, sound like or how it should behave. The reference point is not some representative notion of an *oko*, but the conventional patterns of human and animal appearance and behaviour from which deviations are recognised as and when they occur. It is these deviations, potentially indefinite in variety, which serve to identify an *oko*, and whose delimitations are determined with reference not to an idea of an *oko* as a definite type of thing, but to the humans and animals whose conventional patterns they flout. Thus, for example, while strange figures with their

faces obscured from view are suggestive of *oko*, so are those which display faces contorted by ugliness or extreme emotion, or whose faces appear uncanny in the opposite direction by virtue of a marked lack of expression. Hence, the identification of an *oko*, referring back in this way to the pattern from which it presents a deviation, is almost by definition an ad hoc affair.

Maintaining an ordinary visibility

It is worth pausing here to consider the importance of light in relation to visual clarity and social activity. The contrast between daylight and darkness in Congoma was impressively vivid and the transitions between them, both temporal and spatial, from day to night and from the clear skies of the village to the half-light of the jungle, were effected with startling rapidity. Sunlight on the equator has an intensity unknown in northern latitudes. The sun tracks a course straight through the middle of the sky. All shadows disappear at noon and colours are revealed with a vividness which seems almost violent to someone used to the glancing light and shade of northern days. You don't look at the colours, they rush in upon you. The greenness of the trees jumps out at you, the ground throws up light into your eyes and the fierce brightness of everything restricts the gaze lending to the daytime world an almost surreal intensity. From eleven o'clock till three on a sunny day you cannot look up without squinting and even a horizontal gaze is constricted by a reflex of the eyelids against the glare. The sun ascends rapidly to its zenith and after several hours beating down upon the world drops rapidly away. There is only half-an-hour of twilight at either end of the day, between six o'clock and half-past six, and then the sun is gone and everything is suddenly dark.

The most eye-catching features in the shadowless blaze of daylight were the traditional skirts (*tunan*) which at the time of my fieldwork were still routinely worn by many Tsachi women. They were composed of horizontal coloured stripes. Around the house and within the village there was nothing else that compared with them for vividness and variety. The road was stone-grey; the cleared patios around the houses exposed a uniform coffee-coloured earth; walls were the pale tan of split bamboo, the faded brown of palm-wood planks, or the simple monotonous grey of bare concrete breeze-blocks. Occasionally, if they had been built as part of a

government program, houses might be plastered and painted yellow-white, pale orange or pastel green. Roofs were either the grey-brown of palm thatch or more often the silver, metallic grey or rusty brown of corrugated iron in various stages of decay. Here and there a splash of political graffiti brightened-up a house front with a block of fading yellow over which was stencilled the face and slogan of some forgotten politician in blue and red. Incidentally, these political murals did not necessarily reflect the allegiances of the people onto whose dwellings they were painted. My host recounted how one day in the run-up to an election a few years previous to my fieldwork a number of people had returned home from the usual Sunday trip to town to find that in their absence their houses had been made into campaign posters for Lista 6, presumably by an audacious and suspiciously well-coordinated band of party activists from Santo Domingo.

Amidst and behind all the greys and browns of human habitation were the varied greens of the forest and of banana, cocoa and manioc plantations. Though these were rendered almost unnaturally vivid by the intense sunlight of midday, they occupied a very narrow spectrum. Into this background of green, grey and brown, Tsachi skirts (*tunan*) brought a luminous rainbow of artificial dyes: electric yellow juxtaposed with magenta, lime green and pillar-box red, royal blue and emerald. Next to these, almost as bright though not as varied, were the shawls (*nanun panu*) which one or two men continued to wear over a bare torso in the once distinctively Tsachi style. These were usually some shade of bright red, typically almost scarlet, not far off the colour of the achiote paste with which a number of men still painted their hair. The black and white striped kilts (*manpe tsanpa*) which were the male counterpart of the *tunan*, were by that time only worn in the context of the occasional performances given by Tsachi music groups to audiences of Mestizos and tourists. They belonged firmly in the category of historical dress. In the days when kilt and shawl were the norm of masculine attire women combined their skirts with a bare torso, the breast covered with numerous necklaces of beads and dried berries, brightly-coloured neckerchiefs and posies of fragrant and medicinal herbs (Moore 1979). By the 1980s a few young women were beginning to wear bras and blouses bought in Santo Domingo and by the time of my fieldwork all the women dressed in this way and there was not a medicinal necklace to be seen. By then, apart from the *tunan*, women's dress followed contemporary Ecuadorian trends. Ventura reports that

before the introduction of modern dyes Tsachi women wove their skirts with stripes of red and black or white and black like those of the *manpe tsanpa* but of a narrower width (Ventura 2000:115, 2009:57-58). *Tunan* have gone through several fashions since then. Bruce Moore records that during the decades of the mini-skirt the hem of the *tunan* rose in sympathy (Moore 1979:20). In the 1980s broad stripes of five or six comparatively muted hues were the standard. During my visit thirty years later the vogue was for many more much narrower stripes of luminous colours, and a zip and pleating would often be included in keeping with global trends. The cloth by that time was obtained in Santo Domingo from two or three Otovaleño merchants who made it their business to supply the Tsachila's wants with regard to both *tunan* and *manpe tsanpa*. The cloth stocked at any one time in their shops was all of the same design and sold in three standard lengths. At home women would adjust it to their needs, adding the zips and the pleating themselves. Men's *nanu panu* (shawls) have undergone a trend of their own from the original plain red. In the 2009 general election campaign male Tsachi politicians and musical performers were favouring the same shawls which were popular among the working-class ladies of Santo Domingo: fine synthetic fabrics of red, blue, pink and white with delicate batik-style designs, embroidery and sequins. Besides these there were the favourite shirts, t-shirts and blouses which the less politically minded majority wore to parties and on trips to town, marked by a preponderance of strong and primary colours.

It is not insignificant, I would suggest, that traditionally and well-dressed people, also typically described as beautiful, should cut some of the brightest figures in the colour-scape of Congoma and its environs. Both the more traditional styles of dress and the contemporary 'Sunday Best' of jeans and football shirt had the effect of making a person as clearly visible as possible against the background of earth and trees, whether in the daylight of the village, the half-light of dawn and dusk, or amid the shadows of jungle paths. Here again we might trace a connection between intentional visibility and the importance of advertising oneself in an appropriate way as a sociable human being. Or we may have an example of the connection between sociability, morality and beauty which is a repeating theme in much of the ethnography of lowland South America (Overing 1989, Turner 1980 & 1995, Overing & Passes 2000). In this the Tsachila are not unusual and Ventura remarks upon their concern with self-presentation:

[...] they accord a great importance to appearance. Contemporary mothers dress their children in mestizo style and they try always to put them in the best clothes, especially on school days and special occasions. Attendance to the hair is very frequent and always forms part of moments of relaxation, as much for the little ones as for adults.

(My translation, Ventura 2009:57; 2000:115; 2012:72.)¹

Here we may note another point of contrast between humans and *oko*. While the Tsachila kept themselves clean and beautifully dressed, particularly attending to their hair, *oko* were often described with unkempt and unwashed hair and were popularly associated with a monstrous ugliness. It should be noted, however, that while the ugliness of dead and red *oko* seemed to be connected with the ravages of death or with the horror of anthropophagy, the dishevelment of their coiffure was typically explained by the fact that they did not know how to wash properly. It attested not simply to the ugliness of monsters and the dead but to their distorted perceptions which led, among other things, to ineffectual personal care. However, there were also stories of *oko* and other disturbing creatures who manifested a human form of exceptional beauty. It would seem therefore that more is at play here than simply a distinction between beautiful sociable humans and ugly ghosts and monsters incapable of washing properly. In fact the ethnographic literature suggests that there is in lowland South American societies in general a deep ambivalence with regard both to styles of clothing and personal beauty.

In his seminal discussion of the “social skin” Turner (1980) argued that bodily adornments were used by the Kayapo to socialise what they regarded as an essentially natural and antisocial corporeality (1980, see also Turner 1995, Seeger 1975). Although one might dispute his use of the term ‘natural’ in the light of the recent critiques developed by Descola (1992), Viveiros de Castro (1998), Lima (1999), Vilaça (2005), Rival (2005) and others, Turner gives a convincing illustration of how bodily adornments and modifications are used to construct, augment and advertise the identity and capacities appropriate to a fully socially

¹ Ventura (2009:57):

[...] ils accordent une grande importance à l'apparence. Les mères contemporaines habillent leurs enfants à la métisse et elles cherchent toujours à leur mettre les plus beaux vêtements, notamment les jours d'école et de fête. Le soin des cheveux est très fréquent et fait toujours partie des moments de détente, aussi bien pour les petits que pour les adultes.

engaged human being. Yet the notion of clothing is also invoked by Amazonianists in connection with the concealment of identity. Again Rivière writes:

Appearances are deceptive, in the sense that they may be put on and taken off like clothes that hide the underlying reality.

(Rivière 1994:256.)

Viveiros de Castro (1998) has advocated a somewhat different interpretation, arguing that in Amazonian cosmologies, “It is not so much that the body is a clothing but rather that clothing is a body” (p. 482). He likens this notion of the body/clothing to a diving suit which is worn not to pass oneself off as a fish but to function like one, to enable oneself to swim underwater, entering the world of fish by acquiring the necessary capacities. But however one conceives of the process of transformation, the fact that bodily form is considered to be highly changeable renders appearances an unreliable guide to identity.

Even the beauty of traditional sartorial elegance would seem to be no guarantee of a happy encounter. Indeed, if anything it might be the reverse. Writing about the adoption of Western clothing by the Piro, Gow (2007) reports that they are in fact frightened of their ‘traditional clothing’ because they consider that it made them look like jaguars (p. 59). And he notes also:

Jaguars compound their dangerousness with their mesmerizing beauty: Piro people’s accounts of encounters with jaguars never fail to mention the aesthetic wonder of their appearance.

(Gow 2007:59.)

Beauty is not always an indication of goodness or sociability. It is as often associated with seduction and deception and in fact the most beautiful examples of Tsachi people whom I encountered during my fieldwork, the ones whose appearance, dress and body paint inspired the most extravagant superlatives from my interlocutors, were those that figured in stories where they invariably turned out not to be Tsachi after all but actually an animal, a bird, a snake, a cricket or some other creature in human form. In the stories I was told of this type the beautiful animal-Tsachi would usually seduce and marry a Tsachi woman with whom he would live in relative harmony for several years until one day the family attended a dance. Dressed up to the nines and by far and away the best-looking guest at the party the interloper would

attract the attentions of all the women and the envy of all the men, and after having a few too many to drink would inadvertently reveal his animal identity. Being provoked to anger or shame at finding himself exposed he would either wreak a murderous havoc upon his family or simply flee into the jungle never to return. I will discuss such stories in more detail in the following chapter, but for now I merely want to draw attention to the ambivalence which they evince regarding both traditional styles of clothing and exceptional human beauty.

The other context in which traditional dress made a regular appearance, approximating traditional ideals of beauty, was the political sphere. During the general election campaign of 2009 the Tsachi men who were candidates or campaigners would not be seen without at least their hair painted and usually wearing a shawl instead of a shirt. The two women running for office in the provisional government wore Tsachi skirts at all times and all the candidates sported at least a few black stripes across their faces and forearms, evoking the body paint of fifty years ago. Incidentally, these designs were applied not with the traditional *mali* (*Genipa americana*), which people told me was hard to come by just then, but with permanent markers and eyebrow pencils.

Ghosts were the only other people who frequently sported traditional attire. When one encountered a stranger in the forest dressed in a traditional skirt (*tunan*) or a traditional shawl (*nanun panu*) and kilt (*manpe tsanpa*) they would more often than not turn out to be an *oko*. Though it was undoubtedly different fifty years previously, when every Tsachi person dressed in that older style, by the time I arrived in Congoma such attire was more likely to evoke the appearance of an animal in human form, a politician or a ghost, rather than that of an ordinary human being ready for a friendly interaction. This may go some way to explain why contemporary Tsachila so rarely reprised their “traditional” dress in its entirety. A *tunan* would always be combined with a t-shirt or blouse bought in Santo Domingo, a *nanun panu* matched with a pair of jeans. By means of such ensembles people were able to identify themselves as Tsachi while avoiding the anxieties associated with a now old-fashioned and all too uncommon attire. And here I think we have the nub of the matter: people strove not for an ideal human appearance but simply for an ordinary one, not old-fashioned, not ugly but not exceptionally beautiful either, because

anything too unusual raised the possibility that one might be an *oko*. Indeed, as I have already suggested, any encounter with a human or animal which manifested a sufficient degree of incoherence or abnormality, be it in terms of perceptual and communicative availability or apparent intentions, was susceptible to such a designation. In this connection the ordinariness of one's appearance, the visibility conferred by bright clothing and the adornment of achiote paste, the capacity for appropriate personal care evidenced by a well-presented coiffure, all combined to allay any suggestion that one was not what one seemed to be.

The sobriety of social interactions

When you count among your neighbours thieves, foxes and noisy antisocial ghosts on the one hand, and on the other a collection of invisible bloodsucking creatures capable of shape-shifting and killing you with a glance, it is understandably important to make sure you hear and see things, especially your visitors, clearly and quickly, and when visiting, to be heard and seen in a similar manner. It is unwise to rely upon such ambiguous signals as the barking of dogs or a knock on the door. Among the Tsachila these anxieties combine with the extreme discretion discussed in the introduction which permeates every aspect of life. The Tsachila have long been renowned for their reserve. Before the founding of Comunas, they lived much more widely dispersed in the forest and contact with those outside one's immediate household was thus hardly ever accidental. On the rare occasions that Tsachila bumped into one another in the forest each would ask where the other was headed, upstream or down, and they would hold a conversation with their backs half-turned to one another, looking away in opposite directions, such that they never met one another's gaze (see also Ventura 2000:355; 2009:128). Even as recently as the 1980s they were so ambivalent about living at close quarters that when they came to visit the missionaries who had come to live in the Comuna, each group would wait out of sight until their predecessors had left the porch vacant allowing them to approach without engaging them. A friend of mine who was one of those missionaries between 1980 and '89 described how Tsachi women at that time would often crouch on the ground with their backs to the missionaries while speaking with them. There was a group of ladies in particular whom she remembered doing this, three sisters

who continued to dress in a traditional Tsachi manner at a time when their neighbours were increasingly adopting Western clothes.

My friend recounted the way in which these ladies spoke with the missionaries as an example of the kind of ‘vergüenza’ which is characteristic of the Tsachila. The word ‘vergüenza’ has a breadth of connotations which makes it impossible to translate with a single word in English. Depending on context it covers a range of emotions or qualities akin to shyness, timidity, modesty, reserve, embarrassment or shame. The Tsafiki word which it is commonly used to translate is *lu*, the meaning of which is still more resistant to an English rendering. I would suggest that it may best be described as referring to that emotion which keeps one from contradicting a stranger, from confronting an enemy, from displaying anger or affection in public, from approaching a crowd or looking an interlocutor in the eye, from asking your host for something or your guest for what he wants, and (as we shall see later) from venturing out onto the dance floor until well-primed with beer (see also Ventura 2000:357-58; 2009:129-30). Despite all the upheavals that have reshaped their way of life over the last hundred years it is still something that puts them at odds with the more brash and stylised conviviality of their present-day Mestizo neighbours. Although by the time of my fieldwork the Tsachila routinely employed Mestizo labourers on their farms, lodged them in their houses, sold their produce to Mestizo merchants and invited them to their parties, they remained notably reserved by comparison with the conventions of the predominant Spanish-speaking culture. An air of ambivalence and wariness still attended the greeting of a stranger, and even friends and relatives were treated with a reticence which would have seemed decidedly cool to someone used to the emotional tenor of a Mestizo household.

One of the most readily observable indications of their unusual reserve was the fact that Tsachi people of middle-age and older would very rarely shake hands. If proffered a hand by a Mestizo or a polite Gringo they would take it, and sometimes initiate a handshake themselves upon first introduction if it seemed to be expected. But when they joined or left a group they did not, as Mestizos would, shake the hands of everyone present regardless of acquaintance. As for the exchange of kisses, I never saw it attempted by the Tsachila. The one curious exception was provided by my hosts’ children who would often plant a rather formal kiss on their parents’

cheeks before taking themselves off to bed. Younger Tsachila, adolescents and young adults, were increasingly adopting the rituals of Mestizo greetings, but they prosecuted them hesitantly or with a curious languor which might equally have been born of diffidence or indifference, and they never ventured to exchange kisses in public.

A similar reticence is suggested by Tsachi styles of verbal greeting. The Spanish convention of saluting everyone, even strangers, with ‘buenos días’ and ‘buenas tardes’ has no equivalent in Tsafiki. When a Tsachi person said “*Tsaran ma joe*”, the closest translation of ‘buenos días’, they meant just what they said, that the weather is fine, and they would not have said so if it were raining. There is no Tsafiki word for “hello”. The “hoo” already mentioned with which people announce their arrival in front of each other’s houses is a warning rather than a salutation. It is much closer to “Don’t shoot!” than to “Hello”. Nowadays Spanish greetings and their nearest Tsafiki translations appear to be in fairly common use, though rhetorical enquiries such as, “¿Cómo está?” and “¿Cómo va?”, “How are you? How are things going?” typically receive the tautologous and perfectly unilluminating reply “Por aquí”, “[I’m] here”. Nothing is revealed except the obvious and no response is required. Ventura makes similar observations with respect to conventional greetings in Tsafiki:

Greetings at the crossing of paths are reduced to a polite question with hardly any semantic content: “Where are you going?” (*nunchi?*), to which one responds with an evident observation: “I am going upriver” (*fechi*) or “I am going downriver” (*pelechi*).

(My translation, Ventura 2012:155.)¹

She continues:

As for leaving-takings, these tend to be very discreet or accompanied often by a brief “I’m going” (*majinayoe*), to which the interlocutor responds politely with a “you’re going?” (*jinayun?*).

(My translation, Ventura 2012:156.)²

¹ Ventura (2012:155):

Los saludos en los cruces de caminos se reducen a una pregunta de cortesía de escaso contenido semántico: “¿Hacia dónde vas?” (*nunchi?*), a la cual se responde por una evidencia: “Voy hacia arriba” (*fechi*) o también “Voy hacia abajo” (*pelechi*).

² Ventura (2012:156):

En cuanto a las partidas, suelen ser muy discretas o, acompañadas, como mucho, de un breve “-me voy” (*majinayoe*), al cual el interlocutor responde cortésmente con un “-¿te vas?” (*jinayun?*).

All the routine social interactions which took the Tsachila beyond the immediate household were conducted outside the house and in the light of day: principally working, bathing, and gossiping. Social life in this sense was public; it took place almost entirely outdoors. With very few exceptions visitors among the Tsachila were entertained on the veranda outside the house.¹ Even relatives and friends would usually conduct their conversations there, and if they came in at all, more often than not they did so of their own accord. In this case they would generally be given no more than the tacit welcome of having a seat vacated for them, but only when they had already evinced their intention to join the assembled company indoors by movement in that direction. The movement of a guest indoors appeared to require a self-evident motivation, something that would render a verbal invitation or explanation unnecessary, since rarely would either be forthcoming. The initiation of a conversation with someone already within the house would be sufficient, or an expression of interest in what was currently being watched on the television. If a relative or friend arrived in heavy rain or after dark they would usually be greeted from the front door and come directly inside to talk. The only other way that a visitor would make the transition from veranda to house was if they were called inside to eat something. Usually, however, any food or drink was brought out to a visitor.

The daily round

Having, I hope, given the reader a flavour of the tenor of life in Congoma and the anxieties and potential disruptions that lurked beneath its placid surface I want now to return to the beginning as it were and to trace the connections between the diurnal patterns of sound and light and the routine activities of the daily round. There was a regular pattern to the noises which unfolded over the course of the day, attendant upon each of its successive activities as the sunlight waxed and waned. At sunup would be heard the first sounds of households stirring, radios and televisions being switched on, the excited clucking of chickens being fed, the chink, chink, chink of the daily re-sharpening of machetes, and then the sounds of farm work drifting

¹ In this respect the verandas of contemporary Tsachi houses are comparable to the large wall-less “for-rooms” or “halls” which feature in the descriptions of Colorado houses given by Rivet (1905), Karsten (1924), Von Hagen (1939) and Costales (1956) “where guests are received” (Karsten 1924:141).

across from people's fields. Later, as the sun slipped down from its zenith into the tops of the trees, and people began returning home, bathing and gossiping, there came the faint snatches of easy, quiet conversation and laughter floating across from the verandas of neighbouring houses. The noise of reggaeton, 'musica tropical' and hip-hop blaring out of radios and hi-fis announced the return of teenagers from their high-schools in Congoma Medio and Santo Domingo, and shortly thereafter the shouts of young men playing football would be heard echoing from the pitches dotted up and down the road. These daily afternoon matches would sometimes be prolonged well into the dusk until the darkness made it impossible to see the ball and one's fellow players well enough to continue. When at last play was suspended the teams would sometimes retire to one or other of the village shops to drink Pilsner (the most popular bottled beer, almost ubiquitous in Ecuador). Although the young men drank together they did so mostly in silence, until they went home to eat and sleep. Come the morning they would rise again at dawn and do the whole thing again.

The imminent resumption of the daily round was presaged by the cries of the cockerels. They let out their first screams around 3 a.m. and repeated them at intervals until sundown. But the early hours of the morning were as dark as midnight and at six o'clock light would return suddenly without warning. The family with whom I came to live would normally rise between half-past six and half-past seven. During the school term the children had to be dressed and breakfasted by seven-thirty to be ready for lessons at eight o'clock. In the holidays the family stayed in bed an extra half-an-hour, sometimes more, depending on what work they had planned for the day.

The first sign of the household stirring would be the sound of the radio. Whoever was first out of bed would switch it on loud enough to wake the whole house. To the accompaniment of salsa, lambada, reggaeton, 'musica folklorica' and 'musica nacional' the day's chores would slowly begin. The kitchen floor was swept of last night's debris; the chickens fed; children might be sent to the shop across the road for some eggs, cooking fat or a tin of pilchards. Maria or one of her older daughters would start frying, reheating rice and boiling water for coffee. In that part of Ecuador the first meal of the day was referred to as 'café', by Mestizo and indigenous people

alike, whether or not it included coffee. My hosts' breakfasts, of rice, plantains, eggs, fish or soup, were always differentiated from lunch and dinner by the accompaniment of a hot drink, usually coffee, but often lemongrass or cocoa. The sweet steaming liquid, dosed with plenty of sugar, was a welcome and reassuring stimulant after the somnolent darkness of the night.

After breakfast the first task was to find some clothes to work in, sturdy but not smart. They would need to keep the flies, thorns and ticks at bay. Then there was the daily chore of sharpening the machetes, sitting on the veranda with the blade across the knees and a whetting file in hand going back over the machete's edge until it shone razor-sharp. This was the habitual prelude to the day's work. Wielding a machete is backbreaking enough without it being blunt, so they were honed all over again every morning until they were too sharp to touch. In fact an inadvertent machete wound was the example routinely given to me of the kind of bloody accident provoked by an encounter with a red *oko*.

My hosts had three or four parcels of land in different parts of the Comuna, on which they cultivated a huge variety of crops for national and international markets as well as for their own consumption. They grew more than forty species of banana for sale in the Andes via Mestizo middlemen and for export to Europe and North America. Cocoa was another of their most profitable crops, also for export. Then there was taro destined for the USA, balsa wood, manioc, pineapples, coffee, countless fruiting trees and palms to cater for domestic requirements, and culinary and medicinal herbs usually transplanted to a convenient position in the environs of the house. The farm, consisting of about 40 acres, was too much for the family to manage on its own, armed only with machetes against a perpetually resurgent forest. To assist them they employed a small number of Mestizo labourers on a casual basis, but because they were paid by the day, not by their output, they needed almost constant supervision to ensure that they were working efficiently. My hosts spent much of their time travelling between their disparate fields, usually on foot, either to check up on this or that labourer or to do the clearing, sowing, and harvesting themselves. Sometimes, when they needed to carry large amounts of water with which to spray herbicide, or when they were going to collect a substantial harvest of plantains, they would saddle their horse and one of them would ride her out to the farmland.

When they went to the farm, my host, Dario, and his wife, Maria, often took lunch with them in the bottom of a basket in a cooking pot wrapped in banana leaves and clothes to keep it warm. If Maria and their older daughter weren't working on the farm themselves, they would take lunch out to Dario and any labourers who were working for them, but if both he and Maria were working, they would often come back home for lunch around one or two in the afternoon. The habit of eating in the middle of the day is one which the Tsachila learnt from their Mestizo neighbours. Fifty years ago, after a substantial breakfast of *ano ila* (the mashed plantain which formed the staple of almost every meal), with meat or fish, they would set off for the farm to work and pause only for a large bowl of *mala* (chicha, beer) in the middle of the day. That kept them going until the late afternoon when they came home to bathe and eat the evening meal.

People normally returned from their farms between 4 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., an hour or two before nightfall. They would drop off their machetes, and sometimes a stem of plantains ready for dinner, and then go off to bathe in the river which was never far away. Then they would put on fresh clothes, or lounge shirtless on the veranda while the heat of the day dissipated. There was no sense in washing in the morning since by noon the heat and humidity, not to mention the backbreaking work of farming, would make it necessary to do so again before going to bed. Consequently people almost always bathed in those last two hours of sunlight, as the day cooled and while the water remained warm.

Around the same time that adults returned from the farm, children would come home from their play and the older ones would begin scouring their parents' bodies for miniscule ticks. These attached themselves, through the course of a day's work clearing undergrowth and jungle, to one's back, arms, chest, neck, head, and legs, and had to be removed promptly to stop them from producing infection or fever. It seemed that one did not generally remove one's own ticks, even from the most accessible parts of one's body, but relied upon one's family to do so. Dario would sit there impassively while Maria or his daughters went meticulously over his body searching for the offending insects. They might raise his arm, turn a leg, or crook his head sideways, scratching out the parasites with a fingernail as they went, and all the while he would sit there without acknowledging either the service or the intimacy,

but complying with every repositioning of his body. I never saw a man return this favour and de-tick his wife or daughters. They attended to one another in this regard.

Sometimes there would be distractions from bathing and de-ticking, and the late afternoon would be spent gossiping with the cousins and in-laws who lived next door. Bathing would then be put off on occasion till after dark, and rather than going down to the river, one would wash out of a large cooking pot outside the back door. This also seemed to be the preferred option on cold days when the river might be a little too bracing, and for bathing before going to a dance. Perhaps it was convenient for ablutions which were more about making oneself look beautiful than about cooling off after a hard day's work. Perhaps they didn't want to be seen coming home from the river in their party clothes, preferring to make their first impressions at the dance itself.

Into the night

Come nightfall the sounds of work, play and relaxation gave way to other noises rising invisibly from the darkness. As the twilight fades and the chickens begin to roost, there is a brief moment of relative quiet before dark. The hens' constant clucking and the periodic cries of the cockerels, which dominate the environs of the house all day, finally cease. But before you know it darkness has descended and a new sound echoes around the village, this time emanating from the undergrowth, plantain groves and jungle. When I first heard it I could not decide what it was. I had encountered nothing quite like it before: a chorus of high-pitched, almost exultant, cries which sounded like something halfway between the yelping of a pack of hounds on the scent and a troop of monkeys spooked by an approaching predator. The noise seemed to rise from the undergrowth and it filled the air and moved around in the darkness, falling momentarily silent in one quarter as the same cries went up from another, so that it echoed back and forth from multiple directions.

It was later explained to me that the source of this strange noise was a toad. But it was known as *Wela oko* in Tsafiki, a name which turns out to have nothing to do with toads. The Spanish word for toad, 'sapo', is translated by the Tsafiki *kotan*. *Wela oko*, on the other hand, refers to something else. *Wela* is the name of a great

warrior who was once called down from the sky by the Tsachila to defend them against the aggressions of a neighbouring indigenous group. This warrior and his son who accompanied him were unimpressive figures, tall and skinny, but they were so quick and agile that they caught all the spears thrown at them by their adversaries and sent them back with deadly accuracy. They leapt about, catching spears with every part of their bodies, in their mouths, under their arms, with their legs, in the crooks of their elbows, and as they did so they let out high pitched exultant cries. But the son left the fray to drink some water, and his father, alone, succumbed to the hail of spears and was killed. The son rejoined the battle, finished off the enemy and returned to the sky, but the dead *Wela* was left behind and changed into the toad called *Wela oko*, which to this day sends his battle cry into the darkness every night.

The night-time may have been dominated by the cries of an *oko*, but it was also the time for dancing and drinking. Tsachi parties were always referred to as dances, 'bailes', and as a matter of course they lasted all night long, finishing officially at dawn. Even then, a hard core of drinkers, usually young and male, would often continue passing round the beer until well into the next afternoon. This was the one occasion when you could be sure of seeing the inside of your hosts' house: both the house and the clearing around it would be teeming with guests all night. It was also the opportunity to meet people beyond the circle of one's immediate neighbours and kindred, and hence the place where romantic involvements could be begun and discreetly pursued. Here mobile phones played an important role in organising furtive rendezvous and sustaining communication from one meeting to the next. The dances drew people from all over the village, from other Comunas, from Congoma Medio, Corporativa, and Chico, from Puerto Limón, Progreso and Santo Domingo. There was often a sizeable Mestizo contingent made up of the friends, business partners and employees of the hosts, and everyone would drink and dance together according to their personal connections and mutual attractions rather than to any so-called ethnic identity.

The evening would begin with a meal shortly after dusk provided by the hosts. This would follow the Ecuadorian convention of soup, followed by a dish of meat and rice, garnished with a little salad and accompanied by a cup of fruit squash or cola. The otherwise ubiquitous *ano ila* made no appearance on these occasions. The

women of the household, usually assisted by two or three female friends and relatives, waited on a constant stream of people taking their turns to sit at two or three long tables in the front room of the house or on the veranda. The effect was like that of the standard commercial eatery in Santo Domingo. It was all very different from the normal family meal where people would sit together on the floor of the kitchen sooner than at a table, eat a single dish and have *ano ıla* with everything. By contrast the guests at a dance were like customers wandering in from outside to take whichever seat was vacant and wait to be served. Although they all knew each other they sat together as if they were strangers, each at a different stage in their own private meal. Soup was served first and when it had been consumed the bowl was taken away and the main course brought (the 'seco' or 'segundo' in Spanish) and then the drink. When they had finished eating they left the table with barely a word and rejoined the party.

These parties began with everyone seated around the edge of the dance floor with no-one showing any inclination to set foot on it. The Mestizo MC, who comes along with the hired disco equipment, tries valiantly to cajole people into action. He keeps up a commentary down the microphone about what a marvellous night we are all having, "the joy and excitement of it all", "dancing the night away on such a special occasion". The occasion referred to could be a birthday, a wedding, a christening, Christmas, New Year, even Valentine's Day. Every opportunity was taken, provided funds were sufficient, and usually no more than three weeks went by between one dance and the next. But they all began in the same way. Undeterred by the indifference of his audience and despite all the evidence to the contrary the MC continues with his commentary, but there is nothing he can do except wait until the beer finally takes hold and people at last venture out onto the dance floor.

The dancing usually consisted of a very modest two-step. Most Tsachi couples avoided one another's gaze and only occasionally held hands while they were dancing. Most of the time they looked like they were dancing simply because it's what you do at a dance. Then there were people, usually Mestizo, who danced in order to show off their sex-appeal. They did not always have great rhythm, but they didn't mind about that. They were enthusiastic and energetic all the same and for them dancing was most definitely a contact sport. Then there were a few people,

Tsachi and Mestizo, who danced just because they liked dancing, and these people were generally very good at it. But they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. They came to the fore when salsa, lambada or merengue was played. Once or twice during the night the DJ might dare to put on some reggaeton. This was one of the most popular musical genres in Ecuador, but it rarely made an appearance at a Tsachi party since the dance which accompanies it seems to require maximum body contact. Whenever reggaeton hit the speakers the Tsachila did their best to twist and gyrate without touching each other, while the Mestizo couples thrust their knees into each other's groins and looked like they were about to tear one another's clothes off. A Mestizo dancing reggaeton with a Tsachi girl was a study in cultural incommensurability. The young man could exude as much sex-appeal as he liked and in response he'd get no more than a few stone-faced hip-swivels with at least half a metre clear between the pair of them. But the DJ soon returns to the far less exciting territory of 'musica nacional' and it's back to the endless two-step.

While the dancers did their best to negotiate this odd mixture of Tsachi reserve and Latin ebullience I would sit there on the sidelines desperately trying to keep my alcohol intake to a minimum. Drinking among the Tsachila was an art-form in itself, and it required a certain amount of practice if one was to survive a whole night of partying. My apprenticeship really began on the Day of the Dead, 2nd November, when I found myself having a picnic in the village cemetery and people offered me numerous cups of beer and 'Cristal', a cheap white rum. In each drinking group one person is entrusted with the bottle. He pours a portion of beer into a disposable plastic cup and passes it to the person next to him, who drains the cup and returns it to him. He pours another portion and passes it to the next person, and the cup continues round the circle until the bottle is finished. After a pause the next bottle is opened and shared out, and then the next, until they have all been emptied. Then there is another pause until enough of the group feel moved to contribute to a few more bottles. Someone collects up the money and goes off to buy them and the drinking begins again.

One never asked for a drink. A cup was either thrust into your hand or you went and bought a few bottles and set up your own drinking group. I invariably found myself invited to join one and I was simply expected to drink what I was given, which was

always rather more than I wanted. It was possible to refuse a drink of course, but this seemed to be both antisocial and rather unmanly. Unless one controlled the bottle one had very little say in how much and how quickly one drank. There were, nevertheless, various techniques for limiting one's alcohol consumption without rejecting a drink. First, you could blow off, or pour away, the froth on top of the beer, thus reducing the quantity a little. Then, after drinking you could leave a modest amount in the bottom of the cup, a little present for the next person. If you held the beer in your mouth for a little while before swallowing it, after you had returned the cup you could spit a fair amount of your mouthful onto the ground. This seemed to be acceptable providing it was done with the right kind of uncouth aplomb and an air of supreme indifference. It should look as if you simply could not be bothered with the effort of swallowing. Another strategy was to pass your share on to someone else outside the group. This was generally the prerogative of the man in charge of the bottle who could invite new people to join, but provided you picked the right person such an act of generosity absolved you from the accusation of rejection. This sometimes backfired, however, when you found your generosity immediately rewarded by an even bigger cupful. Women could designate someone else within the group to drink a cup on their behalf, but a man would not do this unless he was desperate, by which time he was probably past caring anyway. I did my best, at parties, to end up in a large group of young men, as they tended to be short on money, and so they put less in the cup each time to make it go round. This was also a little risky, however, since when they were very short they would resort to Cristal instead of beer. Cristal, affectionately known as "Ecuadorian Whisky", cost \$1.50 a bottle and went a lot further than a bottle of Pilsner worth a dollar. It was much stronger, rather unkind to the stomach, and generally to be avoided if at all possible. The only hope one seemed to have of surviving one of these parties still able to stand and string a sentence together was to eat voluminously beforehand and to spend as much time as possible out of range of anyone with a bottle. Pilsner, let alone Cristal, makes short work of an empty stomach.

Nevertheless it was important both to be seen to be drinking and to remain sufficiently *compos mentis* so that come the morning one could get home before collapsing. In contrast to the monumental spectacles of inebriation reported in some parts of lowland South America, very few Tsachila would be encountered prostrate

on the dance floor or by the roadside in the aftermath of a party. Dario often recounted to me great feats of alcohol consumption, but they always concluded with a successful return home to sleep off the intoxication in readiness for the timely resumption of work. His technique, he explained, was to eat well at home before going to the dance and then to avoid sitting down. So long as he stayed on his feet, he said, he remained in control.

The dance was for men in many ways a competition to test one another's endurance and capacity for self-control. Women drank only rarely and Dario on a number of occasions explained that when they did they very quickly became completely uncontrolled, falling over and unable to walk properly. I was unable to obtain a comment on this from Maria. However, although the women remained in general much more sober than their husbands, the atmosphere created by the men's alcohol consumption, the music and the dancing was one of a kind of uneasy revelry which included everyone to some degree. It became easier as the night wore on and the dancing became looser and more energetic, beginning to appear less of an obligation and more like a pleasure. It provided an opportunity to overcome the extreme reserve which held sway in so much of ordinary life.¹ But despite all the alcohol, the air of anxiety never quite left the proceedings. Even at the end of the night, with very few exceptions one could pick out the Tsachila from the Mestizos simply by the stiffness and conservatism of their dancing.

In fact the festivities were almost ritualistic, the dancing in its initial stages appearing more symbolic than real, and though it may seem a lot to read into what at first glance looks like a very ordinary party I think the ritual aspects of the dance are significant. The association of drinking, dancing and ritual is a common one in the ethnographic literature (for some examples see Rivière 1969, 2000; McCallum 2001:129-156, Fausto 2002:672, Gow 2001:121, 165). As I mentioned in the introduction Praet (2006) describes how the consumption of alcohol and the

¹ Gow (2001) gives a strikingly similar description of the role of alcohol in an explicitly ritual context among the Piro with regard to the festivities accompanying a girl's initiation ceremony: "When drunk, Piro people can abandon their quiet everyday demeanour, to laugh loudly, joke, flirt, and generally mess about. This is what they call *meyiwlu*, 'having fun, having a festival'" (p. 165). Here Gow identifies a parallel between the 'drunkenness' induced by beer and the 'drunkenness' induced by the hallucinogens used by shamans.

performance of distinctive games among the Chachi is used in funerary rituals to “do the shape of the dead” temporarily. In this connection he draws attention to the widespread use of alcohol and also of tobacco in South America as transformative substances largely confined to ritual contexts (Praet 2006:216, see also Goldman 1963:247). Although, *prima facie*, the context is very different here I think a similar analysis might be applicable to Tsachi parties. There is no association with the dead in this particular instance so, to borrow Praet’s terminology, whose “shape” might the Tsachila be doing?

Consider the dinner which marks the formal beginning of proceedings. It is peculiar in following so precisely the convention of Ecuadorian meals as opposed to the ordinary Tsachi fare. Not only this but, as I have mentioned, it evokes the manners and atmosphere of the commercial eateries in Santo Domingo. From here one rejoins a dance which is accompanied by the sounds and lights of a disco system operated by an ebullient and professionally enthusiastic MC who bellows down the microphone in fluent Spanish. If Tsachi people at a dance may be said to be “doing a shape” it must be that of your average Mestizo on a night out in town. It is certainly not their own ordinary shape. Almost the entire evening is characterised by marks of a Mestizo style, in the food, the music, the language, the dancing, the clothing, and it is the closest I saw the Tsachila come to approximating the florid sociability of their neighbours. It was a time to meet strangers and potential spouses, Tsachila from other households and *Comunas*, and to strengthen links with Mestizo friends, employees, and business associates.

But florid and uninhibited Tsachila were not the only unusual characters to emerge under cover of darkness and the fug of alcohol. It was in the small hours of the night that one was said to be most likely to encounter an *oko*. And although one was ideally expected to stay at a party until dawn, when the light and tranquillity of the day had reasserted itself, people often began slipping away between two and four in the morning. These drunken night walks seemed to be a particular feature of the lives of young bachelors, who would often go some distance to attend a dance, and then have to find their way back in the dark, decidedly the worse for wear. Such escapades were not for the fainthearted, for it seemed to be a cause of no great surprise to happen upon an *oko* somewhere on the path. However the frequency of

such encounters seemed to do little to allay the terror which they typically inspired. Having left the party thoroughly drunk and hardly able to walk one might thus arrive home at a tearing sprint, completely sober and for a good many days thereafter assiduously avoiding a certain spot in the forest. Such are the diversions of a life which turns out never to be quite as quiet as one would wish.

Summary

I began this chapter by highlighting the quietness and evenness of life in Congoma, and over the course of the preceding pages I have attempted to show how this was the product of an effort to maintain an ideal of tranquillity which was contrasted not with the cacophony of modern urban life, but with an historic and contemporary background of ghosts and monsters. This effort, as I have argued, tacitly informed the whole tenor of social interactions among the Tsachila, which betrayed an anxiety not only about the sources of noise, but also with regard to the clarity and mutuality of auditory and visual perception in general. It was a concern which reflected the uncertainty attaching to appearances as an indication of true identity, one which the Tsachila share with a great many Amerindians, and which is related in large part to the notion that bodily form is highly changeable (Rivière 1994). By tracing the patterns of sound and light, both spatial and temporal, I have endeavoured to show how this type of perceptual anxiety is implicated in the experiences of everyday life, from the mundane to the extraordinary (see Praet 2006), and how it follows the rhythms of day and night. During the mundane activities of the daytime it is tacitly acknowledged in the conventions of visiting and greeting, in the unusual reserve characteristic of almost every social interaction, and in sartorial conventions which exhibit a highly visible ordinariness. In all these instances the clarity and mutuality of auditory and visual perception combines to advertise one's identity as an ordinary human being with good intentions, and to minimise any suggestion that one might instead be a thief, a ghost, an *oko*. It is in the half-light of the jungle and the twilight of dawn and dusk, where clarity of perception is compromised, that *oko* are commonly encountered. They are typically identified by a lack of coherence. They are at once perceptually and socially unavailable, being visible but silent, or audible and invisible, seeing and hearing but unseen and unheard, or seen and heard but unresponsive (see Taylor 1993). Nightfall heralds the advent of the extraordinary,

the suspension of the tranquillity and clarity of the daylight. This is the time for shamanic activity and for revelry. The shaman waits for midnight to go into *oko* and converse with the dead. The Tsachila at dusk go dancing, eating and drinking their way into an approximation of a Mestizo fiesta. The possibility of a terrifying encounter awaits them on the journey home and the noise of *Wela oko*, the ever-shifting chorus of an ancient ghost, resounds in the darkness.

IV. The Dead and Other Creatures: ancestral accounts

What are *oko*? As I went around the village asking this question I found that there were at least three ways in which it could be answered. There were the reports of personal encounters on the one hand and on the other the occasional testimonies of shamans from their experiences “in *oko*” (*okobi*), both of which were mentioned in the previous chapter. But there were also accounts, called *kwenta*, about things that had happened ‘más antes’. The word *kwenta* seems to be a straightforward borrowing from Spanish; a Tsafiki rendering of ‘cuento’ (a story or tale) for which I encountered no other translation.¹ People sometimes talked of *matuto kwenta*, which is to say *kwenta* of ‘a long time ago’ (*matuto* is translated ‘hace mucho tiempo’ by Moore 1956), but more often they simply called them *oko kwenta* or, when they were telling stories about animals, *animali kwenta* (another borrowing from Spanish). These were not distinct categories of *kwenta* uniformly or consistently invoked so much as occasional descriptive tags and the term *kwenta* on its own was sufficient to indicate that the story being told did not belong to one’s own experience or that of one’s family and friends; it was something heard from someone else, widely known, and concerning a time ‘más antes’. Why there should be no autochthonous name in Tsafiki for such accounts is an intriguing question. The same is the case for the Chachi among whom such stories are called *tinbu kuinda* (‘what is told about the past’) (Praet 2006:46-47). According to Praet *tinbu* in all likelihood comes from the Spanish ‘tiempo’ and *kuinda* from ‘cuenta’ (pers. comm. 30 Sep 2012). Despite their apparently borrowed nomenclature the *kwenta* constitute one of the most distinctive and accessible components of Tsachi common knowledge. These are stories which were typically passed on by grandparents to their grandchildren and they gave the notion of *oko* much of its collective and imaginative valence. Nevertheless, in the

¹ Ventura cites two uses for the Tsafiki word *kuwenta* (or *kwenta*), one corresponding to the Spanish ‘cuenta’ as I have described above and the other indicating a similarity of appearance. In the latter sense, for example, it is used to distinguish father (*apa*) from father-in-law (*apa kuwenta*, “like a father”). Similarly it is used to refer to the many instances of metamorphosis depicted in the *kwenta*. The various animals and other creatures who take on Tsachi form in these stories are referred to as *tsachi kuwenta* – “as if Tsachi” or “appearing as Tsachi”. Ventura observes that a very similar pair of usages also applies to the Quichua words *kuwenta* and *kuwentana/kuwintana* (meaning ‘the same as’ and ‘speak, recite’ respectively). She suggests that these may be examples of old hispanisations introduced into Tsafiki via Quichua, although this cannot be said with certainty since the language used in the sierra in pre-Inca times may have been of the same language family as Tsafiki (Ventura 2012:67, 67 n. 5).

course of my fieldwork I found that they existed in a certain tension with contemporary accounts. On the one hand they presented a picture of *oko* which was very different from the manner in which they were encountered in everyday life. And yet at the same time these two poles of experience rolled into one another in such a way that it was impossible to draw a clear distinction between them. The account of how I became acquainted with them in fieldwork will serve to illustrate this.

I first came across *oko* while playing with the village children. We had discovered that I could do an impression of a monster, and they would entreat me constantly to regale them with it. “Do a monster”, ‘¡Haga monstrito!’¹ they begged, until I ran after them roaring, arms flailing, shoulder-length hair thrashing around my face, and making the most frightening grimace I could manage. ‘¡Haga monstrito! ¡Haga monstrito!’. The little ones, three or four years old, who still spoke very little Spanish would cry “*oko, oko*” and when I asked one of the older girls what this was she explained that it meant ‘monstrito’ [*sic*]. Once they knew that I understood this, all the children used the two words interchangeably. “Haz *oko*”, they said, “Do *oko*”; “Vamos a jugar monstrito”, “Let’s go play monster”; “*Oko, oko*, no me coges, no me coges”, “you can’t catch me, you can’t catch me”.

Later I asked the same girl what *oko* were like and she repeated that they were monsters and added that they went about like people, but any more than this she was either unable or unwilling to tell me. I asked her if she had seen one and she said she had not, and when I asked her and her cousin if they knew any stories about them they said no. However, as our games developed it became apparent that *oko* had a taste for human blood. That was why they chased humans and why humans fled from them and very soon the children’s entreaties included the phrase ‘chupa mi sangre’, “suck my blood”, alternately employed as an exhortation and a taunt with which to coax an often worn-out monster into action.

However, when I asked Dario about *oko* the phenomena he initially described were very different from the blood-sucking monsters of the children’s games. You can bump into *oko* in the forest, he told me. You might hear a see-saw whistle or a shout,

¹ “Do the/a monster!” The Spanish word is in fact “monstruo” but the children always said “monstrito”.

and then not see anyone. Or sometimes you see a figure a long way off but cannot see their face and when you try to get a better look it is as if they fall down and they disappear from view. Or you might hear a snatch of conversation as if some people close by are talking, but when you try to listen more closely there is silence. They don't like you to hear what they're saying. These are *oko*, he told me. In the house they show up when everyone has gone to bed as a rattling or tapping in the kitchen or a knocking on the door, and when you go to look there is no-one there. You encounter them when someone in the family has died or is going to die. They are the soul going out of the body, he explained, "el alma saliendo del cuerpo". Years ago they were more common, Dario told me, particularly when a powerful or famous shaman died, but now, he said, one hardly sees them. People say that they used to show up like animals, lions and tigers, but not anymore. He told me how he and his wife used the threat of *oko* to scare their younger children into behaving, to stop them fighting each other or to get them to go to bed. "Aquí viene el cucu" they would say, "Here comes the cucu", and the children would be frightened into motionless silence. Cucu or cuco is a word from the local Spanish referring to an evil spirit or monster. Among the Tsachila it was sometimes used synonymously with *oko*.

Dario then began telling me about *okokela*, a word for which he tried and failed to think of a Spanish translation. I later learnt that *kela* was the Tsafiki for jaguar, or 'tigre' in the local Spanish. *Okokela* might be rendered "jaguar *oko*" in English, but the Spanish '*oko del tigre*' seems to express a somewhat closer relationship between jaguars and *okokela* than was suggested by people's accounts of them. What Dario described to me was a small humanlike creature which people sometimes produce when they are about to die, and it appears in the forest. Not everyone makes an *okokela* when they die, he explained, only certain families. They have all the parts of a human body, only in miniature. The face, according to his indications, was about two or three inches across and the rest of the body in proportion to this. The only thing it lacked was hair. It was completely bald, he said, apart from a kind of fluff on its head which he likened to cotton or bread mould, and described as 'medio negrito', "blackish". The creature builds for itself a little corral of sticks around a central stick or trunk and here it sits for two or three days until a jaguar of the opposite sex comes and carries it off into the forest and eats it. About five years previously he saw the

stick formation of an *okokela*'s corral in the forest, but he had never seen the creature itself. His aunt, he said, reported having seen them several times when her dogs had discovered one and she had arrived to see the little creature being torn to pieces. An uncle of his, he added, came across one when he was out hunting one night. He was sitting on a tree trunk waiting for 'guanta'¹ when he heard a rustling beside him, and turning the torch in that direction he saw the small bald face of an *okokela* staring back at him. The creature covered its face with its arm in embarrassment — they are very shy, according to Dario — and his uncle had run all the way home without stopping.

As my fieldwork progressed I heard many other accounts of *okokela*. One lady who I asked about them told me of an occasion when her cousin had just died and she had gone to the kitchen early in the morning to prepare breakfast and found a series of tiny little footprints in the ash of the hearth, and little mounds of ash piled up as if someone had been playing with it. I found that almost everyone I spoke to knew something about *okokela* and had at one time or another seen the distinctive little clearings in the forest which were attributed to them. Most could tell me the names of one or two people who had purportedly seen the creatures themselves, but very few admitted to a personal encounter.² I also heard more and more stories about strange elusive figures and noises in the forest, of unusual animals purported to be manifestations of blood-sucking red *oko*, and of encounters with the *oko* of dead people who disturbed the living, or appeared to their surviving relatives to give advice or bring a warning.

Once I had learnt that a blood-sucking monster could be called an *oko*, that certain noises and apparitions deserved a similar appellation, and that death brought them forth from people in a seemingly bizarre variety of forms, I embarked upon a series of interviews in the hope of getting some kind of handle on these creatures. However, as I went round the village asking for accounts of *oko* people would

¹ 'Guanta' is the local Spanish name for a species of large rodent which is a very popular game animal throughout lowland Ecuador, commonly called agouti in English.

² Praet (2006) describes a similar situation, though with respect to very different creatures, among the Chachi. Although few of Praet's interlocutors reported actually bumping into a 'Ferocious Indian' many of them told of having seen evidence of their activities, strange footprints etc. in the forest (Praet 2006:77-78).

frequently offer to tell me ‘cuentos de los mayores’, “stories of the elders”, especially if they felt that their own experiences were not very substantial or interesting. I had already heard one or two such ‘cuentos’ from Dario, and initially they seemed to me to be very remote from everyday life.

Then one afternoon I went to interview a lady who I had been told knew a lot about *oko*. She was in her mid-forties and spoke very little Spanish. I asked her to tell me about any encounters she had had with *oko*, and she answered my questions hesitantly in a mixture of disjointed Spanish and Tsafiki with her daughter-in-law translating occasionally. What emerged was a very strange story indeed, which I found difficult to piece together. After about twenty minutes her son intervened, asked if I could stop the recorder, and explained that his mother was not very good at Spanish and was very reserved even in Tsafiki. She had told the story all in the wrong order, he said. He asked what I was studying and I explained that I was looking for stories of real-life experiences of *oko* so that I could compare them and write a thesis about them. I told him about some of the accounts that I had already collected. Then he explained the nature of his mother’s experience which was quite different to any of these. He suggested that we re-record it after he had talked it through with her to get the narrative clear.

And so we began again at the beginning. The lady had been born and brought up in Naranjo, the most isolated of the Comunas. Her father had already died, and her mother later died in childbirth along with the newborn, leaving her and her three elder brothers orphaned and living alone in a traditional Tsachi house in the middle of the forest. This would have been around 1971. She was nine, she told me, and her eldest brother was seventeen. Their nearest relatives were not interested in looking after them, and they were left with nothing, no lamps, candles or even matches to make a fire. They had to live on whatever they could find in the forest. After a three-day wake her mother had been buried in the cemetery at San Miguel, a good day’s walk away. And three days later she came back. She began approaching at four or five in the afternoon and by nightfall she was with her children in the house. Every night after that she returned in the same way. She appeared as she was before she died, but she had long, long hair and her body was cold to the touch. She would tell them that she wasn’t dead, that she wanted to come back, and she would admonish

them for not having cooked properly. She pushed the boys to one side so that she could lie down next to her daughter and she would embrace her and touch her with her hair. But her body was cold, the lady told me, and she would lie next to her mother motionless with fear. And come the morning she would be gone. This continued over a period of about four months, she said, until finally an uncle of theirs took them to live with him in another Comuna.

Throughout her account the lady referred to this manifestation not as her mother but as *ayanchi oko*, “mother’s *oko*”, and *ayan puyan oko*, “dead mother *oko*”. What was returning from the grave, though it looked like her mother, was an *oko* and, it would seem, no longer a proper human being. At the same time her son, who was now translating for me, was keen that I should understand that what his mother was describing was not a soul or spirit, but body and soul together. Her mother, it would appear had climbed out of the grave, and it was her reanimated corpse which was haunting her children and which was identified as *puyan oko*. Her son went on to explain that before, back in the fifties, this is how the dead would generally return, with body and soul together. They would ‘resusitar’ and come back to their family three days after being buried. It was not like today when only the spirit comes back. According to his mother, in those days the majority of the dead returned from the grave like this. It was not until the shamans managed to find a way to “make the body die” that the dead rested in peace and only their spirits returned. The solution they discovered was to pass an earthworm through the mouth of the corpse and out the nose.

A couple of days later I interviewed a man of 65 who I had been told had a whole host of *oko* stories, some of which were supposed to be very frightening. As it turned out these were all stories that he had heard from his grandparents and he denied ever having seen an *oko* himself. So we began with the oldest of these stories which concerned a grandmother who died. When her daughter and son-in-law went out to the farm to work, she came back to the house and looked after her three small grandchildren. She cooked, and washed the clothes, and would leave again before the parents returned. The mother and father, coming home to find the housework done and dinner prepared, couldn’t work out what was going on. One day the *oko* noticed that the children were covered in mud and decided to give them a bath. She

heated up some water in a huge clay pot and when it was boiling she took the two youngest children and threw them into it. The eldest child managed to escape and ran to fetch his parents, but by the time they arrived at the house his siblings were both dead in the boiling pot. So they went to where the grandmother had been buried, found the hole where she had come out and lit a fire in it to kill her. And the *oko* cried, “my house is burning, my house is burning”. And they stoked the fire until she was dead.

This story was in some ways reminiscent of the account that the lady from Naranjo had given me about her mother and so I asked this man whether the story he told me concerned real life or was a legend, ‘una leyenda’. He said that it was a ‘leyenda’, a story, a ‘cuenta’. When he was a child, he said, before television and radio, he and all his cousins would go to his grandfather’s house in the afternoon to listen to these stories. They would sit on balsa wood benches, their grandfather in a hammock, while he told them, “This is what happened before.” “This is a story of what happened a long time ago” he would say.

“Was it a story of something that happened?” I asked.

“Yes” said my interviewee.

“Or is it invented?”

“Well, this I don’t know”, he said, “but I think they happened. That’s what they say. It happened like this.”

Once I realised that a *kwenta* was not simply a made-up story (and I should have known better, of course) I began collecting more of them. I found that everyone knew about these *puyan oko* from “before” who would climb out of the grave, body and all, and return to their families. I heard several other versions of a “shamans’ conference” at which they finally worked out how to make dead bodies stay in the grave. According to many people the earthworm, often the mother earthworm, was made to pass through the heart of the corpse, and some people said that she had to pass through the ears, so that the *oko* wouldn’t be able to hear the weeping of the

bereaved. Every now and again I heard another story of a contemporary bodily apparition reminiscent in certain respects of these ancestral accounts. Most of them, however, had been passed down the generations for so long that no-one knew exactly when or where they had occurred, and the names of the protagonists had been forgotten. Furthermore, though there were some similarities, most notably in the account given to me by the lady from Naranjo, in general the ancestral accounts of *puyan oko* were different from the first-hand experiences of *oko* with which I began my interviews. However, as I have illustrated above, when I asked if they might have been invented, if they might not be real, but just stories, people almost invariably insisted that they were true, although they happened a long time ago. They must have happened, they said, otherwise there would be no story.

Everyone I spoke to considered these stories to be accounts of real events which they said occurred maybe two, three, five hundred years ago or more, and which have been passed down the generations so that they might not be forgotten. Those who told them to me said that their grandparents had passed them on so that they would know about what had happened “before”, and it was the loss of this memory that they lamented in their own children, who were more interested in television and radio than their grandparents’ stories. Apart from the fact that they were entertaining in their own right, rather thrilling, and frequently compared to the electronic diversions of the younger generation, their principal value was seen to be a historical one, resting precisely on the assumption that they were true. That is to say that although they were not the personal experiences of those who related them, they were regarded as the experience of someone, albeit reported third-, fourth-, fifth-, tenth-hand, and this was often emphasised in their retelling. For instance, when I asked the gentleman mentioned above whether the dead grandmother of the story returned ‘en cuerpo mismo, o—?’ (“in the body itself, or—?”), he replied:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Si, en cuerpo mismo, pero como persona, como abuela misma. | Yes, in the body itself, but like a person, like the grandmother herself. |
| DD: Aha. | Aha. |
| Si. Pero no estab- muy bien, buena. Así [<i>se indica con la mano a los</i> | Yes. But she wasn’t very well, good, Like this [<i>he indicates with his hand the parts</i> |

*partes de su cuerpo mismo] son
diente estab un poco podrida, dice,
aquí, nari- [se indica], por aca un
poco , así da- brazo adentro [se
indica el axila]. Por aquí [se indica a
la rodilla] así dice que estab-
podrida dice.*

*of his own body]
her teeth were a little rotten, [they] say,¹
here, the nose [he indicates], here a
little, like this – the arm inside [he
indicates his armpit]. Here [he indicates his
knee] like this [they] say that she was
rotten [they] say.*

DD: Aha. [El: Aha] En la, la rodilla.

Aha. [Aha.] On the, the knee.

Si, en la rodilla. Aquí parte. Así. Así
dice que era. Tonce otra mas
grandecito él da-, él visto bien todo
eso.

Yes, on the knee. This bit. Like this. Like this
[they] say that it was. So the other
bigger [child] he -, he saw clearly all
this.

DD: Aha.

Aha.

Así dice que era.

Like this [they] say it was.

From such experiential references, of which more examples will be seen below, it appears that these stories entered into people's reflections about the world on a similar basis to the first-hand accounts they heard from family, friends and neighbours where the same concern is evident regarding the details of what has been seen and heard and by whom. Thus, as Ventura has pointed out, in contrast to some Amerindian mythologies, in Tsachi *kwentas* "the individual does not disappear from the narrative" in favour of generic figures (Ventura 2011:69). Instead, many of them retain the kinds of personal idiosyncratic details and mundane reference points which make their protagonists recognisable as people who could indeed have been someone's friend, neighbour or relative not so long ago.

Furthermore, while people had plenty of explanations for why the dead do not come back in quite the same way now as they did then, their ideas on this subject were rarely of an axiomatic character. That is to say that in general they posited no

¹ Here and throughout the following transcriptions the reader may note the frequency of my interviewees' usage of the words "dice", and "se dice" (literally '[he/she] says' and 'one says'). This is how my Tsachi interlocutors generally approximated the hearsay evidential of Tsafiki when speaking Spanish, thereby usually distinguishing only two levels of evidentiality: "he/she says" and the generic "they say". However, they very often omitted both the Spanish pronoun and the verb-ending, relying on the context to convey which of these was meant. In my English translations I have therefore made a judgement about which sort of evidentiality is implied and given the pronouns in parenthesis when these are not explicit in the Spanish.

fundamental alteration in the nature of the cosmos, but appealed to changes of a lesser order. Thus, as we saw, I was often told that the shamans managed to effect the death of the corpse by passing an earthworm through it. Another very common explanation given was that the petrol fumes produced by cars, trucks, and motorbikes helped to keep *oko* away, because they found them repugnant. Cigarette smoke, as we shall see later, was thought to have a similar effect. People often also saw a connection between the retreat of *oko* and increasing population density, though they were never clear about precisely how this worked. Almost everyone made some mention of the arrival of the Christian missionaries, and it didn't seem to matter whether they were Protestant or Catholic. They had brought the word of God to the Tsachila, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of baptism, which now protected them from the worst manifestations of *oko*. I was often told that good people, baptised people, generally didn't produce *oko* when they died. Most people whom I questioned on the subject mentioned all or a number of these explanations as together helping to account for why the manifestations of *oko* were different and less prevalent now than they had been in the past. However, it may be noted that none of them amounted to a definitive change in the way the world worked. There was no guarantee that the earthworm would always come; there were still plenty of places in the forest from which petrol fumes were absent and plenty of uninhabited spots; there remained bad and unbaptised people whose *oko* were still a potential threat.

Thus the 'más antes' of the *kwenta* cannot be said to be a distinct kind of time, a different era or mythic period. It was simply an indication of the temporal position of past events relative to one another and to the present with which they exist at least theoretically in ontological continuity. The time within one's own memory when one's relatives kept pigs, the time before kerosene lamps or electricity when people lit their houses with candles made from rubber, the time when corpses would return from the grave, these were all 'más antes', whether it be during one's own childhood, in the lifetime of one's grandparents or a hundred or more years ago. The kind of timescale denoted in each case varied from person to person depending on the particularities of their own experience. Thus, the lady from Naranjo, when she said that 'más antes' most of the dead came back from the grave like her mother, had suggested that this might have been fifty or a hundred years ago. One of my evangelical friends, on the other hand, attributing a contemporary absence of certain

similar phenomena to the effects of the birth of Christ, suggested a time ‘*más antes*’ of several centuries remove from the present. This was as close as I came to finding any definitive dividing line between ‘*más antes*’ and ‘*ahora*’ and it was couched in unambiguously Christian terms. Generally the relation between the two was vague, debatable and open-ended, subject to the constant possibility of revision in the light of one’s own experience.

However, as we shall see below, it was not only the dead who, ‘*más antes*’, used to intrude so forcefully into human society. There was a time when animals also did so. Notably my interviewees regarded this as being much more emphatically a thing of the past. Such a period when species boundaries were fluid, or sometimes barely discernible, is a common feature of oral history in lowland South America (Viveiros de Castro 1998:471) and many Amerindians in fact appear not to share the confidence of my Tsachi interlocutors that it has come to an end. Several ethnographers explicitly describe animal-human metamorphoses as occurring not only in myths but also in the contemporary lives of their informants (e.g. Rivière 1994:256; Praet 2006:99-103; Vilaça 2005:451). As I described in the introduction they are the kinds of observations which have inspired the controversial perspectivist formulations of Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2005), Vilaça (2002, 2005), Lima (1999) and others. They propose that what we find in many Amerindian cosmologies is the notion that all the ‘persons’ in the universe (certain kinds of animals, plants, spirits, the souls of the dead) perceive themselves as humans, live in houses, eat human food, drink beer just as humans do, but that what they perceive as such is differentiated by their bodily capacities (Viveiros de Castro 1998:478). Thus:

[...] being people in their own sphere, non-humans see things *as* ‘people’ do. But the things *that* they see are different: what to us is blood, is maize beer to the jaguar; what to the souls of the dead is a rotting corpse, to us is soaking manioc; what we see as a muddy waterhole, the tapirs see as a great ceremonial house.

(Viveiros de Castro 1998:478)

It should be noted that this “seeing as” refers not to conceptual equivalences of the kind that might prompt us to say that the blood drunk by the jaguar is analogous to the maize beer of humans. Rather, according to Viveiros de Castro, we are talking about literal perceptions (*ibid*:470). We must remember also that if, according to

such a perspectivist model, all the different kinds of persons see their own houses, food, kin etc. in the same way as humans do, then there is only ever one correct way of seeing things:

If we, for example, began to see the worms that infest a corpse as grilled fish, like vultures do, then we could conclude that there was something very wrong with us. For this would signify that we were turning into vultures, which normally is not part of anybody's plan: it is the sign of illness or worse. Perspectives must be kept separate.

(Viveiros de Castro 2005:53; see also Vilaça 2005)

We will see how in the *kwenta* it is precisely such instances of perceptual incompatibility associated with different bodily capacities, especially with culinary and eating habits, which distinguish both the dead and animals from living human beings. In such a schema we will see how the dead align with animals as another species of person (that is to say another society) with its own distinctive bodily capacities. The notion of 'living human beings' thus emerges as a tautology. To borrow a phrase from Viveiros de Castro again:

[...] death is a bodily catastrophe which prevails as differentiator over the common 'animation' of the living and the dead.

(Viveiros de Castro 1998:482.)

With this in mind let us now explore what may be learnt about the dead from the 'más antes' of the *kwenta*. In the following analyses, I will initially proceed by way of a series of analogies and contrasts with my own experience (see discussion in the Introduction). I will refer back to the general concerns and underlying assumptions of the kinds of ghost stories I am used to hearing and retelling among friends and acquaintances in England and I hope I may presume upon sufficient common ground with my reader as to include them in this process. My purpose in taking this approach is twofold: First of all to make the apparently strange as familiar as possible until we begin to recognise it in our own experience and in this new light to see the strangeness of our own familiar assumptions about such stories; secondly, I wish to keep the discussion as much as possible in the discursive register of common knowledge so that we are comparing like with like.

Stories about the dead

This time we shall begin on a moonlit night. The same elderly gentleman, who told me the story of the dead grandmother who boiled her grandchildren, on our second meeting related the following:¹

Some time ago when a grandmother died, so, there remained, like this, the daughter,— the daughter, the granddaughter, all of them there, and the son-in-law, and they said that on a moonlit night, they say that she comes out like this, to work, to look for fish, to wash clothes. And so— The river, [they] say, was very near like this. So, on a moonlit night, it was perfectly clear, so someone was appearing in the river, washing. So, there the daughter saw her: “There she is washing”, she says that she is washing, “My mother is washing in the river, washing clothes.” There [she] says, in the sun[shine] of the moon, in the moonlit night. So with this she says that the clothes dry, this *oko*. So there it was hung out to dry. And the next [or another] day [she] went to look but the dead one wasn’t there.² Already she had gone. Already she wasn’t there. And another time, the next [or another] night [she] was watching there and there she was again. And then, [they] say, she arrived at the house, [they] say, this *oko*. She called to the daughter, said that, “I am walking about here. You’re not washing clothes. Give me clothes to wash!” So, she says that the sun is shining well. So, it is good for washing, and the clothes dry, she says, very quickly, with this sun, she says. But it was a moonlit night, the moon was there, quite bright. So, like this, [they] say, she went about, she went about. Then, [they] say, she came and there she said that— again, in the night, another night she had come there to say “I am going fishing. Give me a basket.” —She used to have a little basket.— “Lend me a little basket. I’m going fishing.” So, then— then, [the daughter] says, “Where are you going to fish?” Then [the *oko*] says that there is a deep pool, there, down-river. “There I am going to go and fish”, she said, “to catch ‘campeche’”³ And so, then the daughter gave her a basket. She went. And— she went. So, this [*oko*] got hold of these— There were trunks,⁴ a lot of rotten trunks, dry trunks, felled there for some time like this. So, there, there tends to be⁵ this centipede. You know this centipede don’t you? It’s walking, it has a hundred legs, [they] say. *Mamapini*,⁶ this one. This, [they] say, there was a lot of them

¹ The following paragraph consists of a close translation from an interview I conducted in Spanish. Here I have edited out my own contributions to the conversation, which were few and brief and did not alter the flow of the story. I have removed one or two repetitious hesitations on the part of the story-teller, but at the same time I have endeavoured to convey something of his distinctive style and rhythm of speech.

² “...no estaba *puyan*.”

³ ‘Campeche’ is a local Spanish name for one of the species of fish found in the rivers of that area.

⁴ “...Había palo, bastante palo podrido...” My Tsachi interlocutors tended to use the Spanish word ‘palo’ for tree, stick, branch, trunk, wood, in both the plural and singular, in the same way that they used the Tsafiki word *chide* for all these things.

⁵ “...allf sabe estar...”

⁶ *Mamapini* is the Tsafiki name for a type of centipede which is extremely common on the edge of the forest and in the clearings around houses. They are about 4-5 inches long, highly distinctive in appearance, and they have a reputation for being poisonous and causing considerable pain if stepped upon with bare feet. They are a dull metallic grey in colour, armour-plated, and if poked will roll themselves into a tight ball and squirt a small amount of venom within a range of about 4-5 inches. When rolled into a ball like this they can be kicked out of the house or off the patio like little wheels, but they often met their death instead at the hands of adults or children armed with a stick or handy shoe. *Mamapini* translates literally as ‘grandmother’ + ‘snake’, so: “Grandmother-snake” or “snake’s grandmother”.

over there, so she had collected them, [they] say.¹ Full, this, this basket. [They] say it was moving even.² So, there, calling, she says, to the daughter that “I caught a lot of ‘campechi’, come and see.” And the daughter didn’t go out. So, [they] say that she was tired, because of this it was. [The daughter said] “There, go ahead and eat it, cooking.” So, she says that, “In which pot shall I cook?” So, she says, “Over there there is a pot, go ahead and take it and cook.” And [the *oko*] cooked these *mamapini*. And she ate them, [they] say, there all of it she took out, like this. A large amount of this, like, the skin, little shells, there it is, piled up there. And when the sun rises, already she wasn’t there, but this was strewn about there, [they] say. And the pot was left there, [they] say. There, still, there was this *mapili [sic]*.³ And this pot she threw away, says the daughter, from fear. One sees that it is very ugly this. One cannot eat it. Like this [they] say it happened. So, there they [the *oko*] have come like this. And again, another night she came. And there she said again, “Again I can go and catch *kere*.”⁴ And there she went another time. So, then they had to leave the pots hidden, all of the pots hidden. And “I can’t eat there”, she says, “because it is already rising.” So, only in the night she walked. And there it was left, [they] say, all of this, this [*tasake??*] [they] say. There, full, again it was left, alive the lot, [they] say. This *mamapini* was there full, [they] say. So [the *oko*] didn’t eat that night. This pot, from fear, [they] say, [the daughter] threw out a long way from there. Like this [they] say that this *oko* does, like this she came some time ago. So, from then, she would tend to come, [they] say.⁵ So, so that she would not come, that is the *ponela*,⁶ that is the medicine man as one says, this *pone*. So, then— Always dead ones were doing bad things from time to time.⁷ So, this *oko* coming there, another [*oko*], another [*oko*], another [*oko*], another *oko* cooked the son.⁸ Now this, this *oko* ate *mamapini*, and ends up damaging the pot like this. And— well, damage? It isn’t damaged, but out of fear— this *mamapini* was looking very ugly,— so she threw away the pot. So the *ponela* did— [they] say that one has to do in this manner so that they don’t return. If not, this is going to carry on coming and coming, this *oko* when one dies. So, so that it won’t return one has to do a certain thing. So, there, gathered together like this, they collected some money among the family, like this, everyone. So, then [they] said that this *otonkoro*,⁹ when one buries someone there it ends up buried.¹⁰ So, one has to make this *otonkoro* go across, they say, the really big *otonkoro* there, the biggest. This

¹ “Entonce, el cogido, dice [*sic*].”

² “Dice que movía, pues.”

³ Here I think he is referring to *mamapini* (see note previous page)

⁴ *Kere* is the Tsafiki name for ‘campeche’ (see note previous page).

⁵ “Entonce, [*sic*] de ahí ya, sabía venir, dice...”

⁶ This is the plural form of the Tsafiki word *pone* which my Tsachi interlocutors variously translated into Spanish as ‘chaman’ (shaman), ‘brujo’ (witch) ‘curandero’ (medicine man).

⁷ “Siempre hacía mal *puya* a veces.” *Puyan* is a Tsafiki word which may be translated ‘el muerto’, ‘dead one’. In connection with *oko* it is often used interchangeably with the virtual homonym ‘*piyan*’ which is translated ‘perdido’, ‘lost’ or ‘lost one’. Very few people remarked upon this, and those who did regarded the conflation of these two words as erroneous. Nonetheless there is a substantial connotive overlap between the two, since the *oko* of a dead person is identified by the shaman ‘in *oko*’ as a *tenka* (heart) which has lost its place among the living. Thus, a dead person is in a very real sense a lost person. A little later in this story the narrator makes precisely this connection when he identifies the newly killed *oko*, that “no longer comes out” as being finally lost.

⁸ I think this is a reference to the story this man told me (mentioned earlier) about the dead grandmother *oko* who cooked her grandchildren in a pot of boiling water.

⁹ *Otonkoro* (Tsafiki), here referring to a species of large earthworm common to the region. In my travels round the village I once came across one making its way along the pot-holed waterlogged main road. It was about 3 feet long and easily an inch across. Bruce Moore translates *o’toncoro* with the Spanish ‘lombriz’ (Moore 1956).

¹⁰ “...esa *otonkoro* cuando entierra ahí queda enterrado, no.”

[they] say that one has to make go across here, in the heart from below to cross and again to cross, so, and there one dies. So, this *otonkoro* there, and so there the heart dies, it kills it, [they] say, this *oko*. And so from there, from there it no longer comes out, there no more, there it is lost already. So this *pone* said like this one has to do this, this way so that it no longer returns, if not it is going to come like this, it is going to do very bad things there.

This is a compelling story, like all good ghost stories, and it is easy to imagine, as a child, sitting enthralled at your grandpa's knee as he recounts each successive detail. Nevertheless, in the ghost stories I am used to hearing and retelling in England, much of the interest of a narrative depends on the suspense associated with an unidentifiable or inexplicable manifestation and the increasing fear at the prospect of its ultimate discovery. In the above, on the other hand, although a certain amount of suspense attends each new development, the theme of the narrative is not the identification of the dead grandmother, but the strange things she does. It is these, especially her disgusting culinary habits, that are explicitly identified as the elements of interest and the source of fear. The story is concerned not with the family's identification of the ghost— there is no doubt that the daughter recognises her dead mother correctly— instead what is at issue is the failure of the ghost herself to properly identify the moon and the centipedes. The *kwenta* in fact presents us with two vivid inversions. First “the dead one” returns in the moonlight and insists on washing clothes, claiming that the sun is shining. Then she says she is going fishing for ‘campeche’ and comes back with a basket-full of poisonous centipedes which she cooks and eats. When the sun begins to rise again she hurries away.

The connection which is explicitly made in this story between the dead and the night-time echoes that identified by Carneiro da Cunha in the Krahó case, to which I referred in the introduction. There she describes exactly this identification of the moon as the sun of the dead in the context of a thorough-going inversion by the deceased of almost every aspect of the society of the living (Carneiro da Cunha 1981).¹ Among the Tsachila I did not find such an elaborate and systemic account of

¹ A strikingly similar inversion of day and night in parallel with that of the living and the dead (and humans and spirits) is described by Kopenawa & Albert for the Yanomani (2003:68, cited by Viveiros de Castro 2007:161-162). There are hints of it elsewhere in Amerindian ethnography, but I have been unable to ascertain whether these are anything more than hints or precisely how widespread they may be. Nevertheless, in more general terms, it has been frequently noted by ethnographers

the society of the dead as Carneiro da Cunha gives. Nevertheless we can clearly see, in the foregoing account of the dead grandmother, elements of the same kind of inversion of the ordinary sociality of the living. Furthermore, I would suggest that if we cast our minds back to the previous chapter we can see just how such an inversion, particularly with respect to its spatiotemporal dimension, is suggested by the implicit associations established by the circadian structuring of sound, light and sociality. Ordinary human activity unfolds during the daytime, and gives way at night to the noises and terrors attributed to the dead who, by virtue of their perceptual and communicative unavailability, are beyond the pale of human social interaction. In the above story we see these same associations vividly highlighted and taken to their logical conclusion.

There are, however, several *oko kwenta* that describe the dead returning during the day, the story of the dead grandmother with which we began being an example. She comes back in the daytime while her daughter and son-in-law are away on their farm. Almost everyone who admitted to knowledge of *oko kwenta* was familiar with some version of this story, and I heard very similar accounts involving a dead mother. The consequences were not always quite so disastrous as to involve infanticide. In every such story that I heard about a deceased mother, and often also in the case of a dead grandmother, the husband or the daughter and son-in-law would eventually double-back one day on the journey to work so that they could hide next to the house and watch what was happening. Then they would see the children beginning to cry and wailing for their mother or grandmother, calling for her until she came back from the grave, her hair long and dirty, her nose and armpit and knee already rotting. They saw her cooking, making *ano ila* or preparing soup. But instead of seasoning it with salt she took a handful of the putrefying flesh from her nose and sprinkled that into the food. The concealed observers would then burst out from the bushes and chase her away, perhaps striking the *oko* with a machete, sometimes knocking off a limb or two. And when she returned to the grave her surviving kin lit a fire in it, or poured boiling water down it, in an attempt to kill the *oko* all over

across lowland South America that the society of the dead is presented as an inversion of that of the living (e.g. Taylor 1993:654, Overing 1993, Praet 2006:209)

again and stop her coming back. In a particularly vivid rendition of a story about a dead mother one of my interviewees told it this way:¹

Like this it happened. They said she died leaving two or three little children, like this. So he would go out to work leaving them there and upon his return, he said, there was all the food, already prepared, there it was ready. And a long time passed like this, and a long time passed like this. And he would ask them who it was who was coming and cooking. And the children would say, I myself cooked, we ourselves have cooked. But I think there was another, a smaller child who said, mother came back, like this. Something was said to the father that mother comes back. So, because of this, he says that one day he went to look at the grave. So this grave had a hole that was cleared out,² he says that she wanted to go in and out, in and out, and so it was all swept³ there, all cleared away,⁴ and she had a hole to go out of and enter by. So, there he stayed to wait for it, he thought he would wait for her to see how things were, beside the grave and by the side of the house. So he saw everything. So he went off and when he had gone he says that then she approached, she approached, he says, she approached and then, he says, she was all rotten. And this was what was rotten, the knee and the armpit and the nose. So, he says it was like this. So, she arrived, and then set up the pot to cook. And some time back they always had jungle meat, and he says she took it, but she didn't put salt on it, but this is what he says, that she took some snot and threw that in. This was what she knew. This was for salt, he says, she threw in snot. And so this is what happens. He says she did it like this. So he waited for her to do everything so that he could see how she did it. And there it was that he was stricken with fear, at the point when she took from her nose and threw it in the food. This it was that frightened him. But from this point I don't remember. Someone told me, but— it would be that he made to scare her off, or he went to a medicine man⁵ so that she wouldn't return. So, this is how it was.

This account initially follows the sort of pattern with which I am more familiar from English ghost stories: the unexplained circumstance or event whose ghostly cause is ultimately revealed. The details of the process of discovery are prominent in the narrative, and they include the sort of experiential references which are common to contemporary accounts of *oko*: He went to the grave and looked; he waited by the house to see, etc. Such details contribute to the building of suspense and sense of atmosphere which makes a ghost story at once frightening and credible; the horrific impossibilities of one's imagination begin to ring true. It is this transformation of the unbelievable into the concrete that I think makes for the kind of spine-chilling denouement which we associate with such tales. However, as I have already pointed

¹ The following paragraph consists of a close translation from an interview I conducted in Spanish edited as in the previous example.

² "...trigadito [?]..."

³ "...arrastrado, o sea rastradito..."

⁴ "...limpio..."

⁵ "...curandero..."

out, this was not the pattern of the account of the grandmother who ate the centipedes, concerned as it was not with the establishment of the ghost's concreteness, but with the manner in which she performed certain household chores; and although the present story of the dead mother relates in detail the process of her discovery, the husband is interested in seeing how she cooks rather than ascertaining whether or not a corpse really has climbed from the grave. Again, it is the ghost's culinary habits, more than the fact of its existence, which inspire fear and precipitate the action with which the story concludes. In the first example the ruined pot and the basket of centipedes are what finally persuade the grandmother's family to seek out the shaman, and in the second the narrator explicitly identifies the moment at which the husband observes his wife seasoning the food with handfuls from her rotting nose as the point at which he is stricken with fear and provoked to action. These stories, then, draw the listeners' attention not to the horror of the dead coming back *per se*, but to what they do once they have. Their behaviour is presented as a series of specific inversions or distortions of ordinary life, of the bounds of ordinary sociability, and these are the preoccupations of the *kwenta*. They signal the importance of the difference between the living and the dead, and their dangerous incompatibility. It may be noted in this respect that the implicit assumption underlying these accounts is different from that which motivates English ghost stories. Catherine Howard stalking the gallery of Hampton Court, for example, is terrifying enough simply by virtue of being a supposedly deceased person walking around, and this is all she has to do to contravene the assumed boundary between the living and the dead; her blood-curdling screams merely emphasise the point. These Tsachi stories of the dead grandmother and mother on the other hand proceed from the assumption that the dead do, would, or at least did come back and that some further reason is required to demonstrate why they should not be allowed to do so. The boundary between the living and the dead is thus drawn differently, centring upon the behavioural or perceptual inversions exhibited by the deceased once they have returned and which make it impossible to continue living with them. Furthermore, this boundary is not something which the stories take for granted, but is the point which they set out to demonstrate. The *kwenta* evince a concern, as it were, to prove the depth of a distinction which is not sufficiently apparent and which in the end has to be dramatically enforced by the living protagonists.

There is one further observation to be made, since the difference between the living and the dead in these accounts is not merely behavioural. Although it is the actions of the dead which prove decisive, there is also an obvious transformation in their appearance. Their strange and appalling distortions of normal activities proceed from putrefying bodies. In the stories related above behaviour does not render appearance irrelevant; a physical decay, as it were, accompanies a kind of psychological decay, and the two are intimately related. This point was made particularly clear to me when I asked one of my interviewees why the grandmother put her rotting flesh into the food. The question provoked a more general discussion of the differences between the living and the dead:

Now like this already she is changed, is dead already. This one no longer has life, as in thinking in reality.¹ We have this thinking.² This one now is changing like a *piyan*³ *oko*, she doesn't have sense like us anymore.⁴ She cuts her hand, right. Like, we are not dead. So, this rotten flesh [they] say is like salt. You understand salt right?

*Daniel Dolley: As in pimba?*⁵

As in *pimba*, yes. Thinking that it is *pimba*, but then it isn't. It's that as she is already dead, right, already she has changed. She is not like us anymore. Now humans, we have human [ways, appearance, things ?]. We bathe. This one doesn't bathe anymore, doesn't use soap. This one doesn't bathe anymore. Her hair, [they] say, was really long. Her hair, yes, reaches to here. Like this her hair without being cut until here on the spine.

DD: The middle of the back?

Yes, the middle of the back and this, if it is a woman without bathing. She had, of course, like a skirt, but this also ends up without being washed. She didn't have shoes [...] She didn't have anything, she was just rotten. She didn't have a nose, rotten up to here, right, and hair also really long.

DD: But hair like normal, only really long, or, like damaged?

Damaged as well, her hair also damaged. Like when we bathe our hair ends up smooth, right.

DD: Yes.

¹“...ese ya no tiene vida, como pensamiento en realidad.”

²“...nosotros tenemos ese pensamiento...”

³ As noted in a earlier footnote *piyan* is a Tsafiki word which is translated “perdido”, ‘lost’ or ‘lost one’ and is a virtual homonym of *puyan*, ‘el muerto’, ‘dead one’. In connection with *oko* the two words were often used interchangeably and they exhibited a substantial connotive overlap.

⁴“...ya no tiene como nosotros sentido...”

⁵ *Pimba* is the Tsafiki word for salt.

When one doesn't bathe it becomes kind of toasted, like this hair of a horse. Like this was this one. Like this, like this was this *piyan oko*.

Here the first thing my interviewee observed regarding the difference between the living and the dead was the way they think and perceive: the dead one, having no life, he says, has lost the ability to “think in reality”. Here we may note that the word “reality” is being used not to make a distinction between a real and an unreal state of affairs, between what really is and what only seems to be the case. My interviewee clearly did not mean that the grandmother was not really thinking at all but only appeared to be doing so. What he meant was that she was not thinking properly, that is to say, that she “doesn't have sense like us anymore.” When I asked another of my interviewees for a Tsafiki word for “reality” (‘realidad’) he said:

Tsa, tsapatsa... so ‘real’ is wanting to say *tsapatsa...* I say I am not in reality... I say almost I am not in *tsapatsa*.¹

Bruce Moore consistently transliterates the ‘*ts*’ of Tsafiki as ‘*ch*’ and so *patsa* appears as *pacha* in his dictionary and he translates it as ‘uno mismo’ (“oneself”). *Cha (tsa)* he translates as ‘verdad, verdadero, cierto, común’ (“truth, true, sure, common”). In this regard Ventura writes,

Tsa effectively constitutes a prefix translatable as “true” as in the words *tsakela* (the true *kela*-tiger-, the jaguar, in contrast to other cats), *tsapini* (the true *pini*-snake-, which designates the most dangerous, *Bothrox athrox*), *tsa ano*, (the true plantain, the most common — Plátano dominico in Spanish); it can also be translated as “right/just/exactly” (in *tsaina*, right now; in *tsanke*, just/exactly like this).

(My translation, Ventura 2012:64.)²

Tsa, it may be noted, also appears in Tsachila and Tsafiki which are normally translated as “true people” and “true speaking” respectively and which Ventura suggests, in the light of the examples just given, should be understood as indicating the people of reference, the speech of reference (2012:64-65). So, to say “I am not in

¹ “*Tsa, tsapatsa...* entonces real quiere decir *tsapatsa...* no estoy en realidad digo... casi no estoy en *tsapatsa* digo.”

² Ventura (2012:64):

Tsa constituye efectivamente un prefijo traducible por “verdadero” como en las palabras *tsakela* (el verdadero *kela*-tigre-, el jaguar, por oposición a otros felinos), *tsapini* (la verdadera *pini*-serpiente-, que designa a la más peligrosa, *Bothrox athrox*), *tsa ano*, (el verdadero plátano, el más corriente – Plátano dominico en castellano—); también se puede traducir por “justamente” o “precisamente [*sic*]” (en *tsaina*, justamente ahora; en *tsanke*, justamente así).

reality”, to say “I am not in *tsapatsa*”, is perhaps something akin to claiming that one is not in one’s true self, or to borrow Ventura’s language, that one is not in one’s own position of reference. Here it appears that we have the word “reality” (‘realidad’) being used to designate the sort of thing that Viveiros de Castro and Vilaça might identify as a perspective. The dead grandmother who is not “thinking in reality” is thereby identified as not having the thinking which is proper to the people of reference (i.e. Tsachila). In other words she no longer inhabits their perspective, and as we shall see below this change is intimately connected with changes in her body. As we shall see the processes involved are in fact rather too bodily to be easily assimilated to Praet’s concept of changing “Shape” as a primarily behavioural phenomenon (Praet 2006). But let us stick for the time being with the vocabulary of my Tsachi interlocutor before we attempt to cast things in more theoretical terms.

The dead one is changed, he says, and no longer shares the sense of the living. As he continues we begin to see what this entails. She goes about cutting her hand, neglecting to bathe or launder her clothes, to wash or cut her hair, she doesn’t use soap. Previously in our interview he had also mentioned the deceased’s overgrown fingernails. Each sign of bodily decay is related back to some important element of personal grooming in which the dead one fails. And so it begins to become apparent that her dishevelled aspect, and even her physical decomposition, are in fact the result of an unthinking self-neglect. She does not know anymore how to maintain her appearance and is thus literally falling apart. Her failure to bathe, wash her clothes, dress properly and look after her hair are all included in a list of the things she lacks whose concluding flourish, after discalceation, is supplied by missing body parts:

“She didn’t have shoes [...] She didn’t have anything, she was just rotten. She didn’t have a nose, rotten up to here.”

Rotting even as she does not wash herself, disintegrating even as she cuts herself: the horrifying appearance of these dead mothers and grandmothers begins to look more like the unwitting self-destruction of a leper than the spontaneous decomposition of a corpse. Being incapable of “thinking in reality”, lacking the “sense” or “feeling”

possessed by the living, it is as if the dead one is as morbidly insensible of the demands of self-preservation as the Hansen's sufferer.¹

This might seem a strange comparison to make, but it in fact reflects an understanding of personhood which, I would suggest, is key to these accounts of the dead, and which is not after all so distant from our own experience. We may recall that *oko* were sometimes said to be a person's soul going out of their body, 'el alma saliendo del cuerpo', either shortly before or after their death, and that the shamanic ceremony designed to stop the *oko* of a dead relative disturbing their surviving kin is called a *tenka ereka*, literally a "soul-sending" or a "heart-sending". By this means the *tenka* of the dead person is sent to the land of the dead and the disturbances of the *oko* cease in consequence.² Ventura (2000) records that the word *tenka*, used to refer to the heart, the thorax, the pulse, also provides the root for at least twenty expressions corresponding to activities of thinking and for several more related to what she calls "subjective states" including courage, pleasure, joy, anxiety and shame (Ventura 2000:306-09). It is also that to which the ability to breathe, move, act and react is commonly attributed (*ibid*:304-05). The *tenka*, the heart, is in fact involved in one way or another in everything pertaining to an individual's formation as an independent and social person. Thus, Ventura observes:

[...] one might consider that the acquisition of a *tenka* occurs in a progressive manner, the first expression being mobility without awareness, which becomes aware with the ability to walk, and definitively reasonable in adulthood.

(My translation from Ventura 2000:305.)³

¹ Hansen's disease is the medical term for the affliction popularly known as leprosy. It is caused by a bacterial infection of the peripheral nervous system which results in loss of sensation in the various parts of the body which are affected (Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Leprosy*). Contrary to popular belief the disfigurements associated with the disease are not caused directly by the infection, but are the result of the sufferer's inability to prevent and respond effectively to a wide range of both major and minor injuries due to their lack of sensation and insensitivity to pain (Yancey & Brand 1993:118-130).

² Some of my Tsachi interlocutors on some occasions used *oko* and *tenka* apparently synonymously and others on other occasions explicitly made distinctions between them. Although the relationship between them seems in certain contexts to be very close I do not at present have enough data to address this issue.

³ Ventura 2000 :305:

[...] on pourrait considérer que l'acquisition du *tenka* se produit d'une manière progressive, la première expression étant la mobilité sans conscience, qui devient consciente avec la capacité de marcher et définitivement raisonnable à l'âge adulte.

What does it imply then to say that the dead have lost their *tenka*? Although it can mean the complete loss of the ability to move and to interact socially, this is not necessarily the case. The lack of a heart is sometimes attributed to babies who cannot yet walk unaided (*ibid*:305), and it is also an accusation levelled at dim-witted and forgetful people who do daft things and make mistakes (*ibid*:306). The latter, according to Ventura, may be referred to with a certain rhetorical exaggeration as *tenka iton* which is commonly translated by the Spanish ‘tonto’, (fool, idiot) but literally means *tenka*-less, “heartless” (*ibid*:305-306) and implies an inability to think. It should be no surprise then if the dead, having lost their heart, should start behaving like fools. They turn out, in fact, to be the example *par excellence* of the idiot. But here we must remember that the loss of the *tenka*, just like its acquisition, is progressive rather than immediate. This is made clear by the fact that even the walking dead of the *kwenta*, though manifestly *tenka iton*, do still have a heart which becomes the target of the shamans’ attempts to stop them coming back altogether. The dead are finally rendered immobile when the earthworm mother threads her way through their *tenka*. Thus, the changing of the dead one may be seen as a process of perceptual and behavioural deterioration arising from a progressive degeneration of the heart along with the gradual loss of all the functions, physical and psychological, for which it is responsible. It is a process which is both underpinned by and precipitant of a concomitant disintegration of the body in a manner similar to the unaware and self-perpetuating auto-mutilations set in train by the progressive loss of pain-reception inflicted by Hansen’s disease. This process of “heartloss”, a simultaneous perceptual, psychological and physical decay, is finally brought to an end by the heart’s definitive destruction at the intervention of the shamans. It bears emphasising that what this account demonstrates is not in fact the logical priority of what we might crudely call social and psychological factors vis-à-vis bodily form, but that these two aspects of the person are mutually constitutive such that a change in either necessarily alters the other (see Viveiros de Castro 1998:481-482, McCallum 1996). The comparison with Hansen’s disease serves to illustrate that such a concept of mortality is not foreign to our experience, and in fact, as biomedicine increasingly acknowledges, the correlation between physical and mental health is so strong that it is possible to make only the crudest and most arbitrary distinctions between them. Their logical ordering thus depends not so much on an

intrinsic priority of one over the other as on a perceptual gestalt by which their relation may be apprehended either this way or that.

Stories about animals

Strange behaviours and bodily transformations also characterise stories dealing with animals. Here, as in the stories of the dead, a similar concern is evident with the transgression of boundaries and its consequences and the relationship between behaviour and corporeal form. Of those that I heard, the most basic narrative pattern consisted of an animal, bird or insect who turns into a strikingly beautiful Tsachi man and marries a woman; when, day after day, he brings the same food home from the forest, without variation, the woman begins to suspect that something is amiss and one day she secretly follows her husband into the forest; there she observes him, having assumed his animal form, catching fish, or larvae or some other Tsachi delicacy to which the characteristics of his species are particularly suited; later she confronts him and he confesses his true identity; sometimes this precipitates the end of their marriage by way of murder or flight, but very often the woman and the animal remain together, and she might even assist him in the forest; they continue in this way for two or three years, and they begin to have children, until one day the animal's identity is revealed during a dance or his unusual abilities inspire envy and disaster ensues: death, infanticide or exile.¹

We shall begin with one of my favourite storytellers, a gentleman who was in his mid-fifties at the time of my fieldwork, with a growing and well-provisioned household. His comparative wealth was attributable to a considerable reputation beyond the Comuna as a practitioner of herbal medicine (he had clients who came to him from Guayaquil and Quito). Over the course of several interviews, with a clutch

¹ This is a very common theme in Amerindian mythology (see Rivière 1994) and similar encounters also crop up in contemporary accounts of personal experience (e.g. Rivière, *ibid*, Praet 2006, Vilaça 2005:451). In the latter case, however, they are almost always quickly broken off by the human protagonist who then becomes the narrator of a lucky escape. Among the Chachi the stories reported by Praet focus on the alterations effected upon the human protagonist's perception or behaviour and how this risks putting him outside human society and turning him into an animal or monster. In Tsachi *kwenta* the focus seems to be more on the animal's misperceptions and odd behaviour, and how this threatens the tranquil life of its human associates. There is no suggestion, for example, that the wife of the pig or the wife of *Suyun* (the rainbow-snake) is at risk of turning into a pig or snake herself (see later).

of new-hatched chicks and the first of his grandchildren growing up noisily in the background, he came to relish the chance to rehearse tales which had largely dropped from circulation since his own childhood:

Well, this is what my father said; that is, he used to converse like this, right, like this in story.¹ Well, like this, I don't know, I don't know what he looked like, but [they] say that he looked like a man, and then [they] say he got married, that is, he got hold of a Tsachi woman, right. So, he said that he was Tsachi, he looked like a Tsachi man and so then he came to the house. Well, how would it be? But at last, that is, in the end, they came round to marrying.² So, well then, this Tsachi, [they] say, was a little slack for work, right. He didn't sow, he only liked to make a lot a traps for fish, a lot of these that one makes in the river, right. So, [they] say that he would go to the river alone. Like this he would go by making [a lot of traps?]. But like this he brought back so much of this catfish. Do you know which is this catfish? This fish that doesn't have scales, right. Then, [they] say he caught many, like this, a trap, [they] say he had. Like this [they] say he would go until dawn. Well then, there [they] say like this he would go about.³ So, [they] say that he did not want to take the woman with him, only he, [they] say, would go alone. So, then, so often, so often, [they] say, he went again. And [they] say when she went,— behind him, that is, she went,— [they] say that he went with footsteps, footsteps like he was— like a person, [they] say he went, leaving a track, right. And then, near a stream, [they] say, the footprints disappeared; there there were left the things he had, like this, a little machete,— some time ago, [they] say, they used to have a spear to fight with animals, and all— clothes, everything, [they] say, piled-up. Now there was no sign of the man; there was only the tracks of a pig.⁴ Well then, when the woman went, like this, to have a look downriver,— because that way the pig went,⁵— when she went, [they] say, there was the pig.⁶ [They] say that there was a ditch, and the ditch,⁷ [they] say from this he was pulling out this worm that knows how to go in the ground,⁸ right— lots and lots [they] say that he caught, and these he bit, he threw them like this, and so those he bit and put aside [they] say that they were transforming into catfish....

[...When the man returns from fishing his wife garrottes him and he lies there dead in the form of a pig again, and when he dies all their children die too and turn into pigs.]⁹

¹ “...ese en cuento, ya.”

² “...o sea total, que dice, que sabía unir, ya.”

³ “...dice que ahí ya, ello [*sic*] así andaba.”

⁴ “...solamente había un rastro de chancho.” — My interviewee, speaking in Spanish, generally used the word ‘chancho’ in this story, but once or twice he employed ‘puerco’ as a synonym. Both of these I have translated as “pig”, and I take them to refer to a feral variety of domestic pig rather than to peccaries. The latter are sometimes called ‘puerco bravo’ (“wild pig” or “wild hog”) in the local Spanish, but in this instance it was fairly clear that my interviewee was not referring to them. In a Tsafiki version of the same story he used the word *kuchi* (‘chancho’, “pig”), which is also used to refer to the domestic variety, rather than the Tsafiki *para*, which is typically translated ‘puerco bravo.’ Feral pigs, as well as peccary, are relatively common in certain parts of Tsachi territory and are sometimes the object of hunting expeditions in their own right.

⁵ “...por allí se fue chancho.”

⁶ “...dice que allí estado este, esto, el, el puerco.”

⁷ “...dice que estado oso, y oso dice que ahí saquia [*sic*]— sacaba este lombriz...”

⁸ “...este lombriz que sabe ir de la tierra...”

⁹ Here, for the sake of brevity, I summarise the conclusion to the story.

In this story, much more than in those examined previously, the question of identity comes to the fore. Here, unlike the dead mothers and grandmothers whose putrid appearance fostered no illusions, the narrative begins with a case of mistaken identity. In fact, the appearance first presented in stories about animal-Tsachila, rather than arousing suspicion by virtue of some disfigurement or deficiency, very often possessed an unusual perfection, perhaps we might say an archetypal beauty. This is a motif we will see later in other examples of such stories. First I want to draw out some of the similarities between *oko kwenta* and *animali kwenta*.

I mentioned their shared concern with the transgression of boundaries, and in this story of the pig we are presented with a species boundary which is transgressed sexually and alimentally. However, references to strange or animalistic sexual practices are conspicuous by their absence, and once again we find that the revelations and denouement of the narrative turn upon food and culinary habits. Except for her husband's obsession with catfish the woman would have had no reason to complain of him or to suspect that anything was amiss, and the disgust with which she is attributed is provoked not simply by the realisation that her husband is a pig, but that he has been feeding her with earthworms.¹

That it is not the species boundary per se, in the categorical sense, that is the focus of attention is made clear by the fact that in many of these stories the woman and the animal continue to live together after she has discovered his identity. I was told a *kwenta* about a cricket, for example, who married a woman and would bring back large quantities of a whole variety of fish every day. In this instance his Tsachi wife was aware of his identity and went fishing with him, waiting on the riverbank to haul in the catch. They employed a vine, as the Tsachila used to do in those days, to hook the fish and gather them up. He would dive into the river as a man and in the water transform into a cricket and as he was swallowed by a fish he would swim out through the gills stringing his catch upon the vine as he went. Sometimes he would remain a whole day in the river and when the vine was full he tugged on it to signal to his wife and she pulled it in, along with all the fish and her cricket husband. The

¹ As I mentioned in the introduction food is a central theme in connection with identity and the fabrication of bodies in lowland South America (see, for example, Gow 1991, Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2005, Vilaça 2002).

two of them became notorious for being brilliant fishermen and hosting lavish dances out of their bounty, and it was only as a result of the envy of others that this happy partnership was eventually dissolved. A group of shamans, motivated by jealousy, put a curse on the cricket and the next time he went fishing his wife was left waiting and waiting on the river bank for a signal that never came. When finally, just before nightfall and still having heard nothing, she pulled in the vine she found only a few small fish on it, and no sign of her husband. He had warned her previously of this possibility and had told her what to do should it occur, so she cut open the last fish on the vine and there in its belly was the dead cricket.

Here we have a story which does not centre upon deception, abhorrent eating habits, or shocking discoveries leading to murder and exile. Instead it depicts what is in many ways the reverse: an idyllic situation of successful fishing and conjugal harmony destroyed by the envy of others, and its tragic conclusion is full of pathos rather than horror. Yet all the same, just as in the story of the pig, it is the cricket's unusual manner of foraging that is the motor of the narrative. The pig is lazy, his food irksome, and his murder at the hands of his wife is motivated by the anger and disgust which this provokes; the cricket is skilful and industrious, his food unusually bountiful, and he falls victim to the shamans because of the envy that this inspires. Considering them in this way it does not take much reflection to see the similarities between these two stories and the *oko kwenta* described above; there is a basic pattern common to them all: a non-human being arrives in human society, exhibits unusual domestic habits especially in relation to food, and these habits eventually precipitate discord which leads to murder. In fact, the conclusions to these stories are much more alike than they might at first appear. Death provides the end to all of those thus far discussed. The pig, of course, is murdered by his wife, and all their children die simultaneously; the cricket is fatally cursed by the shamans; the dead grandmother who decides to bathe her grandchildren unwittingly kills them. So what of the other two stories? In these, and also in the grandmother story just mentioned, the narrative concludes with the dead one, the *puyan oko*, being violently killed all over again by their horrified kin. In every case then the crucial difference, between animals and humans and between the dead and living, is made and made manifest by the behavioural schemata of bodies. Furthermore, their transgression, whether for good or ill, is ultimately unstable, fostering discord and tending toward a horizon of

death as the definitive transformation. This association of death with cross-species transformations is in fact made even more explicitly in some stories. For example, Ventura quotes a *kwenta* in which a group of wild boar attempt to entrap a Tsachi man. Having been tied up in their house, the story goes, “he was no longer eating the food of the Tsachila and he ending up dying.” And the narrator concludes, “Once he was dead his back began to be covered with the hair of wild boar” (Ventura 2012:79).

The conception of death as constituting a process of transformation into an animal is widely attested in Amerindian ethnography and is one of the features feeding into perspectivist accounts (Viveiros de Castro 2005:63). It is, however, extremely varied in terms of the nature and degree of its elaboration from one group to the next. So, for example, in Vilaça’s analysis of the Wari’, transformation into a prey animal is established as the paradigm for the relationship between the living and the dead and until the 1960s it was expressed in the form of funerary cannibalism in which the living effected this transformation of the deceased into prey by eating their corpses (Vilaça 2000, see also Conklin 1995). Among the Krahó on the other hand, according to Carneiro da Cunha, a similar transformation is effected without funerary cannibalism. The dead are said to undergo a series of metamorphoses (Carneiro da Cunha 1981:163-164). Although Tsachi *kwenta*, as we have seen, provide some examples of human-animal transformations following upon death these are not systemically elaborated and do not establish a general principle so much as an implicit association.

Indeed, not all interspecific liaisons end in death. Like the cricket, there are other sympathetic characters to be found among the animals of the *kwenta* and some have less violent fates. One of my favourites is the story of *Suyun*, of which there are several different versions, but the one I will examine here is strangely enchanting, and it would be worth reproducing simply for that reason. But a brief eulogy on a particularly wonderful tale also serves to remind us that what we are dealing with here are not simply exotic data meet for anthropological analysis; they are also nothing more unusual than the same old jolly good yarns that humans all over the world repeat to each other for the sheer delight of it. Indeed, given that one of the primary contexts of a *kwenta*’s traditional retelling was a group of bored children

with good memories, vivid imaginations and an insatiable appetite for entertainment it would be surprising if they were anything other than thrilling and carefully honed. Here is the story of *Suyun*, the rainbow-snake:

Well, the rainbow, first of all, well the history is that, [they] say, he is a person. Well, you'll see. [They] say, I don't know, well, in our history he is a person. It is like a story. Let's go with this story, you'll see. They say that the rainbow would transform into a lad, that is a man. [They] say that this man had very fine clothing, that is, he was very well painted. He looks beautiful. [They] say that this man is very beautiful. So, some time ago [they] say that there lived a, a family, right. So they had a daughter. So, they say that she used to collect water, right, where water comes up like this in a— How can one say? Where water rises, right. So there [they] say that there was a great big hole. Like this [they] say that the girl would walk there. So this youth, a woman, a young woman, would walk there. So what happened, but that one day, [they] say, when she had gone, appearing there, so [they] say, there appeared a man to her. So, she said that she didn't want to go to fetch water because a man appeared there who wanted to take her. [They] say that he used to want to grab her, right.

So, so then [they] say that she said this to her mother and father and it made them angry, saying that because of laziness she hasn't wanted to fetch water. So they would beat the girl. So she went away weeping and then when she arrives at this river, at this hole, then [they] say he appeared. So then [they] say that the girl no longer returned. She didn't return anymore. Now she was lost. Now she disappeared. So what happened but that the rainbow had carried her off. So it happened that like this [they] say some time passed, right, some time, [they] say, passed by. So then [they] say that they went to where the medicine man, the *pone*, was. The *pone*, [they] say, said that *Suyun* has carried her off. That there, under the ground, is the girl, inside the hole. So then, [they] say, like this the girl herself arrived where the mother and father were to talk. She says that "A man carried me away", that "there I am living now". And then they say that like this she invited her mother. [They] say that she said, go over there to the house because over there there are a lot of *wale*.— You know agouti, right?— So, in order to give her agouti [they] say that she says this, right. So then [they] say that the mother has gone to see. So [they] say that there was a whole lot of snakes there, like this, right, but this isn't, [they] say, like this *Suyun*, but other snakes. [They] say that they were huge, like this [they] say, that they were piled up like this, a lot of snakes there inside, where the girl lived with *Suyun*. With the rainbow she lived there.

So, then [they] say that he kills agouti and he gave it to the mother. Like this [they] say that she came, returned to the house and then they made a dance, a party, right, the family, that is, the mother of the girl. So, there she has invited him, but he, [they] say didn't let them see him. He didn't present himself to them.¹ She on her own, [they] say, was there inside. So then, then she invited him. [They] say that she invited him in to where she was. [They] say that she said, "I am going to bring my husband" [they] say the daughter said.² So then she came up to him asking what happened to this husband. So [they] say that he doesn't want to come because he

¹ "Entonces ahí ha invitado, pero él no dice que dejaba ver pues a ellos no no, no presentaba..."

² "Entonces de ahí ya pues ya invitó ya dice que invitado donde, dice que dicho, voy a traer a mi a mi marido dice que la hija."

was embarrassed,¹ [they] say, to arrive here where the Tsachila were, right, because you know back then [they] used to make *mala*,² so a lot of Tsachila used to come. So then the father-in-law went, then a brother-in-law went over taking *mala* to this rainbow transformed into a person. He has arrived, but like this [they] say he held back, he didn't come to the house but has been like this outside only, waiting. So then they have made him drink *mala* like this so that they made him tipsy, [they] say. So then they have made him tipsy and now like this being drunk [they] say that he has lost his reserve.³

Then [they] say that he arrived, and then [they] say that he was very beautiful, this man. [They] say very comely, very well-dressed, [they] say that he was like this. So then [they] say that many women wanted him, so [they] wanted to embrace this man, or to kiss him, right. And [they] say that he said "No, don't touch me because I am a person very—" that is, like "with very strong energy", right. That is, hot, right. So like this it was that someone touched him, and [they] say that it gave them like bad air, something like this, right. Do you know about this? Bad energy it gave them, like bad urine, they couldn't urinate, all this [they] say happened. So, well, like this it happened. Well, then this happened. Then he was wasted.⁴ [They] say that he said, "I want to sleep". So, and then they carry him like this inside with the woman, right. And now there he was asleep according to him, right. So [they] say that there he was transformed into a snake. [They] say that he was coiling around the woman completely, saying that he was embracing her. And now then, they looked on afraid, going out. But [they] say that he has realised. [They] say that he has said, "You all saw me", [they] say he said, and no-one wanted him. Then [they] say that he went off, he took himself off then, he didn't want to be there anymore. He says that it made him ashamed that they should have seen him as he was a snake, right.⁵ Now, then from this point [they] say that he didn't want to stay so that in the end they said, "We haven't seen [anything]", and that, "No, just stay", but [they] say that he said, "You saw me, that to me this makes me ashamed." Like this he took himself off then.⁶ Like this [they] say that it happened, you hear. And well then, well then he didn't return anymore, but the daughter always, [they] say, came back. So, she, yes, [they] say that she would come. This finishes this story of the rainbow, right.

One of the most striking and compelling aspects of this story, I would suggest, is the fact that so much of it is told from the perspective of the animal. Ultimately *Suyun*

¹ "Entonces dice que él no quiere venir porque tenía vergüenza..." The word 'vergüenza' has a breadth of connotations which makes it impossible to translate with a single word in English (see page 95).

² *Mala*, a Tsafiki word referring to a range of homemade beverages, often though not always fermented, made from ripe plantain, corn or palm-fruit, or a combination of these. Within living memory they were still being made and served to guests in almost industrial quantities on the occasion of dances and celebrations.

³ "...ahí han hecho marear, ya así como borracho dice que ya ha perdido vergüenza..."

⁴ "...después ya pues ya estado chumado..." 'Chumado' is a colloquialism used in various parts of Latin America for 'borracho', 'mareado' (drunk or tipsy) and on this occasion, of the superabundance of equivalent vocabulary provided by English I thought that 'wasted' most neatly combined the necessary connotations with an appropriate vulgarity of tone.

⁵ "...dice que daba vergüenza que hayan vieron como era culebra, no cierto."

⁶ "Ya, entonces de eso dice que no quería quedar ya para el final decir que ellos no hemos visto y que no quede nomás que no dice que dicho a mi viera usted que a mí me da vergüenza así que se fue mismo ya." This is a particularly ungrammatical and equivocal section of the interview where it is difficult to determine whose speech is being reported, and to which clauses the various negations apply.

emerges as something of a tragic hero, and in the process there is an interplay of narrative viewpoints of a kind which is largely absent from those *kwenta* previously discussed. In them, with the exception of the cricket, the story was told from the single point of view of the human protagonists; the surviving kin plagued by the domestic blunders of their dead relatives, the woman disgusted by the foraging habits of her pig husband. Here the position of the Tsachi characters vis-à-vis *Suyun* is far more complex. He is described, like many of the other animal-Tsachila as being exceptionally beautiful, but he appears first of all as a threatening person who drives the girl back to her parent's house out of fear. However, her parents disbelieve her and beat her and send her unwittingly back to *Suyun*. This makes his subsequent carrying her away decidedly ambiguous: is he kidnapping her or rescuing her from violent parents? Who, in fact, is in the wrong here? It is worth noting in this connection that the corporal punishment of children appears traditionally to have been extremely rare among the Tsachila and I never observed even a hint of it during my fieldwork. To beat one's daughter is not a normal thing for a Tsachi person to do. When the girl fails to return these atypical parents consult a shaman who informs them that *Suyun* has taken her and she is living with him underground, but they apparently make no attempt to rescue their daughter and as the story unfolds we discover that she is not being held against her will and is happy to be with him. When she returns to visit her mother she tells her of the bounteous supply of agouti where she lives and invites her to come and take some for herself. When his mother-in-law duly arrives *Suyun* gives her some of the agouti he has killed and thus cements the rapprochement between mother and daughter. It is *Suyun*'s behaviour toward his affines that in fact turns out to be typical of a good Tsachi person and his generosity initiates an eminently social relationship of exchange and reciprocal invitations. The girl's mother invites her newly-discovered son-in-law to a dance. Although he is reticent in attending, it may be observed that this too is typical of Tsachi convention. Even those who are hiding no secret identity have to be coaxed from the edges of a party by generous offerings of alcohol. It is only once *Suyun* has drowned his inhibitions like everyone else and joined the crowd that the trouble begins, and even then this is not the result of his own behaviour. In fact, he warns people not to touch him, and in all the dances that I attended during my fieldwork I never saw the sort of embracing or kissing to which *Suyun* reportedly objects. While he counsels an entirely conventional degree of modesty, a number of women find

themselves unable to resist his extraordinary beauty, and when they make the kinds of advances he has warned them against, they suffer the unfortunate consequences. Finally, when he falls drunkenly asleep in the embrace of his wife and inadvertently reveals himself as a snake it is his own crushing sense of shame that drives him back into the forest against the protests of his human in-laws.

There is an unusual tragedy attending this self-imposed exile and I think herein lies the genius of this particular narrative. Of all the characters in the story *Suyun* and the girl are the only two who never do anything wrong, that is to say, who, in terms of their behaviour, have been most human. Though *Suyun* begins the story under suspicion of nefarious motives and later abduction, he turns out to be a model son-law. It is his generosity that facilitates the reconciliation which the girl offers to her mother and provides for the dance to which he himself is subsequently invited. The girl's parents on the other hand are initially violent toward their daughter and make only a half-hearted attempt to retrieve her when she goes missing. Although later her relatives show admirable hospitality towards *Suyun* at the dance, it is their undisguised horror at discovering his true identity that first alerts him to what has happened and precipitates the intense shame that drives him away. And yet they apparently relent and try to persuade him to stay to no avail. Thus, in the end *Suyun* emerges as that most tragic of protagonists: the unimpeachable hero whose downfall is of his own choosing, undeserved and unnecessary, except in his own eyes. Therein lies the story's peculiar pathos, and in its realisation the narrative perspective, having been transformed, comes full circle and leaves us, like the other guests at the dance, looking once again from the outside at someone whom we had begun to know and love from the inside.

Back to everyday life

Suyun's ruin, it may be noted, is occasioned by the consumption of alcohol at a dance. Here then we find ourselves back in the night-time and on the edge of the ordinary domain of society. As was discussed in the previous chapter, at these night-time dances the ordinary conventions of Tsachi social life are re-made in the image of the national society. Everyone adopts the eating habits of the cafés and restaurants of Santo Domingo, they hire a DJ and disco-system, and a Mestizo compère to

provide an enthusiastic and sentimental commentary quite foreign to conventional Tsachi reserve. Then with the aid of copious amounts of alcohol the assembled company gradually effects a kind of transformation into some semblance of an Ecuadorian night on the town. In this liminal intoxicated arena men in particular ply one another with more and more alcohol in a tacit contest to prove their self-control. This is the test of identity which *Suyun* ultimately fails. In the marginal and unstable milieu of the dance he loses control and to his shame is shown not to be a true Tsachi.

We can now see just how closely the ‘más antes’ of the *kwenta* resonates with the patterns structuring the everyday lives of contemporary Tsachila. Nevertheless, between the stories of animal-Tsachila and the present there was a far more emphatic dividing line than for the stories about the dead. Here, much more so than in the case of revenance, a decisive change was attributed in various ways to the effects of Christianity. Some of my interviewees suggested that things had changed when Jesus was born or when God the Father had given over his authority to God the Son. At that point Jesus, or God the Son, had put a stop to things such as animals turning into humans. This was the explanation usually favoured by my evangelical acquaintances. Others, usually more Catholic in their sympathies, suggested that baptism, as well as protecting against the return of the dead, put a greater distance between the Tsachila and the animals. They proposed that the Tsachila had been made more human by being baptised, by being given the Holy Spirit, by becoming ‘Christians’, by becoming ‘civilised’. Here it is notable that when recounting stories involving animals, my interviewees would very often use the word ‘Cristiano’ as a synonym for ‘humano’ and ‘Tsachi,’ with which to distinguish the human protagonist from the imposter. In fact, this may well be the earliest recorded translation of the ethnonym. Rivet (1905) reports,

If one asks them what they call themselves, they reply “tsatsi”, which in their language is to say “Christian”.

(My translation, Rivet 1905:203).¹

¹Rivet (1905:203):

Si on leur demande comment ils s'appellent entre eux, ils répondent “tsatsi”, ce qui dans leur langue veut dire “chrétien”.

A similar identification of being human with being Christian has been noted by Gow, writing about how the Piro have incorporated Christianity into the way they talk about their history. In this case the Piro claim to have always been Christians and the word ‘cristiano’ “primarily means ‘civilized human’, as opposed to ‘wild Indians’ or ‘animals’.” (Gow 2009:33). Vilaça, writing about the much more recent experience of conversion to Protestant Christianity among the Wari’, has suggested that the process might be thought of in terms of a stabilization of perspective brought about by the new relationship with God (Vilaça 2009), and certainly the accounts given by my Tsachi interlocutors of the cessation of animal-human transformations fit well with this interpretation. However, it may be noted that the process is presented somewhat differently depending on whether it is cast in Protestant or Catholic terms. The explanations given to me by Protestants tended to cite a definitive change in the way God ruled the world, whereas the Catholic explanation, tending to centre on baptism, cited a change in the bodily treatment of human beings. The latter, it may be noted, is much closer to the notions of the continual bodily formation of the person which are typical of Amerindian societies. But to comment any further on this point with respect to the Tsachila would require more data than I currently have. The situation with respect to the dead is somewhat different. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the distinction between the *oko* of ‘ahora’ and those of ‘más antes’ is much vaguer and much more debatable. Here the role of Christianity is extremely ambiguous and is in fact very different in its Catholic and Protestant forms. Catholicism, while protecting against revenance on the one hand, in a different way makes the dead perpetually present and this is the dynamic which we shall explore in the next chapter. Protestantism, on the other hand, as we saw in Chapter I, rejects even the possibility of revenance, and proposes that all *oko* should be regarded as evil spirits. As we shall see in Chapter VI, where we return to the subject of contemporary encounters, this position is not given much credence among the Tsachila, even by committed Evangelicals.

V. Remembrance or Exorcism: invocatory or apotropaic techniques?

In Chapter III I presented an account of the activities of everyday life to which *oko*, as I have argued, constituted the implicit and constantly threatening background. There, we saw how the relation between the ordinary, ideally tranquil life of the Tsachila and the dangerous and chaotic disturbances of *oko* followed a circadian rhythm, tracking the movement between day and night. The noises of human activity asserted themselves as the sun rose and then receded with its setting, giving way to the nocturnal cries of the ghost-toad, *Oko wela*. The twilight of morning and evening and the darkness of midnight disgorged the phantom figures and noises that were kept hidden by the human activity and perceptual clarity of daylight. In Chapter IV we again encountered this circadian pattern, this time vividly illustrated in the narratives of the *kwenta*. The decomposing corpse of the dead grandmother, for instance, returns at night, and here the inversion of day into night and living into dead is depicted more explicitly and more completely as the *puyan oko* attempts to carry out her own nocturnal parody of the daily chores of the living.

But into the movement of day and night, as we have seen, is interwoven another pattern, similarly repeated in the ancestral accounts (the *kwenta*). Part of the distinctive activities of the night were the “dances” or ‘bailes’. Here, too, the ordinariness and clarity of daily life was suspended, only this time people threw themselves into the transformation, or perhaps we had better say they eased themselves in. Freshly bathed and in their best clothes they went out into the night, drank their way onto the dance floor and attempted to prove themselves amid a constant flow of alcohol. It was an opportunity for the exchange of hospitality with Tsachila from other Comunas and with Mestizos, and a chance, under the cover of darkness and intoxication, to pursue romantic interests beyond the circle of one’s immediate neighbours and away from their inquisitive eyes. When we turned to the *kwenta*, as with day and night, so with the ‘bailes’ we found these implicit delineations of daily life vividly highlighted. Here the hazardous arena of the party was depicted as the point of entry for other creatures into human society; it is where they are first encountered, intent on seduction, in their human form; and it is also very often their point of exit when they slip back into their animal proportions under

the pressure of competitive drinking. The ‘bailes’, then, were a place of traffic, social and romantic, between the different Comunas, between societies, between species, all facilitated by alcohol; they were the context of both deliberate and inadvertent bodily transformations, and by dint of their nocturnal milieu they reinforced an experiential association which connected the gregarious and the seductive with the dangerous and the occult.

Although hardly detectable by the time of my fieldwork there were still vestiges of these associations also to be found in connection with shamanic action. We have already encountered the shaman’s use of seduction in the *tenka ereka* to lure deceased souls into the land of the dead. Furthermore, accounts of what it is like in *oko* typically mentioned the ‘bailes’ enjoyed by its denizens, these being the contexts in which outsiders are habitually welcomed there too. Additionally, Ventura writes of a type of *Mu kika*, disappeared since the 1980s, which once marked the completion of a shaman’s apprenticeship with a six-day sequence of rituals designed to establish definitively his relation with *oko*, and these included a great communal gathering, the consumption of ayahuasca, tobacco and beer, and ceremonial dancing all through the night until dawn (Ventura 2012:191-192). But the only other reference to dancing in a specifically shamanic context is given to us by Karsten from the beginning of the twentieth century (1916-17). In his account of a typical curing ritual he writes:

When the *nepe* [ayahuasca] ultimately produces its effects all get into a sort of excitement; the men assisting at the conjuration suddenly seize the stones lying upon the table and, holding these in their hands, begin to run around the patient, chanting loudly. This dance is called *shukáde i. e.* “the stone-dance”. The medicine-man’s conjuration is called *ampéke* which means “to cure by chanting”. It is alleged that to the medicine-man himself, when the *nepe* has produced its narcotising effects in him, the stones and chonta pins on the table appear as living beings and begin to dance upon the table.

[...]

As we have seen, dancing is among the Colorados, as among other Indians, regarded as an efficacious means of conjuring disease-demons.

(Karsten 1924:148-149.)

By the end of the twentieth century, however, dancing had altogether lost these older ceremonial contexts (Ventura, pers. comm. 16 April 2012) along with what Ventura has called the general deritualisation of Tsachi life (Ventura 2012:249). Nevertheless, as I have suggested above and in Chapter III, the contemporary

'bailes' still retained a certain mode of ritualisation and a tacit logic of transformation directed towards outsiders. They remained, in that sense, the paradigm for the engagement with alterity, an inherently hazardous affair dependent now primarily upon the double-edged efficacy of alcohol.

The modern 'bailes' had their own rhythms, some following the life-cycle of individuals, and others adhering to a yearly cycle provided by the calendar of the Catholic Church. As I mentioned in Chapter III the inhabitants of Congoma took every opportunity to party, and alongside the personal milestones supplied by birthdays, baptisms, quinciñeras, engagements, weddings, and funerals these included all the familiar dates of the Catholic year: Christmas and Holy Week, the pre-Lenten Carnival, Valentine's Day, and the Feast of All Souls, known across the Hispanic world as 'El Día de los Muertos', the Day of the Dead. Beyond the fact of their nocturnal context, however, with all the tacit associations thus implied, most of these occasions manifested no explicit connection with *oko*. The Day of the Dead provided a notable exception. In this one celebration, coming and going like day and night according to its own ineluctable logic, the relationship between the living and the dead was taken beyond the particular lives and deaths of individuals and thrown ceaselessly forward into a cosmic cycle.

Here, of course, we confront a tradition whose origin is far distant, historically and geographically, from the context of the Tsachila. The Day of the Dead is officially the Feast of All Souls, a Roman Catholic observance with early Medieval origins on which the Church institutes that all the souls in Purgatory are to be assisted with special Masses and prayers (Brandes 1997:271-272). It represents the apogee of the Christian cult of the dead in Western Europe, and is in many respects the polar opposite of Amerindian mortuary traditions. Of the latter Taylor (1993a), for example, has noted:

It has become a commonplace of Amazonian ethnology to point out the absence in lowland societies of anything resembling ancestor cults, the shallowness of genealogical memory as well as the paucity and apparent simplicity of most funerary rituals (at least throughout western Amazonia), and the general scarcity of tombs or indeed of any marked spaces durably associated with the dead. Far from stressing continuity with their ancestors and enshrining their memory in names, epics or monuments, lowland Amerindians expend considerable time and ingenuity in losing

their dead, forgetting their names and deeds and emphasizing their remoteness from the world of the living.

(Taylor 1993a:653.)

Indeed, Amerindian ethnography is full of accounts of deaths being followed by the abandonment of the deceased's house, the destruction of their possessions, and attempts to erase almost every trace of them from remembrance (see Chaumeil 1983:227-28; Gow 1991:184-85; Vilaça 2000:93). Praet (2006), writing about the Chachi of the Pacific coast of Ecuador, notes:

Chachi people, so it seems, explicitly refuse to remember anything about the dead. Rather than being kept in loving memory, they are radically annihilated.

(Praet 2006:186)

Ideally all ties of kinship and affection which connected the dead to the living would be severed. In this regard the Tsachila are no exception. Before the establishment of cemeteries in the latter half of the twentieth century, the heads of a household were usually buried beneath the floor of the house, and their surviving relatives would quit the place forthwith and build a new one at some considerable distance (Ventura 2000:455, 2009:201; Rivet 1905; Moore 1979). My interviewees occasionally mentioned this when I asked them about funerary practices and the stories they told me about *oko* sometimes included references to it. As I have already suggested in the previous chapter I found that the Tsachila generally wanted nothing to do with their dead, especially not with the recently deceased, and if necessary they would hire shamans to persuade the dead to forget the living and leave them alone. Ventura writes:

Tradition has it that when a death occurs, the family strives, not only to forget the deceased (*puyaka*), but also to avoid their presence (*puyan oko*).

(My translation, Ventura 2009:201.)¹

By contrast, in Catholic tradition the dead and their memory are of such importance that some historians have called the religion “a cult of the living in the service of the dead” (Galpern 1974:149, cited by Marshall 2002:7). Here Galpern refers to the

¹ Ventura (2009:201):

La tradition veut que lorsqu'une mort survient, la famille s'attache, non seulement à oublier le défunt (*puyaka*), mais aussi à éviter sa présence (*puyan oko*).

example of France in the late-Medieval period, about the same time as the beginning of the Spanish missions in the Americas. A similar characterisation might fairly be made of the Church in general at that time, and even in some ways with respect to contemporary Catholicism. Enshrined in the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church is the principle, referred to as the Communion of the Saints, according to which all its members, both alive and dead, constitute one single community (*Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ‘Communion of Saints’). Furthermore, this community of living and dead is bound together into a single “Mystical Body”: at every celebration of the Mass the living are joined by the dead and they are united with one another in the eating of the flesh and blood of Christ. Following this doctrine all the faithful, whether on earth, in Purgatory or in Heaven, live together in a kind of trans-mortal moral and physical union in which each is mutually obligated to assist the other by means of vicarious works of charity, penances, prayers and devotions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 218-20, 307-09, 376-77).

Nevertheless, despite the obvious differences, there are some surprising points of contact between the Catholic tradition and the kind of Amerindian situation described so appositely by Taylor and others. Despite the Church’s notorious concern for right doctrine and the elimination of heresy, there is a certain sort of kleptomania about Catholic piety, which results in the preservation of an eclectic and bric-a-brac mixture of pre-Christian, local, and adiaphoric beliefs and practices, and an often bewildering repertoire of polysemic symbolism and ritual action. Thus, while the Church enjoins upon the faithful their duties to remember, honour and pray for the deceased, Catholic tradition also provides them with a plethora of techniques, official and unofficial, with which to keep evil spirits and unquiet souls at bay. Indeed, since its inception the Church has asserted its mission not only in terms of salvation from sin but as a progressive eradication of the Devil and his demons from the world; its acts of benediction are understood simultaneously as acts of exorcism. Thus, for example, the Tridentine rite of baptism includes numerous exorcistic elements. Similarly the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* talks of water, salt and oil as “the chief things formally exorcised in blessing” (see *Exorcism*). All the instruments of benediction, then — baptism, the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, sprinkling with holy water, anointing with oil, the burning of blessed candles, the keeping of relics, icons, pious invocations and prayers to saints and angels — are the same

means by which the faithful are protected or liberated from whatever evil may be feared or suffered. Along with the officially recognised demons and evil spirits, these have as often included the malevolent attentions of the dead (Marshall 2002, Caciola 1996).

In the following pages I will attempt to demonstrate how, in the celebration of the Day of the Dead, Catholic practice intersects with Tsachi concerns at precisely this juncture, the result being an apotropaic repertoire which is at once Catholic and Tsachi in character and invites multiple interpretations. We will see how the Catholic commemoration of the dead among the Tsachila has extended what was previously a short-term ad hoc management of the recently deceased across an annual cycle in which they are now submitted to an endless process of exorcism. Underlying this is the fact that the dead suffer from the same scarcity of land by which the living are constrained and in the cemeteries they have undergone a kind of parallel sedentarisation, their tombs moving in sympathy with the houses of their surviving kin from wood to concrete. As their presence has become thus increasingly permanent and increasingly visible the effort to make sure they keep their distance, to secure their continued absence from the sphere of the living, has become similarly permanent and institutionalised. The annual Catholic blessing of the cemetery, inviting the imputation of a similar apotropaic logic to that which governs Tsachi burial practices, thus becomes a way of repeatedly exorcising the dead who, as the jungle recedes, can no longer be made to disappear.

The Day of the Dead 2008

One evening towards the end of October 2008 Dario and I were sitting in the house talking when he paused. He said something to Maria in Tsafiki, and then, pointing towards the sky, he called my attention to the sound of a sudden wind passing along the road outside. This wind, he told me, came almost every year around that time, and people said it was the *oko* of the dead returning from *Pipwa*, the land of the dead, and heading back to the cemeteries. The Feast of All Souls was then just a few days away, and when it came we went the same way as the wind, up the road to where Dario's mother-in-law was buried.

On the morning of the 2nd November 2008, a Sunday, Dario, Maria their children and I set out from the house at around 9.30, heading for one of the Comuna's three cemeteries. We arrived between 10 and 11 having thumbed a lift halfway up the road in the back of a neighbour's pickup. There were already quite a number of people in the cemetery, sitting in family groups around the graves of their respective relatives. The tombs consisted of whitewashed concrete boxes set on concrete plinths. Most of them were substantial constructions, about three or four metres long, one-and-a-half metres wide, some a little wider, and most about a metre high. Some had a second tier, adding a further one or two metres, and quite a number were adorned with simple whitewashed concrete crosses. Besides these there were three or four graves consisting simply of a little mound of earth with a white concrete cross planted beside it. A few of the tombs were still vacant, one end left open, waiting for a corpse to be walled up within. Most people had bought bunches of flowers in Santo Domingo to lay on the graves, and there was a temporary stall set up by some local Mestizos in the middle of the cemetery which sold candles. These were bought in great quantity and with a little melted wax arranged on the concrete plinths in front of the principal tombs. Here and there they were accompanied by a picture of the Blessed Virgin or the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Everyone had brought a considerable amount of hot food with them, wrapped up tightly in the bottom of pots and baskets to keep it from going cold. After we had sat a little while by the grave of Maria's mother, the family's Mestizo labourer arrived with a bunch of flowers which they had asked him to purchase for them in Santo Domingo. Maria's father, her brother and his family joined us, having made their way there independently, and about midday the baskets of food were unpacked and we ate lunch, consisting of rice and chicken.

Not long after that a priest arrived. He was neither Tsachi nor Mestizo: a young man with pale skin and an earnest, slightly hesitant demeanour. He laid an altar-cloth over one of the larger tombs and the majority of the people at the cemetery gathered to hear him say Mass, a crowd of some forty people in all. It began with a hymn in Spanish, sung *a cappella* and led by the priest. The readings were also in Spanish, but the second hymn was Tsafiki and led by the village President who functioned as the principal layman and cantor of the congregation. The priest joined in and

evidently knew it fairly well. He then delivered a sermon in Spanish in which he extolled the virtues of remembering and honouring the deceased, and endeavoured to impress upon those present the importance of maintaining the cemetery in good condition. It had apparently been almost entirely neglected since the last Day of the Dead and had required a concerted collective effort to clear the undergrowth ahead of that year's visit. The priest expressed his hope that it would be kept clear and tidy thenceforward and exhorted his congregation to apply themselves diligently to this task. As the Mass proceeded the priest read out a list of some hundred names of the people for whom the Eucharist was being offered, all of them bearing the distinctive surnames of the Tsachila: Aguavil, Calazacón, Zaracay, Oransona, Alopi, Gende (see Ventura 2000:326-329). But at the proffering of the host only one person, an elderly Tsachi lady, responded to the priest's invitation to receive.

After the Mass the family whose grave the priest had used as an altar gave him a plate of rice and meat for his lunch and after he had eaten he set off around the cemetery, going from grave to grave, asking permission from each family in turn to pray for their dearly departed. All but a few consented. He enquired as to the sex of the deceased and prayed for them as 'nuestro hermano' or 'nuestra hermana' ('our brother' and 'our sister'), while more often than not their family ignored him (see Ventura 2000:457; 2009:203). He concluded with three Hail Marys and then, before moving on to the next person, sprinkled the tomb and its environs with liberal quantities of holy water using a cut rose and a small plastic cup which he recharged periodically from an old coke bottle.

In all these respects the proceedings, even if a little unceremonious, followed the conventions of Catholic remembrance of the dead. However, there were certain incongruities. It was notable, of course, that everyone had brought a picnic to eat by the graveside, but there were other things as well. The priest, according to the conventions of a Mass for the dead, had recited numerous names of the "faithful departed", and yet on none of the graves was there the least inscription to indicate who they contained, when they died, or in what affection they had once been held by those who survived them. Their memorials were no more than these bright plain boxes in the grass, all entirely blank. No family photographs appeared beside the pictures of Mary and Jesus, and when the priest came to pray for the deceased at

their graveside he did not ask what they were called but only whether they were male or female. All this was very odd. Odd it was also when, shortly after we arrived, someone produced a packet of cigarettes and all of a sudden people whom I had never before seen smoking lit up together. I was offered one myself, but declined and sat there wondering what was going on as the air around me filled with tobacco smoke.

It was notable more generally that no marked atmosphere of reverence prevailed in the cemetery. There was no evidence of mourning. No hush. People conversed normally, joked and laughed. Children ran about and played among the graves. The make-shift stall, set up beneath a permanent awning of pambil and palm-thatch, sold its candles as a sideline to a roaring trade in alcohol; the bar was well-provisioned with Pilsner and Cristal and there was a huge sack-full of ice to go with it, packed with hay to keep it from melting; there were crates of cola and boxes of sweets, mandarins, and mangos to cater for the children and the women, most of whom rarely, if ever, drank. The majority of the men quickly gravitated towards the bar where they sat on low wooden benches, empty beer crates and one or two plastic chairs and passed round cups of Pilsner brimming with ice. Other groups of drinkers formed around some of the larger graves and just outside the perimeter of the cemetery, on the edge of the jungle, two or three knots of young men stood drinking Cristal and discussing football. By the late afternoon the graveyard played host to a good few drunks, and when I left with Dario and his family at nightfall a considerable number of men and one or two women were still there drinking in the twilight.

Incongruities

A neglected cemetery full of nameless graves; a picnic and a party among the tombs; beer, rum, tobacco smoke: suddenly the whole thing sounds a little less straightforward. There was certainly more going on than merely the annual remembrance of the faithful departed instituted by the Church. While the priest prayed, invoked the dead, recited a litany of their names, reiterated in his sermon the obligations of care and remembrance due to them by the living and mentioned the comfort to be derived from their presence with us in the cemetery, his would-be

faithful appeared to be doing their utmost to keep their dearly departed away. Engaged in eating and drinking, they paid as little attention as possible to the prayers and the tombs and instead sat about quaffing beer and smoking with unusual enthusiasm. Lighting a cigarette, I later discovered, was a standard trick to make *oko* keep their distance; they couldn't abide the smoke.¹ It might seem, then, that the priest and his congregation were in fact operating at cross purposes.

Yet it is not as simple as that. Despite the anxieties they harboured, demonstrated most powerfully by the apotropaic smoke with which they filled the air and their lungs, the Tsachila were nonetheless taking their ease among the dead. There they were making themselves quite comfortable, doing the kinds of things that they would at a local party, in a place which on every other day of the year they were at pains to avoid. Some people even sat on the tombs themselves as they drank their way into the kind of inebriated sociability appropriate for a 'baile'. It would appear that the festive atmosphere was in previous years still more pronounced than that which I witnessed in 2008. Furthermore, not so long ago and perhaps still in other cemeteries away from the disapproving gaze of Mestizos, the food which the Tsachila brought with them was destined first of all as an offering for the dead before it was consumed by the living. Dario's brother-in-law, whom we shall call Reginaldo, described to me what it was like forty years prior to my own visit, when he was about ten, at a time when the vast majority of Tsachila buried their dead in the cemetery in San Miguel which was then exclusively Tsachi. On the Day of the Dead his grandparents used to set out in the very early hours of the morning so as to arrive in San Miguel around first light. They carried with them every possible comestible – rice, *ano ila*, manioc, boiled eggs, chicken, ground peanuts, smoked meats from the forest, fish, and different kinds of chicha (beer) made of plantain and maize. On reaching the

¹ Praet records a similar technique used among the Chachi to keep monsters away (2006:77, 92, 94, 105). However, he has also suggested that among the Chachi tobacco can be considered the food of monsters (Praet 2006:288), echoing similar observations made by other ethnographers regarding Amazonia (e.g. Wilbert, 1979:31, Barbira Freedman 2002:139-140). To what extent the latter may apply alongside the former among the Tsachila, I am unable to say. Such an understanding of tobacco as the food of *oko* may exist among shamans, who use tobacco juice during their apprenticeships while establishing connections in *oko* and tobacco smoke in their treatments of patients. If so this would lend support to some of the suggestions I make later on in this chapter. However, as I explained in my introduction, the understandings of shamans were not the focus of my research. From lay Tsachila I only ever heard that cigarette smoke was repugnant to *oko* and I heard a number of stories in which people had made use of this in the context of frightening encounters in the forest precisely to defend themselves from the attentions of the *oko* in question.

cemetery they loaded all these victuals and delicacies onto the graves of their deceased relatives, and left them there until about midday, “thinking”, he told me, “that the dead one is going to come to eat this food.” It was a matter, he said, of “being kind even with the dead.” According to his account, people used to say that the *oko* came to take the food away to *Pipwa* (the land of the dead), but all the same it would remain on the graves and after a few hours would be shared out among families, friends and neighbours, and everyone would eat and drink together in the cemetery. “But now, today”, he said, “only a few still take food.” He associated this change with the increasing scarcity of meat and fish. Later in the conversation he returned to the same subject and indicated a further reason:

Now it is a different thing. The cemetery now, for example, in San Miguel, now there are not only Tsachila. Over there are some others, *feto* [Mestizo], someone else. So this custom has already gone.

The others, he confirmed, came to the cemetery on the same day as the Tsachila, but they did not bring food. They came simply to visit, to light candles and to sit for a while, and the increasing presence of these non-Tsachila certainly seems to have been responsible to a large degree for the cessation of food offerings. Ventura (2012:239), for example, cites an elderly Tsachi lady who recalled that during her childhood, when the graves were piled high with plantains, eggs, fish and chicha (beer), the Mestizos would reproach them for it and remind them that the dead do not eat.¹ During her own fieldwork, between 1991-1997, Ventura reports, in the one cemetery of the Comuna which remained exclusively Tsachi, having seen the tombs similarly covered with food and drink. Here, she says, alcohol circulated liberally among the men, and music was even being played. In the other two cemeteries (Ventura 2012:239), however, in the presence of a priest and Mestizo neighbours, the situation was more akin to that which I have described above from my own experience. No food was placed on the tombs but people brought their own lunch and consumed ice-creams and cola provided by an entrepreneurial salesman.

¹ ‘Felicía explica que durante su infancia, cuando los muertos eran agasajados con plátano molido (*ano ila*), maíz fermentado (*pako*), huevos (*pipoka*) y pescado (*kere*), los mestizos les reprochaban esta costumbre recordándoles que “los muertos no comen”’ (Ventura 2012:239).

And yet, while the offering of food to the dead is often identified as a Tsachi tradition, meeting with disapproval from Mestizos, it is governed by the date of a Catholic observance, and reliant upon the geography of Catholic interment. Though the date, as we shall see, may have a longer history among the Tsachila, the geography, at least, seems to be a relatively recent innovation. The earliest mention I was able to find of a Tsachi cemetery near San Miguel, or indeed of any Tsachi cemetery, is in the short monograph of Costales Samaniego first published in 1956. All earlier references to mortuary ritual among the Tsachila, of which there are very few, indicate that the dead were either buried in the middle of the forest or under the floor of the house in which they lived, this being immediately thereafter abandoned by their surviving kin (Rivet 1905:202-03, Karsten 1924:151, Ventura 2012:237-40). This was something to which most of my own interlocutors could attest thanks to the memories of their parents and grandparents and the *kwenta*. It seems, therefore, that it was only within the last two generations that the Tsachila have been in the habit of collecting their dead in one place and of marking their graves in perpetuity in such a way as would make possible a communal and annual remembrance.¹

There was a further incongruity to the proceedings. Although the priest's invocations, the food offerings and the apotropaic smoke suggested contradictory attitudes to the dead, they were all predicated on the assumption that the dead were, or would be, present. The recitation of their names summoned them, the offering of food placated them, and the smoke made sure they kept their distance once they had arrived. And yet, there were none of the usual evidences that they were there. Generally when *oko* appear they make some sort of disturbing noise; so much so that, as I have already said, the phrase 'haciendo bulla', "making noise", typically implies their presence even if they are not otherwise mentioned. And yet Reginaldo reported that when the food was left on the graves during the Day of the Dead and the *oko* were supposed to come to take it away, no noise was heard and the food remained there, untaken and unconsumed. Where were they, and if they were there, why were they so uncharacteristically silent?

¹ There is some oral among the Tsachila suggesting that the cemetery in San Miguel may date back some 200 years, but if this is so it would seem that it was not in general use until much more recently, since neither Rivet nor Karsten nor Von Hagen make any reference to it.

The Day of the Dead, then, presents us with a number of puzzles. We may observe a contradictory combination of practices, some invocatory, some apotropaic. In the food offerings we have a tradition associated with the Tsachila and disapproved of by their neighbours, but which in fact presupposes a Catholic cemetery whose general use appears to date back no more than seventy years. And then there are the dead themselves who are supposed to be present, but who show none of the normal signs of being so.

Okobi

We will begin with this last puzzle. Why do the dead make no noise in the cemetery on the Day of the Dead, and why is there no evidence of them eating? When I put the matter to Reginaldo his response was far from clear:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

Daniel Dolley:

<p>Y, cua... cuando llegaban los <i>oko</i>, para comer, ¿hicieron bulla, mismo, o, o no, o...? ¿Solo llegaban tranquilamente o...? [REG ríe]...O, no sé...</p>	<p>And when... when the <i>oko</i> arrived, to eat, did they make noise, the same, or, or not, or...? Did they just arrive quietly or...? [REG laughs]... Or I don't know...</p>
---	--

Reginaldo:

<p>Ahora, como ya [te ??] decía, no, eso es <i>okobi</i>, no.</p>	<p>Now, as I already said, no, this is <i>okobi</i>, no.</p>
---	--

DD: Aha. Aha.

<p>REG: Eso es <i>okobi</i>. Seguramente bulla no, al momento bulla nadie.</p>	<p>This is <i>okobi</i>. Certainly no noise, at that moment no-one makes noise.</p>
--	---

Reginaldo's reference to *okobi* here requires some comment. As I mentioned in Chapter III the word itself, *oko* with the suffix *-bi*, may be translated 'in *oko*' (cf. *pibi*: 'in water /in the river'). However, it took me quite some time to discover this, because although a simple construction, people used it to refer to an occult part of life accessible only to shamans and about which everyone else seemed to know hardly anything. Questions such as "What is *okobi*?" "What does *okobi* mean?" invariably elicited the vaguest explanations with reference to the mysterious activities of shamans. In the first section of the same interview with Reginaldo,

before our discussion of the Day of the Dead, he had used the word in connection with the activity of the shaman (*pone*) sending an *oko* to the place of the dead in the ritual exorcism of *tenka ereka*:

[REG, 30-10-08 15H16]

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>REG: [...] Entonces, aquí el <i>pone</i> hace un proceso más o meno. Un prom— proceso de ceremonia. Y este <i>pone</i> sabe lo que está haciendo, está contacto con el <i>pipwa</i> allí, [DD: Mm.] tons el má o meno conoce. Tonce eso no es en sueño sino que má o men— no sé en qué, en le espíritu, o en— [DD: Aha.] No sé en qué. Hay otros palabra que podemos utilizar, en dimensiones por ejemplo.</p> | <p>So, here, the <i>pone</i> does a process more or less. A — process of ceremony. And this shaman knows what he is doing, he is in contact with the <i>pipwa</i>¹ there, [DD: Mm.] so he more or less knows. So this is not in dream but more or le— I don't know in what, in the spirit, or in— [DD: Aha.] I don't know in what. There are other words that we can use, in dimensions for example.</p> |
| <p>DD: [E, e—] ¿en tsáfiki... [REG: <i>Okobi</i>.] hay, hay como decir— [REG: Sí] hay como decir este?</p> | <p>[—] in Tsafiki... [REG: <i>Okobi</i>.] is there, is there a way to say— [REG: Yes.] is there a way to say this?</p> |
| <p>REG: <i>Okobi</i>.</p> | <p><i>Okobi</i>.</p> |

In the ensuing conversation I did my best to pin down exactly what *okobi* was, but it transpired that Reginaldo himself did not know. Indeed, by using the word he was in a manner of speaking asserting his ignorance. *Okobi*, he explained, was the dimension in which the shaman effected the banishment of the *oko* and whatever happened there was known only to these two:

[REG, 30-10-08 15H16]

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>REG: [...] O sea, este proceso está haciendo [el <i>pone</i>] aquí, pero también está haciendo en, en... en otro dimensiones diré quizán [sic] diríamos [sic].</p> | <p>[...] That is to say, this process he [the shaman] is doing here, but also is doing in, in... in other dimensions I will say perhaps [?] let's say.</p> |
| <p>REG: De aquí hace dimensión ese llama <i>okobi</i>, [DD: Ah.] entre,</p> | <p>[...]
From here [to the ??] dimension this one calls <i>okobi</i>, [DD: Ah.] between,</p> |

¹ *Pipwa* (sometimes written *Pipowa*) is the Tsafiki name for the land of the dead, the place to which the *oko* of the dead are sent by the shamans.

entre este espacio... *okobi*.

between this space... *okobi*.

[...]

REG: Ah... claro, porque... el sentido es... Claro, nosotros estamos viendo el, lo, el *tsachi*, el *pone* hace este— esta cosa. Pero el resultado no, no, no... no se ve aquí. [DD: Aha.] El resultado solo ve el *pone*, y, y, y, ...y, y el *tenka* desaparecida.

Ah... of course, because... the sense is... Of course, we are seeing the, it, the person, the shaman do this— this thing. But the result no, no, no... one doesn't see here. [DD: Aha.] The result only the shaman sees, and, and... and the disappeared *tenka*.

Here *tenka* refers to the *oko* which disturbs the relatives of the deceased and, subsequent to the ministrations of the shaman in *oko*, disappears. Throughout the interview Reginaldo occasionally used *tenka* in this way apparently as a synonym of *oko*. Later in my conversation with Reginaldo we returned to the question of *okobi* again, this time in relation to augural dreams. When I encouraged him to elaborate on the connection between oneiric and waking experience, how the one could prefigure the other, he replied:

[REG, 30-10-09 15H16]

REG: [...] Bueno, no sé, o sea no cómo explicar, pero aquí hay algo, no. [DD: Aha. Sí.] Entre este y este hay algo aquí. [DD: Sí.] Tonce, ese... ese *okobi*. [Ríe él.]

Well, I don't know, that is [I don't know] how to explain, but here there is something, no. [DD: Aha. Yes.] Between this and this there is something here. [DD: Yes.] So, this...this is *okobi*. [He laughs.]

[...]

[...]

DD: [Bueno, bueno] bueno aquí hay algo pero ¿no puede ver? O no—

[Well, well,] well here there is something but you can't see? Or—

REG: No puedo ver, [DD: —qué, qué?] no puedo explicar. Solo tengo esperar resultado, no. [DD: Aha.] E... no sé qué—

I can't see, [DD: —what, what?] I can't explain. I just have to await the result, no. [DD: Aha.] [E...] I don't know what—

[...]

[...]

REG: Tonce, yo creo que aquí falta ser *pone*, no. Pero *pone* sí sabe lo que está haciendo aquí y acá. [DD: Aha.] Él sabe porque le hace un proceso. [DD: Aha.] Pero yo no sé porque [ríe él] no soy *pone*, [DD: Aha.] seguramente, no, porque— Pero sé que aquí— Ahora, acerca de esto allí dimensiones sean—

So, I think that here one lacks to be a *pone*, no. But *pone* yes knows what he is doing here and here. [DD: Aha.] He knows because he does [to himself ??] a process. [DD: Aha.] But I don't know because [he laughs] I'm not a *pone*, [DD: Aha.] certainly, no, because— But I know that here— Now, about

Bueno no entiendo muy bien también pero... así mismo... tiene que ser algo aquí, tiene que a ver algo... [DD: Aha.] para poder hacer este.

this dimensions there would be— Well, I don't understand very well also but... the same like this... there must be something here, one must see something...[DD: Aha.] in order to be able to do this.

What then did Reginaldo mean when, in our discussion of the Day of the Dead, he told me “this is *okobi*”, “this is in *oko*”? Did he mean to say simply that it was a mystery how the *oko* came to the cemetery to collect the food and why they did not make any noise while doing so; that it was something unknown to him, and indeed to most people, invisible, unexplainable; or was he referring more specifically to the activity of shamanism, which occurs quintessentially in *oko*? Indeed, the occasion was in certain respects reminiscent of shamanic ritual. I have already remarked upon the association of gregariousness and alcohol consumption, with interactions with outsiders and the occult and with the rituals of the shaman. Other points of contact are also detectable. In recent years, for example, candles and holy water have been employed by Tsachi shamans in the performance of *tenka ereka* (heart/soul-sending). Ventura writes:

At the present time, the ceremony of *tenka ereka* is less about accompanying the souls of the dead to their final destination, to Pipowa, than it is about expelling them from here below by means of fumigations. Thus, herbs (such as rosemary) and termite mounds are burned; then the area around the house, and the rooms where people sleep, are sprinkled with holy water. The latter is more effective when the water has been blessed by seven churches, something which is not within reach of the Tsachila, who have access only to that of Santo Domingo and perhaps to that of Puerto Limon, unless they acquire it from itinerant traders of esoteric products. In addition, the house of the deceased is surrounded by lighted candles. These techniques of exterior provenance and incorporated very recently, are always accompanied by a discourse that focuses more on the distant fate of the dead than on the simple need to banish them from here. What is more, they remain ineffective until the kin of the deceased submit to cleansing with eggs, and sometimes even to the ritual *Patso kika*, in order to build a protection against the evil spirits.

(My translation, Ventura 2009:209-10.)¹

¹ Ventura (2009:209-10):

À l'heure actuelle, la cérémonie *tenka ereka* est moins destinée à accompagner les âmes des morts vers leur destin final, vers Pipowa, qu'à expulser d'ici-bas par le biais des fumigations. Ainsi, brûle-t-on des herbes (tel le romarin) et des termitières, avant d'asperger les alentours de la maison et les pièces où l'on dort avec de l'eau bénite. Celle-ci est plus effective lorsqu'elle a été bénie par sept églises, ce qui n'est pas à la portée des Tsachila, qui n'ont accès qu'à celle de Santo Domingo et éventuellement à celle de Puerto Limon, sauf s'ils l'acquièrent aux commerçants ambulants de produits ésotériques. En outre, la maison du défunt est entourée de bougies allumées. Ces techniques de provenance extérieure et incorporée très récemment, sont toujours accompagnée d'un discours qui porte plus sur le destin lointain des morts que sur le simple besoin de s'en défaire ici.

Here we may identify a substantial overlap between the activities of the priest on the Day of the Dead and those of the shaman performing a *tenka ereka*. The shaman includes holy water and candles along with eggs in a repertoire of treatments which combine exorcistic, protective and cleansing elements. We can see that while these instruments differ in terms of their provenance and the mode of their efficacy, they converge upon the single purpose of cementing the barrier between the living and the dead.

If it is seen as a type of *tenka ereka* the ceremony of the Day of the Dead begins to appear more congruous. The priest in his prayers, while he invokes the dead, beseeches God to keep them safe and to receive them ultimately into Heaven. In this respect, like the shaman operating in *oko*, he mediates between the living and the dead to encourage the latter towards their destination away from their surviving kin. His subsequent application of holy water to the graves can be understood as simultaneously exorcisory and benedictory, a blessing or cleansing of the graves to rid them of the presence of the dead. The candles arranged on the tomb, and the smoke of the cigarettes, may be seen to contribute towards the same end. Likewise the images of Mary and Jesus are placed on the graves to protect the living — in this instance the dead are not invoked, but banished with an array of powerful things. It is unclear, however, whether by all this activity they are kept at a comfortable distance or rather confined to their tombs; Ventura again:

Several Tsachila have told me that the dead disturb the living less at present, as much because of the use of boxes to serve as the coffin and of their confinement in the cemeteries, as due to the Masses of the priest, which have symbolically taken the place of *tenka ereka* to eliminate the spirits of the dead.

(My translation, Ventura 2009:207-208.)¹

De plus, elles restent inefficaces jusqu'à ce que les proches du défunt se soumettent à des nettoyages avec les œufs, et parfois même au rituel *Patso kika*, afin de se bâtir une protection contre les mauvais esprits. (See also Ventura 2012:246.)

¹ Ventura (2009:207-208):

Plusieurs Tsachila m'ont avoué que les morts gênent moins les vivants à l'heure actuelle, autant à cause de l'usage de caisses en guise de cercueil et de leur confinement dans les cimetières, que grâce aux messes du curé, lesquelles auraient symboliquement pris la place du *tenka ereka* pour éliminer les esprits des morts. (See also Ventura 2012:244.)

Nevertheless, wherever the dead may end up the effect of the priest's prayers, the candles, the smoke, the sacred images — perhaps what Reginaldo would refer to as the result of the process — is that the *oko* associated with the cemetery do not disturb the living. As in the performance of *tenka ereka* they are made to disappear, that is to say, they stop making noise. Thus Reginaldo says:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

<p>REG: Eso es <i>okobi</i>. Seguramente bulla no, al momento bulla nadie. [...] [...] O sea, claro aquí en cementerio al momento no hace nada de bulla, nada nada, [en todo eso ??]... Todo tranquilo. Pero hace bulla es allá en, en otra partes, no.... No sé, bueno, [...así no es...??] no puedo decir nada, pero, entonces, aquí no. Aquí nadie... al momento que tienen comida montonado hay nada, nada que bulla... nadie que hicie..., no se hicieron nada.</p>	<p>This is <i>okobi</i>. Certainly no noise, at that moment no-one makes noise. [...] [...] That is, of course here in the cemetery at that moment it makes no noise at all, nothing nothing, [in all this ??]... All quiet. But [what] makes noise is over there in, in other places, no... I don't know, well, [...it's not like this...] I cannot say anything, but, so, here no. Here no-one... at the moment that they have food piled up there is nothing, nothing that makes noise... no-one that made... they didn't do anything.</p>
---	---

So “what makes noise is over there in other places”, but on the Day of the Dead under the ministrations of the priest and their living relatives the *oko* which are normally so noisy — and there are plenty of accounts of such noise in and around cemeteries at other times — on this occasion have been silenced; the dead, for a while at least, rest in peace or perhaps we could say they disappear. However, although this interpretation would seem to fit fairly well with the activities I witnessed in 2008, it does not sit so well with the customs of Reginaldo's grandparents. If you were going to an exorcism why would you bring a feast for the ghosts? And why would you eat and drink and make music in an attitude of such ease? Indeed a purely exorcistic account of the Day of the Dead, such as I have given above, neglects these two essential and related features of the proceedings: the offering of food to the dead, and the gregariousness and intoxication which they shared with the ‘bailes’ (parties, dances).

Sollicitous treatments of the dead

If in the cigarette smoking we have a clear indication of the apotropaic concerns underlying the Day of Dead, in the offering of food to the deceased we have an equally clear example of a very different attitude, one of solicitude, care and obligation. Here we have something which takes us surprisingly close to the overt concerns of the Catholic tradition already mentioned, for a trans-mortal communion. What, after all, is the priest doing in the Mass if not enacting a common meal between the living and the dead, between the Faithful on either side of mortality? The custom of making food offerings to the deceased is, in fact, a well-documented feature of All Soul's Day festivities all over Catholic Latin America from the Bolivian Andes to Mexico, and it has been suggested that its origins might be traced to fifteenth-century Spain rather than to pre-Colombian Amerindian practices. The anthropologist Stanley Brandes, for example, has cited considerable evidence to this effect in his treatment of the Day of the Dead in Mexico (Brandes 1997). It seems that Catholics in many parts of Europe in the fifteenth century were bringing food to the graves of their dearly departed and even throwing parties in cemeteries in a remarkably similar fashion to the Tsachila in twentieth century Ecuador. With respect to Spain, Brandes writes:

Consider the Old Castilian province of Zamora. From the 1500s on, All Souls' Day celebrations required a catafalque, situated in the main chapel of any given church, surrounded by a variety of candles as well as by "twenty-five rolls of bread" (Lorenzo Pinar 1991:95). Historian Lorenzo Pinar (1991:165) states that in Zamora, "ofrendas and banquets formed an habitual part of funerals. The ofrenda constituted— according to those who treated of it— one more of the multiple efforts made on behalf of the souls in purgatory, and the church insisted that [ofrendas] be installed on the days of Easter, during principal annual festivals, and during All Souls' Day."

(Brandes 1997:281-282.)

Although actually to demonstrate an historical link between the food offerings of the Tsachi Day of the Dead and those of Colonial Spain would require the support of more documentation than perhaps exists (Brandes 1997:293), and is anyway beyond the scope of this thesis, we may at least note that offering food to the dead has a long history in the Catholic tradition, and that despite the contemporary judgement of their Mestizo neighbours, the Tsachi custom of doing so on the Day of the Dead is entirely in keeping with the practices of Catholics across Hispanic America.

But even if the food offerings of the Day of the Dead should prove not to be an import of Iberian Catholicism, we may look elsewhere for their origin. As Brandes reminds us, “There is probably no funerary rite anywhere in which food does not play some role” (1997:280). As Praet points out with regard to the Chachi, however much the living wish to avoid the dead there are times when they have to deal with them “willy-nilly”, most especially when somebody dies (Praet 2006:187). A death, of course, is one of those occasions when the living are forced to interact with the deceased, and among the Tsachila, in common with Amerindian societies of both the lowlands and highlands, the disposal of a corpse and of the soul associated with it involves not only apotropaic action, but also a complex of carefully calibrated solicitous treatments calculated to appease the deceased and to manage their transition into the society of the dead. In this context food often plays an important part. Consider, for example, Harner’s description of a typical Shuar house-burial from 1956-57:

A large basket of cooked manioc and meat is left hanging above the head of the deceased, whether male or female, and a bowl of manioc beer is placed on the ground. The food and beer are replaced daily for about a week, after which it is believed that the *nekás wakanï*, the true soul, has normally departed. However, if one of the survivors subsequently has a bad dream in which the deceased appears and complains of not being fed, the food and beer containers are hastily replenished.

(Harner 1972:168.)

We can detect similar concerns in Praet’s description of Chachi burial practices between 2003-2005. He reports how the coffin was identified as the deceased’s canoe and was provisioned with various necessities, including food, which he would need in the land of the dead:

That is why the plantain coins from the games [at the Wake] are put in the coffin, and sometimes also real money, for the dead sometimes need to buy things, just as the living do. That is also why all kinds of personal belongings are put in the coffin. Clothes but also tools like fishing hooks or axes can be included. Furthermore, food is cooked during the funeral and a plate is left inside the coffin. The dead, after all, need to dress, work and eat as well. But it goes even further. Some insist on burying their dead underneath the ceremonial house to which they belong and nowhere else. They would never contemplate putting them outside, in an unprotected place, without a roof. The Dead, they hold, suffer from rain, cold and wind as much as Humans do.

(Praet 2006:197-198.)

I did not observe any burials during my own fieldwork. However, the ethnographic record on the Tsachila attests to a similar tradition of burying food and other necessities along with the corpse. Compare the previous quotations with the following description of a Colorado burial reported by the Catholic missionary Monsignor Krautwig, probably from about 1882 (see Ventura 2012:238). It is cited in Dautzenberg's (1908) account of the life of Ilmo. Dr. Pedro Schumacher, Bishop of Portoviejo, 1884-1895 (Mezzadri 2004:392):

Their manner of burying the dead is typical. Digging beneath the earth they construct a room. There they hang a hammock and in this they put the cadaver. On the ground they deposit that which in life belonged to the deceased and various pots of charcoal and maize. Then they tie the hand of the cadaver to a large cord and they fix it to the upper part of a tree. They cover the sepulchre with branches and earth. The relatives come every day to visit the tomb until the cord rots; when it has rotted the visits cease, because this sign indicates that the spirit of the deceased has by then abandoned the sepulchre... I have seen this custom with my own eyes.

(My translation from Spanish, Dautzenberg 1908[1968]:157.)¹

Paul Rivet, the famous French ethnologist and medic, visited a group of Tsachila not far from Santo Domingo twenty years after Krautwig, in 1903, and he gives us a similar description:

Once the vigil is over, the body, wrapped in a sheet, a small cross of "chonta" on the chest, is buried in a pit dug in the centre of the house. The hole is 1^m 50 in depth and of such dimensions that the cadaver, lying down, enters without difficulty. The body does not rest in the bottom of the pit, but on three sticks, placed transversely at a certain height, so that it avoids contact with the earth below it; three other sticks, placed in a similar fashion, covered with leaves of "bijao", support the earth which will fill-in the pit, but without touching the deceased. The tomb is marked with a cross of "chonta", placed beside the head, and protected by a little hangar formed of four vertical posts and a roof of leaves of "bijao". A curious detail, a string attached around the body of the deceased comes out of the ground and is fixed to the roof of the hangar. It is by this that the soul departs. If, when pulling on the string, it breaks, this indicates that the soul is gone. As soon as the vigil is over, the family abandon the house, but nevertheless they leave there around the tomb some lighted candles and provisions.

(My translation, Rivet 1905:202-03.)¹

¹ Dautzenberg (1908[1968]:157) citing Krautwig:

Típico es su modo de enterrar a los muertos. Cavando bajo la tierra construyen un cuarto. Cuelgan allí una hamaca y en ella ponen el cadáver. En el suelo depositan lo que perteneció en vida al difunto y varias vasijas con carbón y maíz. Atan luego la mano del cadáver a una gran cuerda y la fijan a un árbol en la parte superior. Cubren la sepultura con ramas y tierra. Los parientes vienen todos los días a visitar el sepulcro hasta que la cuerda se pudra; cuando se ha podrido las visitas cesan, porque tal señal indica que el espíritu del muerto ha abandonado ya la sepultura... He visto con mis propios ojos esta costumbre.

In these descriptions we may observe not only the presence of food and the importance of provisioning the tomb more generally, but also the context in which this is done of care for the deceased, expressed in the whole manner of their interment, in which pains are taken to ensure their comfort and protection from the elements. Costales (1956) describes how the relatives of the deceased would dress him in his best clothes and paint his body and hair “with extreme care, as if he were going to attend a great party, or as if he were on the way to town for the fair”² (p. 79), and in his description of the cemetery we encounter the same hangars reported by Rivet, sheltering each tomb:

[...] The cemetery is gloomy. The exuberant vegetation imprisons the surroundings. Hardly rising above it are some rectangular sheds constructed over each one of the burial mounds. To make this species of shed they have hammered four stakes along the length of the grave. They set up a roof of palm-leaves, in this way leaving the little mound of earth entirely covered.

[...]When we went towards the region of the Colorados, we observed that from some of the funerary sheds there were, hanging from the centre of the roof or from one of the corners, ropes woven from pita fibre, which, suffering from the humidity and

¹ The section from Rivet (1905:202-03) dealing with mortuary ritual reads as follows:

Quelle que soit la raison de la mortalité prématurée des Colorados, voici quelles sont les cérémonies auxquelles donne lieu un décès. Les parents du, décédé le veillent un jour entier. Autour du corps, trois chandelles ont été placées, une à la tête, une à droite et une à gauche. La douleur se manifeste par une espèce de mélopée chantante, avec reprises brusques en notes hautes, suivies d'une chute progressive de la voix, comme d'une personne qui peu à peu s'endormirait en causant et se réveillerait tout à coup. J'ai eu l'occasion d'entendre une de ces mélopées, lors de mon séjour, lorsque les parents de l'assassiné vinrent nous voir. Les hommes n'y prenaient point part, pleuraient en silence ou gardaient un air farouche, et tragique. Les femmes accroupies, le visage recouvert de leurs cheveux, la tête baissée, crièrent et chantèrent ainsi une heure entière. Il fallut l'appât d'un petit verre d'eau-de-vie pour les tirer de cette position et de leur tristesse. Le chant est en langue colorado ; il paraît qu'on supplie le mort de revenir, qu'on lui demande pourquoi il est parti, etc...

La veillée finie, le corps enveloppé d'un drap, une petite croix de « chonta » sur la poitrine, est enterré dans une fosse creusée au centre de la maison. Le trou a 1^m 50 de profondeur et des dimensions telles que le cadavre couché y entre sans difficultés. Le corps ne repose pas sur le fond de la fosse, mais sur trois bâtons, placés transversalement à une certaine hauteur, de façon à lui éviter le contact de la terre au-dessous de lui ; trois autres bâtons, placés d'une façon semblable, recouverts des feuilles de « bijao », supportent la terre qui comblera la fosse, mais sans toucher le mort. La tombe est marquée par une croix de « chonta », placée du côté de la tête, et protégée par un petit hangar formé de quatre pieux verticaux et d'un toit de feuilles de « bijao ». Détail curieux, une ficelle liée autour du corps du défunt sort du sol et est fixée au toit du hangar. C'est par là que l'âme s'en ira. Lorsqu'en tirant sur la ficelle, elle se rompt, c'est que l'âme s'est envolée. Sitôt l'ensevelissement terminé, la famille abandonne la maison, mais en laissant toutefois autour de la tombe quelques chandelles allumées et des vivres.

² My translation from Costales (1956:79):

Relatan que, a la muerte de un colorado se comunica el suceso a todos los amigos y parientes que viven en los alrededores, para el velorio. Previamente los parientes del difunto visten al muerto con las mejores prendas que poseyó en vida, con sumo cuidado, como si fuera a asistir a una gran fiesta, o como si estuviera camino al pueblo para la feria.

Le pintan el cuerpo y le acondicionan el cabello con achiote.

open air, were moving back and forth with the wind. In one of the shacks there was a ladder [...].

[...] This tradition is on the way to disappearing. The teachings of the missionaries are imposing themselves. Even so traces still remain. The superstitious spirit continues latently in them, such being the case of the rope and the construction of the shed which according to what they say serves to protect the dead from the open air and solitude.

It is a new home where the deceased rests without the rain or the sun disturbing him.

(My translation, Costales 1956:79-81.)¹

The effort which we see here to make of the tomb a place sheltered and comfortable for the deceased recalls the identification made explicitly in the *kwenta* of the grave as the house of the dead, a correspondence which is echoed in Costales' last comment above. Rivet, indeed, describes the burial of the deceased in the floor of the house itself, which was thereupon abandoned. The habit of house-burial, as I have already mentioned, although it was still referred to in some of the *kwenta*, over the seventy years previous to my own fieldwork had been replaced by burial in cemeteries. But even after house-burial was abandoned the analogy of the tomb with the house was preserved, as we have seen, by the continuing importance of the roof with which the graves were habitually covered.

¹ This section from Costales (1956:79-81) reads as follows:

Lo velan dos días. Al tercero sale la comitiva con dirección al cementerio, localizado a unas pocas cuadras del pueblo mestizo de San Miguel. El cementerio es sombrío. La vegetación exuberante aprisiona a los alrededores. Apenas sobresalen unos galpones rectangulares construídos [*sic*] sobre cada uno de los túmulos. Para hacer esta especie de galpones han clavado cuatro palos a lo largo de la sepultura. Colocan un techo de hojas de palmera, dejando así cubierto íntegramente el pequeño montículo de tierra.

Para enterrar han seleccionado un sector, donde antes no haya sido sepultada alguna persona. Limpian la maleza y caban una fosa no mayor de dos metros. Bajo el influjo de las emisiones [*sic*], hay familias acomodadas, especialmente de los llamados brujos que pagan al sacerdote para que los haga un entierro cristiano, con responso y las solemnidades rituales de la Iglesia Católica.

Cuando íbamos hacia la región de los colorados, observamos que de algunos galpones funerarios pendían desde el centro del techo, o de una de las esquinas, sogas tejidas de cabuya, que maltratadas por la humedad y la intemperie se movían con el viento de un lado para otro. En uno de los galpones había una escalera, y en el suelo cubierto de malezas, una infinidad de trastos de barro pedaceados, mates y más objetos caseros los que según nos indicaron después, en el día de difuntos fueron dejados conteniendo alimento para los muertos. Parece que esta ofrenda ritual efectúan también en los primeros días del enterramiento. Acuden diariamente, toda la familia hasta que la cuerda sujeta del techo al centro del montículo se pudra. Indagando la razón de todo esto ninguno supo dárnosla. Se contentan con decir que es una costumbre muy antigua que continúa practicándola sin saber el por qué. Presumimos que en tiempos remotos tenía algún simbolismo trascendente.

[...] Esta tradición va camino a desaparecer. Las enseñanzas de las misioneras se imponen. Con todo, rezagos aún quedan. El espíritu supersticioso continúa latente en ellos, tal es el caso de la soga y la construcción del galpón que a decir de ellos sirve para proteger al muerto de la intemperie y la soledad.

Es un nuevo hogar donde el muerto descansa sin que le fastidien la lluvia o el sol.

These sheltered tombs were originally only a temporary abode whose provisioning, as in Harner's account of the Shuar burial, lasted only as long as the soul of the deceased was thought to remain there, until the rope by which the soul was to depart had rotted away. In a similar vein, Ventura reports:

When the deceased was interred in the house, the family would set off rapidly to construct another at a considerable distance, returning to replace food only in broad daylight and only during the first period, when the *tenka* remained attached to the body.

(My translation, Ventura 2012:239-240.)¹

This, then, may be seen to be a stop-gap measure forced upon the surviving kin by the deceased's lingering presence. The dead person, already inadmissible to the society of the living as the *kwenta* vividly remind us, nevertheless was not immediately installed in the society of the dead. For a while he is suspended between the two. He has no house, as it were, in *Pipwa*, and so to keep him in the meantime out of their house, his relatives must make for him a temporary dwelling. The care with which they do so, therefore, has a double significance. They are not purely concerned with his wellbeing, but also with theirs, for the more comfortable they can make him in his own house the less inclined he will be to attempt to return to them and dangerously disrupt their lives. The rope which exits the tomb vertically, the *tenka sili* or "heart cord" (see also Moore 1979:45), encourages him to depart and directs his soul away from the earth toward the land of the dead (Ventura 2012:242-243). But until his soul, his heart, has set out upon that path the deceased is like an aged relative, like the mad decomposing grandmother of the *kwenta*, who is too deranged to be cared for by her family and must be persuaded to stay "in the home" for as long as her demise lacks its definitive conclusion. Once the heart has departed, the cord snapped, the visits and the bringing of food cease and the tomb can be given over to the forest, avoided and ultimately forgotten.

However, the graves that I observed in 2008 were not as easily forgettable as the wooden hangars described by Rivet and Costales. The replacement of palm-thatch

¹ Ventura (2012:239-240):

Cuando el muerto era enterrado en la casa, la familia se marchaba rápidamente para construir otra a una distancia considerable, volviendo para reponer alimentos solamente en pleno día y solamente durante el primer período, cuando el *tenka* seguía atado al cuerpo.

with concrete in the cemetery since the 1950s in fact echoes a similar fashion in house-construction. These tombs were no longer temporary abodes any more than were the breeze-blocked tin-roofed houses of the living just a few hundred yards up the road. There is an illuminating parallel to be observed here between the sedentarisation of the living and that of the dead. The two are in fact closely linked. The same scarcity of land, brought about by the formation of the *Comunas*, which militates against the periodic relocation of households, has also made the disposal of the dead increasingly problematic. One can no longer escape their attentions simply by moving house, and the jungle which would previously have provided plenty of alternative burial sites has grown sparse and crowded with land titles. Thus, just as is the case with respect to the elimination of human waste, upon sedentarisation the disposal of the dead becomes a question of long-term management rather than of periodic moving-on. Hence, the contemporary permanence and conglomeration of the houses of the living, under pressure of construction costs and land availability, has its necessary corollary in the concentration and durability of the dwellings of the dead. And as their presence among the living has become more and more permanent the effort to keep the two apart has become similarly unending. Thus what was once a temporary concern to placate and quarantine the recently deceased until they were safely installed in *Pipwa* and could be forgotten, has, with sedentarisation and the advent of cemeteries, been transformed into a permanent relation between the living and the dead in general which is managed by means of the annual cycle of the Catholic Day of the Dead.

Concluding suggestions

Looked at in terms of the management of an enforced proximity, all the various apparently contradictory elements of the Day of the Dead begin to fall into place. We can see why it should consist of an uneasy combination of apotropaic and solicitous elements. In the cemeteries the dead are permanently present, for though their heart may have gone to *Pipwa*, their bodies and their bones remain. They can no longer ever be forgotten. But the marks of their permanence are at the same time the method of their confinement; the concrete tombs constitute barriers between the living and the remains of the dead which, as we have seen, are annually reinforced with holy water, candles and prayers; the offerings of food may be seen as an extension of the

provisioning of the recently deceased, and according to a similar logic they constitute an attempt to limit the sphere of the dead's presence among the living.

If we consider why the Day of the Dead should take a form similar to that of the 'bailes', several points suggest themselves. First, we may note that, quite apart from anything else, it involves a congregation of the living on a scale which among the Tsachila is almost always accompanied by alcohol consumption whatever the context. In the days when all the Tsachila buried their dead in a single cemetery in San Miguel, the significance of the Day of the Dead purely as a communal gathering of the living must have been still more pronounced. Yet, as we have seen, the dead were thought to be in attendance too; they came from *Pipwa* with the wind, and were kept at a distance by the smoke of cigarettes. As the occasion of a hazardous encounter between the living and dead it may be seen to follow the pattern established in the 'bailes' in general whereby outsiders are admitted and welcomed in the context of a temporary transformation mediated by alcohol.

In ordinary life, as we saw in Chapter III, this transformation consisted of the Tsachila adopting the eating habits and behaviour of Mestizos out on the town. In the cemetery the transformation is much harder to identify. This is perhaps partly because of the decline of the festive atmosphere mentioned above. But there is also the ambiguity arising from the apparent absence of any of the normal indications of the presence of the dead. They are supposedly there, but they make none of the disturbances habitually associated with them. The living, on the other hand, are the ones making all the noise in a place that they usually avoid, lounging around, chatting and drinking, and propping up the tombs as if they owned the place; as if, in fact, they were themselves the dead at a 'baile' in *Pipwa*. Here we might identify once again a suggestion of the kind of shape-shifting proposed by Praet in relation to the Chachi, in which during a Wake the living temporarily become, or "do", the dead, making them physically present along with the recently deceased by means of funerary games. Praet's analysis, however, is based upon clear correspondences which are observable between the activities of the players at a Wake and the kind of life which the Chachi impute to the dead. But, in the case of the Tsachila, if a similar connection can be made with respect to the Day of the Dead it is only implicit. It may once have been more clearly observable. Karsten (1924), for instance, gives a brief description of certain games which the Colorados played during Wakes. But

whatever “shape-shifting” elements these may have contained, a transformation is now merely suggested by the form and context of the communal gathering characterised by the typically transformational consumption of alcohol. Nevertheless, it helps to explain the otherwise puzzling absence of *oko* from precisely the day and location on which they are supposed to have congregated: If the living and the dead do indeed meet in the cemetery, consuming alcohol together, it is in *oko* that they do so, in which they both take on the human form possessed by the dead in *Pipwa*, and the disturbances which characterise their normal encounters thus disappear.

So we have seen that the Day of the Dead celebration combines apotropaic and invocatory practices. But it is not that the first are Tsachi and the latter Catholic, as we might have expected. Rather an apotropaic concern is exhibited both in Tsachi practices (e.g. smoking to keep *oko* away) and Catholic ones (candles and sprinkling with holy water). We also see that there is a logic of invocation expressed both in the actions of the priest and those of his Tsachi flock who come to the cemetery to meet the dead in a kind of ‘baile’. An examination of the history of Tsachi mortuary ritual and of the Catholic celebration of All Souls’ Day has indicated just how difficult it is to tease out which elements of the contemporary celebration are Catholic and which Tsachi in origin. But we have seen also how both Catholic and Tsachi traditions suggest a concern for the management of relations between the living and the dead, rather than simply for communion on the one hand and repudiation on the other. In this context the solicitous and invocatory elements of mortuary ritual and of the Day of the Dead celebration may be seen to be governed by a more general apotropaic concern, in the face of an interaction with the dead which cannot be avoided, to nonetheless control the terms on which it occurs. The difference that the Catholic Church makes to all this is not so much in the underlying logic, but in the extension of what was once a fairly short-term and ad hoc ‘management’ of one’s own deceased relatives into an annual and institutionalised management of the dead in general.

In this connection a final observation may be made regarding the logic of apotropaic action. On the one hand it can be reactive, deployed ad hoc to rid oneself of a present danger: so for example, recourse to the shaman in an instance of haunting, or the

recitation of a prayer or the lighting of a cigarette upon encountering an *oko*. On the other hand habitual and repetitive apotropaic action, of the kind institutionalised in Catholic ritual, is self-reinforcing. Because it is not reactive but pre-emptive it transforms even the absence of something (in this case *oko*) into evidence of its existence, because absence of *oko* then comes to imply the effectiveness of the apotropaic action which is predicated upon the danger that they pose. Once the habitual action is established the only way to find out whether an absence of *oko* is in fact due to the effectiveness of the action or not is to suspend it, and very often the risks perceived to attend such a cessation are prohibitive. So, it gains its own momentum and its own evidential force with respect to the lurking background of that which is absent. In this way, paradoxically, the dead who are repeatedly exorcised are made thus always present as the danger which even the prevailing tranquillity suggests.

VI. Good and Evil in the Afterlife: Christian positions and the interpretation of personal experience

In Chapter III we saw how the threat of *oko* is tacitly acknowledged in the tenor and conventions of everyday life and how it is associated with circadian patterns of sound and light, day and night. In Chapter IV we saw how these implicit associations were vividly illustrated and worked through in the narratives of the *kwenta*, the ancestral accounts of *oko*, which until recently gave the concept much of its imaginative valence. In Chapter V, through the examination of the celebration of the Day of the Dead, we explored some of the ways in which the Catholic cult of the dead has intersected with Tsachi attitudes and practices, both modifying and being modified by them, the result being a combination of apotropaic and solicitous treatments of the deceased which exist in an ambivalent tension. In the present chapter we will examine in detail some of the ways in which people recount their own encounters with *oko*. Taking specific examples we will see how a close attention to these narratives reveals the ways in which people use their common knowledge to make sense of their own experience of *oko*, and how these experiences in turn challenge and reshape common knowledge. Here we will be, as it were, observing common knowledge in the process of its construction and reconstruction in response both to personal experience and to the assertions of Catholic and Evangelical Christianity. We will see here, as we did in Chapter II, how the experiences related remain open to interpretations which are potentially at odds with the narrators' religious affiliations, and we will see also how limited are the effects of Catholic and Evangelical positions on the interpretations they give. The *a priori* accounts of post-mortem existence offered by Christianity appear in the end to have had little significant impact on what these people have seen and much less effect than we might have supposed on how they explained it.

An Evangelical position?

We will begin by returning to the interview with Reginaldo concerning the Day of the Dead. A grandfather in his mid-fifties, Reginaldo was a well-respected figure in the village, a committed Evangelical Christian and a very successful farmer thanks to a prudent attention to the market fluctuations of cocoa, plantain and taro over many

years. It was to his house that my missionary friend had taken me at the very beginning of my fieldwork. From there Reginaldo had introduced me to his brother-in-law, Dario, with whose family I then lived throughout my time in Congoma. Before that, however, I had met Reginaldo by arrangement in Santo Domingo during one of my preliminary visits to the city. He cut an impressive figure with an immaculate coiffure of red achiote. He appeared self-assured, sharp, not unfriendly but at the same time having an air of studied reserve to the point of wariness. This was hardly surprising considering that as yet he knew next to nothing about me. But his demeanour was considerably cooler than that which I had come to expect from Mestizos even upon first acquaintance. Over soup and the standard Ecuadorian second course of rice, meat and beans, we discussed my research interests. At my mention of dreams he told me that he had once had a striking dream in which his deceased grandfather had shown him *Pipwa*, the land of the dead, or Hades, and he promised to tell me about it one day. It was for that purpose that three months later, having by then settled into a quiet life with Dario and his family, I had asked Reginaldo if he would let me record an interview with him. We agreed to meet at Dario's house and he arrived shortly after three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon in order to coincide with the day's sporting activities. While a game of football got underway across the road he and I sat on the veranda of Dario's house discussing dreams, *Pipwa*, souls and *oko*. The first part of this interview, in which he related his dream of *Pipwa*, we will return to in just a moment. After we had discussed his dream, and touched upon the subject of souls and the occult power of shamans, I asked him to tell me about what people used to do on the Day of the Dead.

As we saw in the previous chapter he gave me a brief description of what his grandparents used to do when he himself was a child. They would go to the cemetery in San Miguel, which at that time was exclusively Tsachi, and load up their relatives' graves with food. However, it was far from clear what Reginaldo actually thought about this custom. His concerns in answering my questions were somewhat different from my own in asking. He was an Evangelical, as I have already mentioned, and for Evangelicals the putative presence of ghosts presented a particular problem. Ever since the Reformation, Protestants have held that the Bible denies their existence. Revenance in the popular imagination of late Medieval Christendom was so emphatically associated with the doctrine of Purgatory that belief in ghosts became,

in the words of Keith Thomas, “a shibboleth which distinguished Protestant from Catholic almost as effectively as belief in the Mass or the Papal Supremacy” (Thomas 1971:703). Although far removed from the theological and political turmoil of its origin I found this same fault-line still persisting five hundred years later and six thousand miles away in twenty-first century Congoma. It was often reported to me that according to the Bible there were no such things as *puyan oko* (dead person *oko*) and, besides teetotalism, this opinion was one of the surest ways to identify the influence of Evangelical Christianity among the Tsachila. As I explained in the introduction there were Evangelical missionaries living in the Comuna from the end of the 1940s until the end of the 1980s, and at the height of their influence towards the end of this period there were around 80 observant Evangelicals in the Comuna. By 2008 there were only a handful of people who continued to practice, but those who remembered the lessons of the Evangelicals frequently informed me of the Biblical denial of the existence of *puyan oko*. Their argument, according to Reginaldo, was that the souls of the dead are immediately committed by God to their ultimate destiny and are not permitted to linger in this world. By contrast, among the Catholic majority the existence of *oko* was taken for granted and, as we have seen, their propensity to linger provided the motivation for a considerable amount of religious activity. Reginaldo, then, in answering my questions about the Day of the Dead, was explaining a ritual the presuppositions of which his religious allegiance required him to reject: of course the *oko* weren't there; just like the Bible says, they can't come back. However, although this was the kind of commentary which according to Evangelical teaching he should have given, what he actually said was very different, and it raised all sorts of other questions relating to the grounds of knowledge, the significance of experience, ignorance and belief. In the course of the conversation he implicitly identified four sources of knowledge: what he himself had seen, what people said (particularly his grandparents), what the shamans said, and what the Bible says. Here he was dealing with competing authorities, but the way he played them off, one against the other, was subtle and surprising.

Consider the following section of the interview concerning the Day of the Dead:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

- DD: Entonces, ¿cómo la gente se
daron cuenta que llegan, o...? So, how did people
realise that they [the *oko*] arrive, or...?
- REG: ¿A comer eso? To eat this?
- DD: Sí. Yes.
- REG: Es pura creencia. [Ríe él.] It's pure belief. [he laughs.]
- DD: Aha. Aha.
- REG: Pura creencia. Dice así. Pure belief. This is what they say.
- DD: Aha. Aha.
- REG: Pero en realidad no come. [...] But in reality it doesn't eat. [...]

Judging by the above exchange we must conclude that according to Reginaldo those who said, or believed, that the *oko* came and ate were simply mistaken. He contrasts the “pure belief” of what people say with the reality of the evident absence of *oko*. But as he continued his meaning became more obscure—

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

- REG: [...] O sea, viendo así en realidad
no come. No se ve que, que...
minora... [...] That is, seeing like this in reality
it doesn't eat. You don't see that, that...
it diminishes...
- DD: ¿No parece que...? It doesn't appear that...?
- REG: No parece come. Pero en *okobi*
creo que sí, no. Entonces, eso, eso
lo que, lo que la gente piensen en
okobi. En *okobi* dice que come a
esos, otro poco [digo así, solo dicen
??] que llevan para comer allá. Así
creen la gente. It doesn't appear it eats. But in *okobi*
I believe so, no. So, this, this is
what, what people think in
okobi. In *okobi* they say that it eats
these, a few others [I say this, they just say
??] that they take to eat there. Like this
the people believe.

“That is, seeing like this in reality... but in *okobi*...” —The contrast now seems to be not between reality and belief, but between reality and *okobi* or ‘in *oko*’. And reality, Reginaldo suggests here, implies a certain way of seeing, and ‘in *oko*’ another. In further conversations with him and with another of my interviewees who had been for a time apprenticed to a shaman, this notion emerged more explicitly: a person was said to be in *oko* when seeing with the clear vision of the shaman in which *oko* appeared as people (see Chapter III above). It would seem then that the “seeing like this” of reality, as Reginaldo puts it here, is not definitive, but stands in contrast to an alternative type of seeing in *oko*. Thus, the word “reality” (‘realidad’) again appears to designate the kind of context-specific perceptual situation associated with Viveiros de Castro’s and Vilaça’s ideas of a perspective, in much the same way as we saw in Chapter IV in connection with stories about the walking dead of ‘*más antes*’. There we saw how the dead, no longer “thinking in reality”, occupied, as it were, a different perspective from the living in which what they saw as salt, the sun, fish, bathing, etc. were altogether different from what the living saw as such. Here, I would suggest, Reginaldo is employing this same idea of there being different ways of seeing, of which “reality” designates but one, in order to allow the possibility that the *oko*, while not appearing “in reality,” might still be present “in *oko*”.¹

At this point in the interview I began to wonder whether Reginaldo saw reason to believe that the *oko* really did come to the cemetery and eat, and I sought clarification:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

DD: Aha. ¿Y, y usted cree este también? Aha. And, and do you believe this also?

REG: O en realidad, en realidad no. Or in reality, in reality no.

DD: ¿No? No?

REG: No lo creo. Es que... no es posible, no. Es que no asoma, no. I don’t believe it. The thing is... it’s not possible. The thing is they don’t appear, right.

¹ We encountered something similar in Chapter II where Timoteo, the gentleman who had become a Seventh Day Adventist, talked of seeing “legally” and by implication distinguished this from seeing illegally, that is to say his own seeing of something that according to the Bible one is not supposed to be able to see.

So finally he does in fact profess disbelief. He does not believe that the dead come. The reason? Because it's not possible. Well, of course it's not possible, we might say. The dead cannot really come back, because the dead stay dead. But this is not the reason my friend gives here. According to him it is not possible because they do not appear, because they make no noise, because the food does not diminish, in short, because the presence of the dead is not available to his senses. And yet, as he said earlier, they might come in *oko*. But, as he pointed out, only shamans are in a position to answer that, because they are the ones who see and do things in *oko*, and Reginaldo, as he often reminded me, is not a shaman. This, I think, was one reason for his equivocation in response to my questions. When I pressed him on the subject of the Day of the Dead he would go no further than that which he saw and heard: the untouched food on the graves, the absence of the noise of *oko*, the results of the process which are in this case equivocal, as we saw in the previous chapter. In fact, as he continued, his reluctance to pass comment beyond the limits of his own experience became increasingly clear:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

- | | | |
|------|---|--|
| REG: | [...] Es que, no... en este sentido [hoy ??] medio... Pero como hacen... bueno, yo, yo, en persona, hoy no, yo no hago tampoco. O sea, yo en si mismo nunca he llevado. Pero yo solo eso estoy hablando de, de que mi... hacia mi abuelita, mi abuelito, todo ellos hacía, yo veía eso sí. | [...] The thing is, no... in this sense [today] a bit... But like they do... well, I, I, myself,. today no, I don't do it either. That is, I in myself have never brought [food]. But I'm only talking about, about what my... my grandma did, my grandpa, all of them did it, I saw this yes. |
| DD: | Sí. | Yes. |
| REG: | Pero como yo muy pequeño, no sabía, no sé que hacía, y no asomaba <i>oko</i> también yo. Uh... no, no, no creía. Pero, ahora, ahora ya no hago también. Ya no, ya no. Claro que voy al cementerio, estoy allí, un rato, sentado, conversando con los vecinos por allí. Ya, más o menos así, no. | But as I [was] very little, I didn't know, I don't know what they did, and <i>oko</i> didn't appear to me also. Uh... ...I didn't believe. But, now, now I don't do it also. Now no, now no. Of course I go to the cemetery, I am there, a while, seated, talking with the neighbours there. Ya, more or less like this. |

Reginaldo states here that only his grandparents offered food to the dead, not he himself, and his hesitancy and apparent scepticism regarding the custom are consonant with his religious commitments. The Evangelical missionaries discouraged the practice, and as I have already mentioned they taught that there could be no such thing as ghosts. It is thus all the more remarkable that Reginaldo, being a committed Evangelical himself, should refrain from dismissing the customs of his grandparents as mistaken. Ultimately, it may be noted, he preferred to profess ignorance rather than disbelief. Timoteo, the Adventist whose narrative I discussed in Chapter II, we may recall, showed the same inclination, and this accords with a general tendency in the accounts I collected from the Tsachila, most of whom relied upon experience to such an extent that questions about what they believed were all but redundant. The limits of what one knew, the extent of one's own experience and also of one's ignorance, typically outweighed one's ideological allegiances. Ventura makes a similar observation, referring to "[a] particular manner of reflecting with a great fidelity the perception of the world which each one possesses at each moment" (2009:135-36).¹ She relates this to the evidential system of Tsafiki, which I discussed in the introduction.

In the conversations and interviews that developed over the course of my fieldwork the decisive role of personal experience was most clearly demonstrated by the way in which other sources of knowledge were weighed against it. Reginaldo, for instance, despite his ignorance and equivocation regarding the Day of the Dead, and despite the dictates of Evangelical teaching, took it for granted that *oko* existed. It turned out that even though they did not appear in the cemetery on the Day of the Dead he had had several encounters with them in other places and on other occasions. But when I pressed him on this point he did not at first refer to them:

[REG, 30-10-08 16H14]

DD: Bueno, pero... de *ok*... ..Bueno, me parece que usted cree en *oko*, en la existencia de *oko*, no.

Well, but... about *ok*... ..Well, it seems to me that you believe in *oko*, in the existence of *oko*, right?

¹ My translation from Ventura (2009:135-136):

Chez les Tsachila, cette versatilité qui entoure la description des entités spirituelles est en parfait accord avec le caractère évidentiel de la langue et sa manière particulière de refléter avec une grande fidélité la perception du monde que chacun possède à chaque moment.

REG:	Sí. Eso sí. Sí creo existe <i>oko</i> .	Yes. That's right. Yes, I believe that <i>oko</i> exist.
DD:	¿Y por qué cree en...?	And why do you believe in...?
REG:	¿Por qué?	Why?
DD:	Sí.	Yes.
REG:	Porque— [DD: Aha.] Sí. Porque tiene que haber <i>oko</i> . O sea, después haber muerto tiene que haber <i>oko</i> . Es sí. [...]	Because— [DD: Aha.] Yes. Because there must be <i>oko</i> . That is, after there being [a] death there must be [an] <i>oko</i> . This, yes. [...]

Reginaldo said this as if it were an obvious fact, and among the Tsachila I found no one for whom it would have been otherwise. Of course after a death there is an *oko*: you hear them, you see them; it goes without saying. But, after a pause, he added:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

REG:	[...] La... bueno, yo más creo también porque la Biblia dice eso...[DD: Aha.] La Biblia dice... en <i>oko</i> que ese... que muere, o sea, persona que se muere... <i>tenka</i> o <i>oko</i> sale, y está en cierto lugare. [DD: Aha.] Entonces, tiene que a ver vida más allá si que te pueda ver muerto, [DD: Aha.] allí en la vida. [...]	[...] The...well, I believe more also because the Bible says this... [DD: Aha.] The Bible says... in <i>oko</i> that this one... that dies, that is, the person that dies... <i>tenka</i> or <i>oko</i> goes out, and is in certain place[s]. [DD: Aha.] So, there must be life beyond if you can see [a] dead [one], [DD: Aha.] there in life. [...]
------	--	---

At first sight this appears to be a straightforward appeal to the Bible in support of a belief in the afterlife, what he calls ‘vida más allá’ (“life beyond”). As Reginaldo continued, however, it became clear that he considered the authority of the Bible to be far less evident, far more in need of support, than the existence of *oko*, and so by linking the two through this reference to the afterlife, he reinforced the former with the evidential weight of the latter. In fact, the teaching he attributes to the Bible is reminiscent of his references to shamanic knowledge— “The Bible says... in *oko*...”, (i.e. *okobi*) — and his concluding remark recalls the same contrast we discussed earlier between the kind of seeing one does “in reality” and the shaman’s seeing “in *oko*”: “So, there must be life beyond if you can see [a] dead [one], there in life.”

Reginaldo evidently regarded this as a sufficient answer to my question. However, I wanted to hear about the noises that *oko* made in those other places to which he had referred earlier. I had already learnt from conversations with Dario that *oko* had been far noisier and more troublesome in the memory of his parents and grandparents and even in his own childhood, than they were today. I hoped a reference to this might provoke a comment from Reginaldo, and so it did, though not of the kind I had expected:

[REG, 30-10-08, 16H14]

- DD: Bueno, y... y esto *oko* cuando, cuando uno muere ¿se asoma todavía, o...?...ah, como má...? Más antes, no, hicieron tanto bulla, pero ahorita...
- Well, and... and this *oko* when, when someone dies does it [the *oko*] appear still, or... ah, like bef...? Before, right, they made so much noise, but now...
- REG: Sí. Bueno. Sí hay otra problema para creer, no. O sea, para creer [...?]. Um, la gente sabe decía, no, hay *oko* bueno y *oko* malo, *seton oko* y *yukan oko*. Pero según la Biblia, dice que hace bulla es el, el, el espíritu malo. Epíritu malo reemplazándola a este... haciéndole creer de que este *oko* es del... del que murió. Pero es *seton oko*... según la Biblia.
- Yes. Well. Yes, there is another problem for believing. That is, to believe [...?]. Um, people were used to say, right, there are good *oko* and bad *oko*, *seton oko* and *yukan oko*. But according to the Bible, it says what makes noise is the, the, the bad spirit. Bad spirit replacing this... making [people] believe that this *oko* is of him... him that died. But it is *seton oko*... according to the Bible.
- DD: ¿Es *seton*...?
- It is *seton*...?
- REG: *Seton oko*, o sea, espíritu malo, o *yukan oko*, sí. Haciendole creer a la gente, como creencia. Pero [ma... ??] el, el muerto de que... o sea, *tenka* de que murió está ya destinado, según la Biblia. Está destinado, si está... si este va al paraíso allí tiene que estar esperando, o si está al Seol¹, o lugar de los muertos, ya tiene que estar. [La que... acá ??]. Entonces, todo lo que hace bulla, o cosas extraño que hace por aquí es *seton oko*, reemplazando a *oko*, según la Biblia. Y la, según la creencia de las personas, o de la gente, o de *pone* no,
- Seton oko*, that is, bad spirit, or *yukan oko*, yes. Making people believe, as a belief. But [mor...??] the, the dead of which... that is, the *tenka* of him that died is already destined, according to the Bible. It is destined, if it is...if it goes to paradise, there it must be waiting, or if it is to Sheol, or the place of the dead, already it must be [there]. [That which... here ??]. So, everything that makes noise, or strange things that do around here is *seton oko*, replacing *oko*, according to the Bible. And the, according to the belief of the persons, or of the people, or of *pone*, right,

¹ Seol appears to be a hispanization of a Hebrew word which is normally rendered 'Sheol' in English. It is extremely rarely used in Spanish and reflects the depth of Reginaldo's knowledge of the Bible. See also the subsequent footnote on Sheol.

eso es mismo *oko*. [Enton... está] un poco de confusión. Pero sabemos que sí existe *oko*. Eso sí. Yo, yo sé. Eso yo... estoy conciente de que sí existe *oko*. La buena y lo malo existe, sí.

this is the same *oko*. [So... this is] a little bit of confusion. But we know that, yes, *oko* exist. This, yes. I, I know. This I...I am aware that, yes, *oko* exist. The good and the bad exist, yes.

I had intended to elicit some account of what kinds of noises, if any, were made by *oko* nowadays by comparison with that time ‘más antes’. If not in the cemetery on the Day of the Dead, did they appear anywhere else, and why might they have become less common, less noisy and disruptive now than in years gone by? But as the reader may note I did not finish my sentence and Reginaldo identified a different problem altogether. According to the Bible, he says, the noises are not made by *oko* of the dead but by *seton oko* and *yukan oko*, two examples of evil or bad *oko*, and this is a problem for believing. What does he mean? Is it a problem for believing in *oko*, as we might say? Apparently not. What is at issue here is not the absence or silence of *oko* but their presence. The Bible, Reginaldo continues, teaches that the *tenka* or *oko* of the dead is already consigned to its final destination, either Paradise or Sheol¹, and so it ought not to appear at all in the land of the living. This would be the end of the matter were it not for the fact that although they are meant to be elsewhere they are apparently still here, making noise as always. Thus the Bible would seem to require that the noises, disturbances and apparitions which the Tsachila and their shamans identify with the *oko* of the dead are in fact not what they seem to be— they are evil spirits deceiving people into thinking that they are the *oko* of their relatives. This is the problem for believing to which Reginaldo refers, and it cuts both ways. What is said by the Tsachila and the shamans is contradicted by the Bible. Which account does one believe? There is, as he observes, a little confusion here. And yet, despite himself being a committed Evangelical, Reginaldo concludes with no confusion at all in favour of the Tsachila and the shamans: “But we know that, yes, *oko* exist. [...] I know [...] I am aware that, yes, *oko* exist. The good and the bad exist, yes.”

¹ Sheol and Seol are renderings of a Hebrew word which appears in the Psalms in connection with the grave, Hades, the abode of the dead. Reginaldo’s usage of it reflects a considerable familiarity with the Bible, attributable not least to several years which he spent as part of a group of young men whom Bruce Moore taught to read and write and employed to help him translate the Bible into Tsafiki.

Among the most impressive of the various encounters with *oko* which Reginaldo related to me was the vivid dream involving his dead grandfather to which I referred above, and this incident may go some way towards explaining his confidence that there are good *oko*, despite what the Bible reportedly says. It was in fact the first thing Reginaldo had told me about on our first meeting, when I had explained my research interests. Later, as I have explained, I asked him to recount it in detail so that I could record it and what follows is my own close translation of that recording:

Some years ago, more than ten years, I had a dream that was kind of strange to me. Well, I will talk directly about what I saw in dreaming,¹ right, what happened to me in dreaming. So, it was a place very, very strange. Very, very strange in the sense that it was like a border, one can say. A very strange border, where I was — In dream I was standing there, looking like this downriver, and also, like this upriver. That is to say, towards where the sun comes out and towards where the sun hides away. So, while I was standing there looking, in dream there came to me my grandfather, my grandfather who had been already dead for many years [...] So, my grandfather appeared, came and he got hold of me here, around the middle, and carried me like this over there. But my grandfather didn't walk on the ground, but in the air. He walked in the air. And he got hold of me here and carried me like this. So, as I said, at this border— There was a border. On that side everything was a yellow colour, or orange, as in dry. Like this one could see a long way, an immense, immense space, so that one couldn't see the end. And then, from the border this way, it was the same, an immense space, but all green. It looked very beautiful, green, green. Like this there was jungle, trees, plantains. It looked very beautiful. So, having carried me there my grandfather said to me, here there are people from all the people who live. And here there was this great space and there one saw such a quantity of faces, that is to say, of persons. But this was a long way away, in this yellow part. So my grandfather got hold of me and he didn't carry me to join them, but to a certain distance he carried me and placed me to stand there, he, talking like a person to me, conversing, explaining that here there are people of every type of people. And in the place where he took me they were building some new houses, that is to say, houses in the style of the Tsachila that they made some time ago. They weren't like we make now, with tin and all this. They were of this material of pambíl, of this wood of the laurels. They were stripping the bark. Like this it was. So, he carried me above all this, making me stand there. Like this he got hold of me here and carried me above it like this, not on the ground. In the air. So, and then he told me, look at all of this, and these are souls, the dead. In Tsafiki he said, *okola, puyan okola*.² So, seeing all this I felt quite afraid. Really, I was somewhat afraid, somewhat taken aback. But this wasn't some hundred or hundreds of people, but it was thousands of people, so that one could see faces upon faces. More or less the comparison is this. When I have conversed with people here I have made this comparison to be able to explain. Have you ever seen, occasionally, when they take photos when these footballers are playing in a stadium. So, more or less, one sees these around the stadium, what a quantity of faces one sees. More or less like this I

¹ “...en sueño...” This is a difficult phrase to translate. Whereas in English one would distinguish “a dream” as a specific instance from “dreaming” as the activity, and perhaps “in dreams” as the sphere of oneiric experience in general, in Spanish all of these are covered by the single phrase ‘en sueño’ and an article is rarely used. Hence I have opted for the rather odd-sounding translation of “in dreaming” in order to highlight the ambiguity of the original.

² *Okola* is the plural of *oko* and *puyan okola* is the plural of *puyan oko* (“dead [one] *oko*”).

saw, but in quantity. And a sound, that is, a noise like— Perhaps you have— well, perhaps no. But in these parts there is a hive of bees. A hive they call it. So, at that moment when one heard that sound, like this was the noise there. More or less this sound. But what a quantity of people this was, dead souls. And all of them were peaceful, very joyful, happy. There they aren't sad, not at all. Very joyful, smiling. Peaceful, peaceful. There they are very very peaceful. So, hearing all this, I, inside me, felt something. I, what am I doing here? I'm not from here. That is, in dream. And I, I looked like this upriver, that is, towards us where everything was green. So, my grandfather again took me from there. That is, the border was more or less here. And from here a certain distance away they were building a house, and my grandfather took me and carried me towards there. From there further away still were the people. And so my grandfather again took me from there and carried me in the same way through the air and left me standing once again on the border where I was before, on the border between the yellow and the green. And so, after that my grandfather went away in that direction, and I, after that I came back in this direction. And when I woke up, that is, when I woke from the dream I felt something like my spirit was affrighted, that is, as *puyan oko*, kind of shaking, frightened. And from then, as it was many years ago, I have it so present, how things were. This is very beautiful. So, then I told myself, in dream I have seen where the dead live. So, in Tsafiki this is *Pipwa*. So, I know to think, that is, talking to other people I say I know what it is like to go to *Pipwa*. I have been there. Because in dream I went, right. So, that is to say, I know it, how it is. Now, talking of it apart from this, the others say the same thing, for example, here the shamans, the *pone*; they speak of it in the same way. They say also that they, when someone dies, have to send the spirit over there.

In this account Reginaldo explicitly connects his knowledge of the land of the dead to his dream. Furthermore, we may note how he presents it as authoritative because it consists of what he himself has seen. He says:

Talking to other people I say I know what it is like to go to *Pipwa*. I have been there. Because in dream I went, right. So, that is to say, I know it, how it is.

The geography which he thus asserts, however, is not the afterlife of Evangelical teaching, an arena of Divine refreshment or judgement from which no traffic is permitted with the world. Although his experience is distinguishable from ordinary life by its oneiric context, this does not appear to modify his claim to have seen the land of the dead and what he reports is a place spatially contiguous with that of the living. It exhibits the traditional orientation associated with shamanic dreams and visions in which the path leading to the dead lies downriver and to the living upriver (see Ventura 2004:168). It is a place from which his dead grandfather passes with apparent ease exhibiting the kind of aerial ambulation frequently remarked upon in narratives of encounters with *oko*. He is brought there simply by being carried downriver and what his grandfather shows him has none of the Christian architecture of Heaven and Hell, but instead the “very human kind of life” (Ventura 2009:201,

2012:237) characteristic of shamanic accounts of *Pipwa*. This is an afterlife far closer, socially and geographically, to this life than is envisaged in a Christian cosmology. Furthermore there is no indication that entry and exit is determined by Divine fiat. Rather, Reginaldo's obvious concern to emphasise the distance which was maintained in the dream between himself and the dead suggests that he thought it all too easy for him to join them:

So my grandfather got hold of me and he didn't carry me to join them, but to a certain distance he carried me [...] Like this he got hold of me here and carried me above it like this, not on the ground. In the air. [...] And from here a certain distance away they were building a house, and my grandfather took me and carried me towards there. From there further away still were the people.

This preoccupation with his position relative to the dead again indicates his dream's indebtedness to shamanic accounts of the afterlife. The shamans themselves reportedly avoid getting too close to *Pipwa* because of the danger this involves (Ventura 2009:202, 2012:238), and Reginaldo implicitly expresses a similar fear in a moment of decision which constitutes the dream's turning point or denouement:

So, hearing all this, I, inside me, felt something. I, what am I doing here? I'm not from here. That is, in dream. And I, I looked like this upriver, that is, towards us where everything was green. So, my grandfather again took me from there.

It is this realisation that he is somewhere where he does not belong and his turning to look upriver which initiates his return towards the "us" of the living and ends in his waking from the dream. In all these respects the account that Reginaldo renders of his dream of the afterlife cuts across his Evangelical beliefs and more closely resembles the accounts given by Tsachi shamans. In his conclusion he makes this explicit, connecting his experience not with Biblical doctrines, but with the descriptions of the shamans, and concludes with an implicit endorsement of the shamanic activity of soul-sending which according to Evangelical teaching ought not to be necessary.

But dreams of the dead often fitted well with Christian claims in other ways. My questions about *oko* frequently elicited references to oneiric encounters with the dead and sometimes with other normally occult creatures too. For non-shamans dreams provided the most common occasions for contact with the deceased. Everyone I

spoke to on the subject confirmed that they had dreamt of dead relatives and that to do so was generally a bad thing. It was a sign that whatever one had originally intended to do the following day would in some way be frustrated. This was not a bad omen of any grand proportions. It might simply be, for instance, that one had planned a trip into town and the bus would not turn up; or perhaps one had arranged to sell a few stalks of plantains to one of the Mestizo traders and he would not come. The sensible thing to do if one had a dream like this of a *puyan oko* was simply to change one's plans and spend the day doing something else. However, besides this self-fulfilling augural convention I also heard a number of accounts of dreams in which people had been encouraged or assisted in some way by visits from deceased relatives.

For example, on the morning of the Day of the Dead, before we left for the cemetery, Dario told me of two occasions when his deceased mother-in-law had come to them in dreams. The conversation began when I asked whether they would be leaving any food on her grave. By way of answer he started telling me about her life. She was a very special person, he said. Everyone in Congoma knew her. She wanted to be able to read the Bible and she prayed to God and within three months, he told me, she had learnt to read Tsafiki perfectly, though she could not read Spanish or write at all. She said it was a gift that God had given her. She was about 50 years old at the time. She made a commitment ('un compromiso'), he said — this is Evangelical vocabulary indicating a commitment to follow Christ — and she 'walked for 18 years' (with Christ). She was a very good person, he said. People came to her for advice, couples with problems for example, and he told me how she had helped him a great deal with advice when he had married her daughter. He said he didn't know where her words came from, but they were good words. When she was dying she said that she didn't need anything, that she knew she was going to Heaven; her body would stay here but her spirit ('espíritu') would go to Heaven ('el cielo'). It wouldn't stay here. So she told them not to leave food for her. They could leave flowers, but not food, and she told them that if they did she would come to them in a dream to tell them that they were failing ('fallando'). So they did as she had told them and left no food for her on the Day of the Dead. But Dario went on to tell me that she had in fact come to them sometimes in dreams to give them advice or a warning about other things. A few years previous to my fieldwork their house, which at that time was built of wood,

had burnt down as a result of an accidental fire. Fortunately no-one had been injured but all their belongings had been lost in the conflagration. Six months afterwards they were desperate, Dario's wife was ill, they had lost their grip on the farming cycle and had no money. His wife was crying, he told me, and he was crying and then he dreamt of his mother-in-law. She told him not to worry; that soon they would succeed and everything would be alright again; and she gave him five large coins with sparks flying off them. Then he woke up and there was nothing. The next night she appeared in his dream again with the same message and so he set to work encouraged and with renewed determination and now, he said, they have a new house, and the farm is back in order, and they are about at the same level as they were before the fire. Then he told me about a dream of his daughter-in-law's. She had never met his mother-in-law. When her youngest son was forty-five days old his head was terribly swollen and she was very worried and in a kind of depression — 'en una caida'. Then she had a dream in which a woman came to her and told her that she was her husband's grandmother and that she shouldn't worry because nothing was going to happen to her baby son. I asked Dario if the woman in his daughter-in-law's dream had looked like his mother-in-law. She had told them the details of her appearance, he said, and yes, it was her. And after the dream his daughter-in-law was encouraged and stronger and her son survived.

Another man, who at the age of 44 had just been baptised an Evangelical, told me of a similar dream. I had been asking him about *oko*, with which he had had a number of encounters. He told me about two of them: the first the sound of a baby's wailing which had encircled him and his uncle in the darkness on the way home from an evening fishing trip when he was a teenager; the second, more recently, when he and his wife were coming back at night from hunting and had stopped in an abandoned house to get some sleep. They had been disturbed by the sound of rasping breath, movements of the floorboards and banging on the walls, pillars, and trees. These had followed them as they left the house and attempted to find alternative shelter and later they discovered that the owner of the house had been killed by poisoning. People who died such violent deaths, he said, made these kinds of disturbances and frightened the living. But he went on to explain that people who died "in Christ" died quietly without making such 'bulla'. God looked after their souls. His own daughter, who was an Evangelical Christian, had died three years previously at the

age of twenty, leaving her one-year-old daughter to be brought up by him and his wife. The child already called her grandmother “mamita”, he told me, and he said she helped to fill the gap left by her mother. His daughter, he said, had died quietly “in Christ”. But she had visited her younger brother in a dream. He described her as being clothed in white and riding a white horse and she counselled her brother to use his musical talents to praise God, instead of wasting his life.

We can see then how Evangelical attitudes to the dead, while they deny the existence of ghosts, nevertheless seem to sit fairly easily with the notion that the dead may appear to the living in dreams, and we may note that such oneiric encounters are often associated precisely with those who “die quietly in Christ”. In the following account, this time taken from a young Catholic woman, we will see more clearly how the idea of these “good *oko*” intersects with a distinctively Christian recasting of the opposition between the living and the dead.

A Catholic position?

The young woman (we will call her Margarita) who gave me the following interview was the daughter of one of the most active Catholic Tsachila in the village. At the time of our meeting she was visiting her parents. She was 19 years old, married and with a son already one-and-a-half years old. But she had been very recently bereaved. About five months prior to our interview she had given birth to her second son two months premature after a difficult pregnancy. They had gone to the hospital in Santo Domingo but after three days the child died. She was evidently still deeply affected by this tragedy, but when I visited her parents’ house to ask her father about his own experiences of *oko* he suggested that I should talk to his daughter. She agreed and began to tell me about the death of her child and how he had been appearing to her in her dreams:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

MAR: De ahí ese muchacho me sabía revelar en sueño, yo me sabía de ahí que cada iba creciendo, y sabía estar con mis dos finados abuelos. Es que mis dos abuelos son, son, son muertos.

After that this boy used to reveal himself to me in dreams, I knew after that that each [time] he was growing, and he used to be with my two deceased grandparents. Because my two grandparents are, are, are dead.

DD:	Aha.	Aha.
MAR:	Mi abuela y mi abuelo; de ahí ya...	My grandmother and my grandfather, after that then...
DD:	Entonces ¿apareció este bebe [MAR: Claro.] en sueño con ellos o...?	So this baby appeared [MAR: Yes, of course.] in dream with them or...?
MAR:	Sí, con ellos ahí.	Yes, with them there.
DD:	Per—, pero de, ¿pero de dónde?	Bu—, But from, but from where?
MAR:	En el sueño [DD: Ah sí.] aparecían así, y ellos sabe—, es que de mi – la carne [??] de mi finado abeulo era aquí, del finado, ese tre aparecía; mi hijo también aparecía en medio de los dos.	In the dream [DD: Ah yes.] they appeared like this, and they have the habit—, because my— the flesh [??] of my deceased grandfather was here, of the deceased, these three appeared, my son also appeared in the middle of the two.
DD:	Aha.	Aha.
MAR:	Aparecía ahí, cada vez se iba criando, criando, criando. En cada sueño que iba...	He appeared there, each time he went on growing up, growing up, growing up. In each dream he went...
DD:	¿En cada, cada sueño?	In each, each dream?
MAR:	Claro, iba a ser más grande. Es por último vi que ese muchacho estaba ya grande, grandecito era, llega parecido al papá, y era, pero era más blanquito y más alto y con más cuerpo.	Of course, he was getting bigger. It is in the end I saw that this boy was already big, very big he was, he ends up looking like his dad, and he was, but he was whiter and taller and with more body.

In Margarita's account of her dream first of all we are presented with a description of her deceased son growing up in the care of his deceased great-grandparents and developing from a sickly premature baby into a tall and handsome young man. This is reminiscent of the observations of the former apprentice shaman mentioned in Chapter III. There, in our discussion of 'okobi' he told me that in *oko* the dead appear as they did when alive, only transformed to be young and strong as they were before the ravages of illness and age had wasted them. In this dream we have a particular instance of the same kind of transformation as it would be manifest in the case of an infant. So far, then, the account is consistent with those given by the

shamans of their forays into *oko*. But as Margarita continued the situation appeared more complex:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

MAR: Así le sabía haber, así
va crecía, pero se iba. A veces
se hizo me ha presentado con mi hijo
también, y con, y con mi, mi sobrina
como digo. Así sabía soñar.

Like this he would be, like this
he was growing, but he went. Sometimes
he did he has presented to me with my son
as well, and with, and with my, my nephew,
how do I say. Like this I used to dream.

DD: Ah.

Ah.

MAR: Pero es...

But this...

DD: ¿Pero con gente viva?

But with living people?

MAR: Claro. [...]

Of course. [...]

Here Margarita's deceased child appears not only with her deceased grandparents, firmly installed as it were among the dead, but also with her other son and nephew who were still very much alive. This suggests a dangerous proximity between the dead child and his surviving kin, and indeed this was manifested in other disturbances:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

MAR: Claro. Así en sueño
sabía estar jugando [los niños], y de
ahí, después de esa, sabía escuchar
llanto así en el cuartito que él murió.
[DD: Mm.] Sabía estar como
llorando, como un bebe recién
nacido.

Of course. Like this in dream [the children]
would be playing, and
then, after this, [one] would hear
crying like this in the room in which he died.
[DD: Mm.] It would be there like
crying, like a baby recently born.

DD: ¿Aquí mismo en la casa?

Right here in the house?

MAR: Sí, allá abajo, abajo, abajo,
vivo pue yo. Aquí sabe estar de
visita.

Yes, over there downriver, down, downriver,
I live myself, right. Here I am visiting.

DD: Ah.

Ah.

MAR: Allá abajo.
Este. De acá de repente nos
cambiamos de cuarto también, [DD:
Sí.] y ya ahí de ahí nos pasamos
casa al otro cuarto, y de ahí del

Over there downriver.
That's it. From here quickly we
changed rooms as well, [DD:
Yes.] and then there, from there we moved
house to the other room, and then from the

otro cuarto escuchaba el llanto de
ese,
este llorando.

other room [one] heard the crying of this,
this [one] crying.

DD: ¿Por, por la noche?

In, in the night?

MAR: Claro, por la noche, a veces de
día también, pero está llorando.
Sabía llorar.

Of course, in the night, sometimes in the
daytime as well, but [he] is crying.
[He] would cry.

The crying of invisible babies was often reported to me in accounts of encounters with *oko*. The phenomenon was commonly attributed to deceased infants, though not always. Here the association with Margarita's deceased son is clear, but it contrasts markedly with the way in which he is manifested in her dreams. There she sees him in the company of his great-grandparents, happily playing with his living brother and cousin, and rapidly growing up towards the prime of adulthood. In waking life, on the other hand, he is still a newborn baby and she cannot see him. He wails invisibly in the room in which he died, inducing his parents and brother to move out in order to escape from him. This contrast between the accessibility of a deceased person in dreams and their simultaneous inaccessibility in waking life is an axis perhaps universally familiar to human experiences of death, bereavement and dreaming. Among the Tsachila it finds an echo in the accounts of shamans of their clear perception "in *oko*" of those whose postmortem presence in ordinary life is usually only an uncommunicative noise. In such a context we can see how dreams of the dead play into the kinds of distinctions that we have already repeatedly encountered between different kinds (or perhaps we should say locations) of seeing, which implicitly divide the world in two between the "reality" of the living and the "in *oko*" of the dead. But of course, the boundary is fuzzy, and all too permeable, especially at night:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

MAR: [...] Claro, por la noche, a veces de
día también, pero está llorando.
Sabía llorar. No sé que, un día,
yo estaba aquí pue, me qued—
me quedo dormida con mi hijo. Ese
día sí me apareció, era alto,
estaba vestido de blanco.

[...] Of course, in the night, sometimes in
the daytime as well, but he is crying.
He would cry. I don't know what, one day,
I was here, I stayed—
I stayed here asleep with my son. That
day yes he appeared to me, he was tall,
he was dressed in white.

DD: ¿Sí?

Yes?

MAR:	Sí. Se parecía al papá, pero era más blanco que él, de ahí...	Yes. He looked like his dad, but he was more white than him, and then...
DD:	Y bueno, ¿y cómo as— as— asomó como adulto o...?	And well, and how— did he appear, as an adult or...?
MAR:	Claro, como ya joven.	Of course, as already a young man.
DD:	Como muchacho.	As a youth.
MAR:	Claro, como muchacho, como joven.	Of course, as a youth, as a young man.
DD:	Aha.	Aha.
MAR:	Ya había criado, así apareció.	Already he had grown up, like this he appeared.
DD:	Aha, y bueno, ¿aquí en la casa o...?	Aha, and well, here in the house or...?
MAR:	Aquí, ahí en el cuarto, es que yo me quedé sola también. [DD: Aha.] Y él me, yo me acosté y me quedé esa vez en la cama a medianoche. [DD: Y—] Me acosté, dormí, de ahí yo, yo me he despertado y así veía que entraba por la, por la puerta así. Yo pensé que era mi esposo y no ha sido así, porque mi esposo estaba llegando más después, a las cuatro de la mañana. Porque esto pasó en la medianoche, este. De ahí me dice, en tsáfiki me dice, dice que— él— otra vez se va, dice “jinoe”, otra vez se va dice, y yo le, yo pensé que era mi esposo, pue.	Here, here in the room, the thing is I stayed there alone as well. [DD: Aha.] and he — , I lay down and stayed this time in bed at midnight. [DD: And—] I lay down [in bed], slept, and then I, I have woken up and like this I saw that he was entering by the, by the door like this. I thought that it was my husband, and it must not have been like this because my husband was arriving later, at four in morning. Because this happened at midnight, this thing. Then he says to me, in Tsafiki he says to me, he says that— he— is going again, he says “jinoe”, he is going again he says, and I —, I thought that it was my husband.
DD:	Aha.	Aha.
MAR:	Y el me dice va, me dice “ <i>xan, xan, xan</i> ” dice, “ <i>xan</i> .” Y yo pensé que era mi esposo [Ríe ella] Y no, digo— De ahí más [después de eso—??]	And he says to me go, he says to me “ <i>shan, shan, shan</i> ” he says, “ <i>shan</i> .” And I thought that it was my husband [She laughs] And I don’t, I say— Then later [after this—??]
DD:	Bueno, ¿e— e— eso al media noche?	Well, th— th— this is at midnight?
MAR:	Claro, a la media noche aparece así, de ahí dice “vamos” dice, “ <i>xan, xan</i> .” Y de ahí resulté que no había venido, yo me desperté bien como	Of course, at midnight he appears like this, then he says “let’s go” he says, “ <i>shan, shan</i> .” And then it turned out that he hadn’t come back, I woke up properly like

estaba pre— prendiendo a la tele y
de ahí— me desperté,
no había mi esposo, no estaba nadie.

I was swi— switching on the telly and
then— I woke up,
my husband wasn't there, there was no-one.

DD: Mm.

Mm.

MAR: De ahí, [??] pregunto a mi
esposo, sí es que, que el vino, el dice
que no ha regresado.

Then, [by text message??] I ask my
husband if it is that, that he came, he says
that he hasn't returned.

DD: Aha.

Aha.

MAR: De ahí, me pongo a pensar que ha
sido *él* mismo, de ahí converso con
mi papá. Y puede ser, ser *él*, dice.

Then, I begin to think that it has
been *him* the very same, then I talk with
my dad. And it could be, be him, he says.

Here Margarita tells me that one night she awoke to find her deceased son entering the room and speaking to her. It may be noted that her account includes two descriptions which are somewhat different from one another. First of all she sets the scene:

[...]one day, I was here, I stayed— I stayed [here] asleep with my son.

She continues,

That day yes he appeared to me, he was tall, he was dressed in white [...] He looked like his dad, but he was more white than him, and then...

In the section quoted above she states immediately that her dead son appeared to her and she describes him in the same terms she has just used to characterise his appearance in her dreams. My attempts to elicit further details led her on to a more elaborate description of the same event. But here the appearance of the figure is characterised somewhat differently:

I lay down [in bed], slept, and then I, I have woken up and like this I saw that he was entering by the, by the door like this. I thought that [it] was my husband [...]

Here we learn that Margarita at first mistook the visitor for her husband and as her narrative continues it transpires that only later, having discovered that her husband had not yet arrived did she begin to think that she had been visited by her dead son. Her opening description now takes on more of the character of a conclusion, a pre-

empting of the outcome of the subsequent narrative. In this “trailer”, as it were, there is no doubt as to the identity of the visitor: it is her son and her account of him conforms exactly to that of her dreams; he looks like his father but whiter; and we may also note that she describes him as being dressed in white. In fact, figures dressed in white were a common feature of accounts of encounters with *oko*. However, all these characteristics, which would seem to advertise the visitor’s identity as her deceased son, sit uneasily with the subsequent narrative which is predicated on Margarita’s misidentification of him as being her husband. This apparent contradiction invites a number of explanations.

First, that the figure was indeed as she initially describes him, like her husband but whiter, and dressed in white, and that she at first discounted these unusual features of his appearance simply because of the great likelihood that it was her husband. It seems plausible to suppose that it was only after this identification had to be dismissed that the strange aspects of the visitor struck her as significant. The second alternative is that having discovered that it was not her husband and having decided that it must have been her dead son the consequent realisation that she had encountered his *oko* introduced the distinctive features of the common notion of *oko* into Margarita’s memory of the encounter. This would seem to be a similarly plausible hypothesis in view of the suggestibility of memory and of the particularly stereotypical and otherwise incongruous mention of the figure having been dressed in white. If this were to be the case then we must also note that it would mean that we are dealing with two distinct instances of memory in the one account which are the products of two different ways of remembering. The first is a kind of summary memory synthesised from the conclusion: ‘I saw the *oko* of my dead son.’ The second is a sequential memory which follows the steps which led to the conclusion. That the content of these two instances of memory are different would thus reflect the difference in the way they have been produced, and the one is identifiable as the synthesis of the other.

The account continues: that same night, Margarita told me, another figure came into her room:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

- MAR: De ahí, me pongo a pensar que ha sido *él* mismo, de ahí converso con mi papá. Y puede ser, ser él, dice. De ahí masito, aparece otro, bueno yo estaba teniendo sueños feos, así pesado soñaba con los finados acá. Esta—
- Then, I begin to think that it has been *him* the very same, then I talk with my dad. And it could be, be him, he says. Then a little bit later, another appeared, well I was having horrible dreams, like this heavily I was dreaming of the deceased ones here. Wa—
- DD: ¿Con?
- Of?
- MAR: Con mis finados abuelos, [DD: Aha.] estaba soñando ahí. Sale entrando casi despuesito, despuesito de dos o tres horas, más despuesito, me queda dormida, y sale entrando uno con un, con un trapo rojo, manta roja.
- Of my deceased grandparents, [DD: Aha.] I was dreaming then. He came out entering almost just after, just after two or three hours, a little later, I'm there asleep, and someone comes out entering with a red cloth, a red blanket.
- DD: Mhm.
- Mhm.
- MAR: Sale entrando otra vez, de ahí yo estaba con miedo también. De ahí viene, despacio fue entrando, despacio, pero sí sonaba lo que pisaba.
- He came out entering again, and then I was afraid as well. From there he comes, slowly he was entering, slowly, but yes it made a sound where he stepped.
- DD: Aha.
- Aha.
- MAR: Estaba tapado con la cobija roja también, no se veía la cara de él.
- He was covered with the red blanket as well, one couldn't see the face of him.

There are several points of interest in the above. First, in contrast to the previous section of her account, Margarita initially gives no positive identification of this second figure. At the same time her description of him conforms to one of the most common patterns of accounts of encounters with *oko* according to which they are characterised as figures of people with their faces obscured. In addition the red blanket by which the figure's face is hidden suggests a clear association with *luban* (red) *oko*. The diagnosis is obvious and yet she does not supply it. Perhaps it is so obvious that it can be simply taken for granted. However, later, as we shall see, she suggests an alternative, and this might be the reason why she is silent on the matter to begin with.

We can also observe how Margarita includes her “horrible” and “heavy” dreams of her dead grandparents as the context for this second visitor. First, this provides a puzzling contrast with the dreams she had just described in which they had appeared along with her dead son. Second, these disturbing dreams constitute a potential source of the kind of psychological and perceptual perturbations with which we might attempt to “explain away” her experience. However, rather than attending to their possible implications for her perceptual state Margarita presents them as part of the context by which, implicitly, the strange visitor is to be understood: that is to say, they suggest the likelihood that he is malign, heralded by nightmares, dressed in the colour of the vampiric red *oko*. Interpreted in this way the bad dreams associated with the second visitor can be seen to contrast with the good dreams brought to mind by the first. This, together with the opposing colours of their dress, the first white, the second red, are thus consistent with the inference that the one is good and the other evil.

After her initial description of this second visitor I asked a couple of questions as I had done before to confirm that I had understood her correctly and this lead her, as before, to an elaboration of the details. On this occasion, however, the two descriptions matched one another explicitly:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| MAR: | Así vestido de rojo, y estaba con la cobija roja así tapado. Aparece así, de ahí, bien despacio va entrando, despacio. Y yo también pensé que era mi esposo y más se acuesta a mi lado, como yo estaba de lado, estaba con mi a mismo. Se acuesta de lado y era bien frío, [<i>Ríe ella</i>] era feísimo frío. Y yo, yo esa noche sí estaba con miedo, con miedo estaba. | Like this dressed in red, and he was with the red blanket like this covered up. He appears like this, and then, very slowly he goes entering, slowly. And I also thought that it was my husband and plus he lies down at my side, as I was on my side, he was right up with me. He lies down at my side and he was really cold, [<i>she laughs</i>] he was horribly cold. And I, I this night yes I was afraid, I was afraid. |
| DD: | Aha. | Aha. |
| MAR: | Y yo me asusté, cuando topaba así bien frío, feísimo. | And I took fright, when he touched me like this really cold, horrible. |
| DD: | Aha. | Aha. |
| MAR: | De ahí más seguía intentar despertar, | And then after that to try to wake up, |

<p>pero no podía despertar así, como que yo estaba gritando, yo he— yo me desperté y vi otra—</p>	<p>but like this I couldn't wake up, because I was screaming, I have— I woke up and saw another—</p>
---	--

The above follows the pattern of her account of the figure dressed in white, except that in her memory of the sequence of events here Margarita reiterates all the strange features of the visitor's appearance. Nevertheless she indicates that in this instance, as in the first, her initial reaction is to suppose that it was her husband. But this would appear to have been a fleeting thought, a desperate hope, rather than a considered judgement, since she comments repeatedly that she was afraid, and when the visitor lay down beside her and was cold to the touch she was clearly terrified. Gone was any thought that it might be her husband. The situation she then describes seems to consist of a kind of paralysed state of fear:

And then after that to try to wake up, but like this I couldn't wake up, because I was screaming, I have — I woke up and saw another —

It is fairly clear that what she means by “wake up” (‘despertar’) is that she tried to get up, to get out of the bed and get away from the terrifying visitor. She continued:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

<p>MAR: Ya pues y es— sentí que era frío también.</p>	<p>Right then and thi— I felt that he was cold as well.</p>
---	---

<p>DD: Aha.</p>	<p>Aha.</p>
-----------------	-------------

<p>MAR: Porque viene y abraza aquí, así era. De ahí, más despuesito sabía llegar mi esposo también, de ahí le pregunto si es que vino, y el dice que no, recién llego.</p>	<p>Because he comes and embraces me here, like this it was. And then, a little later my husband arrived as well, and then I ask him if it is that he came, and he says that no, I've just arrived.</p>
--	--

<p>DD: ¿Y eso sucedió en, en su casa o...?</p>	<p>And this happened in, in your house or...?</p>
--	---

<p>MAR: Aquí [DD: Aquí.] en casa recién, claro.</p>	<p>Here [DD: Here.] in this house recently, of course.</p>
---	--

<p>DD: Aha.</p>	<p>Aha.</p>
-----------------	-------------

<p>MAR: Y era como un aviso también, por lo que desde ahí empezó uno, un</p>	<p>And it was like a warning as well, in that from then began a, a</p>
--	--

problema también. Era como un aviso que me estaban dando también. También los muertos sí dan avisos. Creo que estos finaditos creo que dan avisos así que va a pasar algo, que estén en cuenta. Así creo que es, por eso creo que ha entrado así, como que el primero como quiere revelar, pues, [pero??] — como que quiso revelar, pues. Le dijo “vamos” así me pon una precaución que me, que — que vamos, vamos di— *xan*, *xan* dice. En tsáfiki dice, *xan*. Ya, así es. Así era como un aviso que me dio.

problem as well. It was like a warning that they were giving me as well. The dead yes also give warnings. I believe that these deceased ones I believe that they give warnings like this that something is going to happen, that you [would] be aware. Like this I believe that it is, because of this I believe that he has entered like this, as in the first one like he wants to reveal, right, [but??] — as in he wanted to reveal, right. He said “let’s go” like this he gave me a warning that, that— that let’s go, let’s go he sa— *shan*, *shan* he says. In Tsafiki he says, *shan*. So, like this it is. Like this it was like a warning that he gave me.

DD: Aha.

Aha.

MAR: Dijo *xan*. *Xan* en tsáfiki es— en español se dice “vamos”. Pero varia le dijo *xan*, *xan* dijo, *xan*. De ahí quiso con jalarme, así [??] *xan*.

He said *shan*. *Shan* in Tsafiki is— in Spanish one says “vamos” [let’s go]. But many times he said *shan*, *shan* he said, *shan*. And then he wanted to pull me [with him], like this [??] *shan*.

DD: Aha.

Aha.

MAR: Y yo no le hice caso [*Ríe ella*], yo pensé que era mi esposo.

And I didn’t pay attention [*she laughs*], I thought that he was my husband.

DD: Aha.

Aha.

MAR: Eso e— Eso es todo el encuentro que yo he tenido.

This is— This is all the encounter that I have had.

DD: Aha. — Bue— ¿Es—, eso es todo? ¿O...?

Aha. — Wel— Thi—, this is all? Or...?

MAR: Claro, eso, eso es lo — eso yo he visto, yo he visto, así.

Yes, this, this is what — this I have seen, I have seen, like this.

Here, after finishing her description with the return of her husband and the consequent confirmation that the figure in red was not him, Margarita comes back to the first visitor and gives a fuller explanation of why she thinks that it was her deceased son: he came to give her a warning. This she infers retrospectively from subsequent events in the light of which his insistent attempts to persuade her to come with him can be seen to make sense. He was trying to make her aware of a problem.

Such an interpretation also lends further support to the notion that his intentions were benign, suggested initially by the way his appearance evoked the pleasant dreams with which the young woman began her narrative. This idea that her deceased son was watching over her and her husband was clearly a source of comfort for her. It was a theme which she returned to again in response to subsequent questions:

[MAR, 6-2-09, 14H50]

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| MAR: | Claro, eso, eso es lo – eso yo he visto, yo he visto, así. | Yes, this, this is what — this I have seen, I have seen, like this. |
| DD: | Bueno ¿y qué, qué son esos, eso es <i>tenka</i> misma o...? | Well, and what, what are these, this is the <i>tenka</i> itself or...? |
| MAR: | Creo que ese muchacho se anda en espíritu porque siempre cuando va a haber problemas, ese muchacho sabe y sale en sueño. | I believe this boy walks about in spirit because always when there is going to be problems, this boy knows and comes out in dream. |
| DD: | Aha. | Aha. |
| MAR: | Es como que nos cuidan a nosotros. | It's like they look after us. |
| DD: | Aha. | Aha. |
| MAR: | Sale cuidando a nosotros... [...] como que él— sufre al— sé que sufre cada vez que hay problema. | He comes out caring for us... [...] like he— suffers wh— I know that he suffers every time that there are problems. |
| DD: | Aha. | Aha. |
| MAR: | Por eso se aparece así. | For this reason he appears like this. |

Here we are presented with an example par excellence of a good *oko*, more like the Christian idea of a guardian angel than a ghost, bound to his parents by the sort of affective ties emphasised by official Catholic teaching in which the living and the dead are united by continuing obligations of mutual care and assistance. And yet, this is only part of the story. In highlighting the apparently augural nature of the encounter and inferring from it the good intentions of her dead son, Margarita ignores the many frightening aspects which preoccupied much of her preceding account: the noise of him crying, invisibly, in the house; the silent red figure, deathly cold and terrifying. Where do these belong in her benign interpretation? They would

seem to suggest that something far more threatening is going on, that the young woman is far closer to the orbit of the deceased than it is safe to be. Her dead son may have been bringing her a warning, but even so it is generally unwise to go along with the dead anywhere since they are liable to want to take you in the end to the land of the dead (see Ventura 2012:241). But the frame of reference of Margarita's account was somewhat different from the conventional antagonism between the living and the dead. Later in the interview she returned to the subject of the other figure, the red visitor who had struck such fear into her, and rather than identifying him as a *luban oko* she indicated that she thought he was probably the Devil and her attempts to escape from him included crossing herself, and praying the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Creed. Adopting Catholic vocabulary and apotropaic techniques in this way, Margarita implicitly made available a Catholic distinction rather different from that assumed by older accounts of *oko* and by the shamans. The salient opposition in Christianity is that between God and the Devil, good and evil, and in Christian cosmology relations between the living and the dead sit askance of this. Rather than the dead existing in categorical antinomy to the living, they are divided along a moral axis which is far more important. Those who are good, who have been baptised, who are innocent, continue to be so after their death. The threat of evil comes, not from any intrinsic antipathy between the living and the dead, but rather from bad people per se, and ultimately from the Devil. Here then, in Margarita's interpretation of her encounters with her dead son as being a benign occurrence, and her identification of the other figure, not as an *oko*, but as the Devil, we can see an example of what is perhaps the key difference between Christian attitudes to the dead and those so frequently described in lowland Amerindian ethnography.¹

¹ Viveiros de Castro makes a very similar point, though without explicit reference to Christianity, in his discussion of the place of the dead (the dead being taken as another type of animal) in a perspectival cosmology. He writes,

[...] if animism affirms a subjective and social continuity between humans and animals [including the dead], its somatic complement, perspectivism, establishes an objective discontinuity, equally social between live humans and dead humans. (Religions based on the cult of the ancestors postulate the inverse: spiritual identity goes beyond the bodily barrier of death, the living and the dead are similar in so far as they manifest the same spirit – we would thus have superhuman ancestry and spiritual possession on one side, animalisation of the dead and bodily metamorphosis on the other.)

Catholic Christianity, which as we saw in the previous chapter involves a centrally important cult of the dead, fits well into the scheme proposed here by Viveiros de Castro. We do indeed find

Good and evil, aggressive and tame

Indeed, talk of good and evil was everywhere in people's accounts of *oko* and everywhere it was connected with Christianity. But, as we have seen, this did not result in a straightforwardly Christian account of *oko*. The encounters to which people traced their knowledge of *oko* rarely fitted neatly into either Evangelical or Catholic understandings of the dead, nor indeed did they mesh unproblematically with the kinds of accounts found in the *kwenta*. Some particularly clear examples of this are provided by an interview I conducted with one of Dario's neighbours. This man, let's call him Séptimo, was a grandfather in his early fifties, a successful farmer and one of the most politically active residents of the village at the time of my fieldwork. At the beginning of 2009 the general election was approaching and he hosted a meeting in front of his house at which the residents of the village had an opportunity to meet and question representatives of one of the major parties campaigning at the Provincial and National level. Séptimo was a quiet man, slim and smiling, but with an astute and savvy air about him, and ready with a fluent tongue when called upon. He was never seen without his hair immaculately painted with *achiote*, and he was the only man in the village who habitually sported a *manpe tsampa*, a red shawl, worn in the traditional style over a bare torso. His accent, too, was marked by certain Tsachi traits to a greater extent than most of his neighbours. He was an avid hunter and on his hunting trips which took him to the remoter parts of the forest he reported having frequently come across *oko*. He was not, however, in every way as 'traditional' as his appearance might have suggested. When I met him he was one of the most adherent Catholics in the village, attending the novena services which were hosted by various Catholic households in the run-up to Christmas. But before that, according to his nephew, he had been an Evangelical,

superhuman ancestry prominently displayed in the Catholic tradition in the form of the cult of the saints, and similarly prominent, though less talked about, is the theme of spiritual possession: the casting out or exorcism of demons or evil spirits was a central part of Christ's activity as recorded in the Gospels and is continued by the Church which still appoints to every diocese a specially trained priest as designated exorcist. With regard to the Tsachila, we already saw in Chapter IV how, in the ancestral stories (*kwenta*), the dead emerged as another kind of species along with animals and the process of dying was portrayed as a gradual transformation or metamorphosis at once bodily and social/perceptual. In this respect they exhibit the kind of animalisation and metamorphosis envisaged by Viveiros de Castro as the opposing side of this schema. In this regard it is interesting to note that on the occasions when my Tsachi interlocutors resorted to moral language in talking about the dead, not only did they very often use Christian vocabulary, but also began talking in various ways about possession. However, this is a subject which will have to await another opportunity for an adequate treatment.

and before that again a Catholic. His opinions about *oko*, however, were drawn from neither creed but from a seemingly endless series of personal encounters.

Séptimo began by identifying two types of *oko*, ‘agresivo’ and ‘manso’, aggressive and tame, the first intent on frightening people, the second, he said, simply wandering around without bothering anyone. But his illustrations made clear that these were both *puyan oko*, the *oko* of dead people, and he offered no suggestion that they might be simply evil spirits as the Evangelical missionaries had taught. Neither did the “tame *oko*” that he described bear any resemblance to the Catholic notion of the baptised dead maintaining a benign communion with the living. Nevertheless, as we shall see, he used explicitly Christian vocabulary to account for a different kind of distinction which he drew directly from his own experience.

He began with two incidents from his childhood. When he was thirteen, he said, alone in the house one night, he woke to see the head of a cow, with horns, looking in through the half-open door. He covered his head with the blanket “in order not to see it”. He was frightened, he said, because this was not a normal *puyan oko* (dead [one] *oko*). Because it had horns he judged that it was ‘medio demoniado’, — “half demonised” — and ‘mitad *puyan oko* y mitad demonio’ — “half *puyan oko* and half demon”. After he saw this, he continued, “a Colorado died. I myself saw that he died but I don’t myself remember the name of this Colorado”. And so it was apparently this man’s *oko* that he had seen, and whose frightening aspects he now attributed to demonic influence.

Such frightening *oko*, that is to say ‘*oko agresivo*’, took other forms as well and Séptimo supplied a further example. They were out fishing on one occasion in a group of five including his mother and himself, and walking back along the path at night they heard the sound of a horse approaching at a trot. Thinking it was almost upon them they stood to one side to let it pass. With a whistle of air it went by them, sounding loudly, but the horse never appeared. And then the sound was lost. This also was a *puyan oko*, he said, but a bad one, “coming from behind like this as if it wanted to frighten”; an *oko* “mixed with *yukan*”, he said. Here he was using the Tsafiki word *yukan* in place of ‘demonio’. Encounters of the kind he was describing, with unusual or invisible animals on the path or in the forest, were fairly common,

and they were often identified with *yukan*. The term was translated by Bruce Moore as ‘malo’ (Moore 1956), and used by the Evangelical missionaries as a substantive with which to refer to the Devil. Among my interviewees it seemed to connote evil sometimes in the personified sense of the Devil or of demons or evil spirits, but also and often simultaneously in a more abstract way. Here Séptimo pressed it into service to explain his distinction between aggressive and tame *oko*. The former, *yukan oko*, he attributed to people considered to be bad or irreligious, a reputation which, perhaps rather unfairly, seemed to attach to the ‘mayores’, the old people who were often said not to have been baptised. He put it thus:

[SEP, 7-2-09, 16H47]

<p>SEP: Ahora... <i>puyan oko</i>... sale cuando uno... son católico, no, pongamo un poco de religión ya. Católico y otras e evangélico. Ya. Entonce, cuando va morir ya un, un persona que dice católico, pero cuando no son católico, no son ni evangélico ni católico no son, porque ellos vive solamente por vivir. [DD: Aha.] No tiene ninguna... de... ningún cosa buena, sino que ellos piensa solamente... vivir, nomá. [DD: Aha.] Entonce, cuando un persona, un mayor, así son, son... no sabe nada. Tonce, cuando un moriri, un viejo, siempre sale así, <i>puyan oko</i>... y e mitad demonio mitad <i>puyan oko</i>. [DD: Um um.] Entonce, ese hace asustar a la gente [DD: Um.]. Hace cualquiera ruido, cualquiera bulla, [DD: Um um.] cualquiera grito [...]</p>	<p>Now... <i>puyan oko</i>... comes out when one... they are Catholic, right, let's suppose a bit of religion then. Catholic and others are Evangelical. Right. So, when a, a person is going to die that they say Catholic, but when they are not Catholic, they are neither Evangelical nor are they Catholic, because they live only for the sake of living. [DD: Aha.] They don't have anything... of... not one thing good, but that they think only.... of living, that's all. [DD: Aha.] So, when a person, an elder, they are like this, are... they don't know anything. So, when one dies, an old [man], always like this <i>puyan oko</i> comes out... and is half demon half <i>puyan oko</i>. [DD: Um um.] So, this makes to frighten people [DD: Um.]. It makes whatever racket, whatever noise, [DD: Um um.] whatever cry [...]</p>
---	--

We can see here how explicitly Séptimo associates what he calls aggressive *oko* with people who have no religion, with people who “live simply for the sake of living” and have “not one thing good”. He also connects this with ignorance. The elders, he says, are like this and “they don't know anything”. It is these kinds of people, ignorant, bad, irreligious people, like the elders, who according to him, when they die end up producing *oko* which are “half demons”. This does not mean, however, that he thought that good Catholics and Evangelicals simply didn't produce *oko*. He

had as many examples of bumping into what he called ‘*oko manso*’ (tame *oko*) in the forest and these, he said, were “proper *puyan oko*” as oppose to “*yukan oko*” or ‘*oko demoniado*’ (“demonised *oko*”). However, although they were not frightening in the same way as the aggressive *oko* he had previously described, his accounts of them recalled not the Christian notions mentioned above of saintly dead relatives coming to the aid of the living, but the kinds of categorical oppositions between the living and dead which we explored in Chapters III and IV. One of these, for example, was a shadowy figure looming uncommunicatively out of the darkness, “unable to converse,” he said, “nor greet you at all,” and it simply disappeared as he approached. He contrasted it with ‘*gente sano*’ or “sound human beings”¹ in a way reminiscent of the characterisations of the dead in the *kwenta* where, as we saw, the dead appeared as altogether unsound examples of (in)human beings. In Séptimo’s account the character of the dead as not merely a postmortem continuation of the living, but as a different kind of creature emerged more clearly when he related how he had once come upon two *oko* together who were speaking to one another:

[SEP, 7-2-09, 16H47]

<p>SEP: [...] así me estuve orilla, de orilla estaba también esperando guanta y había un camino... También estaba sentado allá como las siete y media de la noche así mira. Y cuando de abajo ya comenzaron nomá botar atarraya ya de noche..., atarraya botaba, botaba, botaba, atarraya de noche así <i>puyan oko</i>. Era dos. Y ahí botaba, vestido blanco [...]</p> <p>[...]Entonces ahí entre ellos conversaba, conversaba, pero ellos no converjé [<i>sic</i>] como, como, como- no com- humano que nosotros [estamos ??], [DD: Aha.] siempre</p>	<p>[...] like this I was on the river bank, on the bank I was again waiting for agouti and there was a path... Again I was sitting there like at half past seven in the night like this looking. And when from downriver then they started just to cast a fishing-net then at night..., a fishing-net they were casting, casting, casting, a fishing-net at night like this these <i>puyan oko</i>. There were two. And there they were casting, dressed in white [...]</p> <p>So, there, between themselves they were conversing, conversing, but they didn’t converse like, like, like— not like— humans that we [are??], [DD: Aha.] always</p>
--	---

¹ ‘...gente sano...’ This phrase is difficult to render in English. ‘Gente’ is the Spanish equivalent of the English collective noun “people”, but my Tsachi interlocutors very often used it, as in this instance, in the form of a singular noun. In such a case it was practically synonymous with the word ‘humano’ (“human”) but with a heightening connotation of personhood along the lines of “human being” in English. ‘Sano’ has multiple translations in English, including “healthy”, “sane”, “sound”, “whole”, “sober”, “undamaged”. Of these the word “sound” retains the widest connotive valence and best reflects the multiple usages of ‘sano’ in the Spanish of my Tsachi interlocutors.

<p>como tapado nariz uno conversa, medio, medio no sé qué conversa..., así, [demuestra él tapando nariz al hablar]. Así puede-, así [...??] conversar [DD: ¿Con la nariz tapada?] Eso así, [DD: Aha.] como nariz tapada conversaba entre ellos.</p>	<p>like with a blocked nose one converses kind of, kind of I don't know what conversing..., like this, [he demonstrates by holding his nose while speaking]. Like this they can-, like this [...??] converse [DD: With the nose blocked?] Yes like this, [DD: Aha.] like with the nose blocked they were conversing between themselves.</p>
---	---

DD: Y ¿En qué idioma es?

And in what language is this?

SEP: Yo no puede entender yo. E *puyan oko* conversaba.

I can't understand myself. These *puyan oko* were conversing.

DD: No, no, no ¿No era tsáfiki?

It wasn't Tsafiki?

SEP: No..., no..., no sé pue-. Qué sería- ¿tsafi- sería? pero uno no, no ente- ent- no pude entenderi pu-

No... no... Well, I don't know. What would it be? Would it be Tsafi- ? but one can't can't und- und- one can't understand, right.

Faced with this kind of encounter, with figures that are not frightening in a way which might suggest demonic involvement, nor communicatively available like the souls of good people in dreams or benign apparitions, the tenets of Christianity possess very little explanatory or practical traction. As we can see Séptimo instead implicitly relies on the same kind of assumption which underlies the stories of the *kwenta* and which is made explicit by the shamans' accounts of what things are like in *oko*: that the dead are people with a similar but fundamentally separate life who stand in opposition, not to "the living," but to "humans". "They were conversing" Séptimo says, "but they didn't converse like humans". It might have been Tsafiki, but the important point was that these were *puyan oko* who were talking between themselves and "one can't understand, right." Combined with the *kwenta* and the testimonies of shamans, encounters such as this served to reinforce the impression, against the presuppositions of both Catholic and Evangelical Christianity, that the living and the dead were not simply humans in different stages of existence, but parallel societies in various ways perceptually and communicatively unavailable to one another. This was the boundary traversed and administered by shamans when they went into *oko*. In fact, in this instance Séptimo could cite so many encounters with *oko*, whether aggressive or tame, that he wondered whether their proliferation in

the forest was indicative of the contemporary dearth of such shamanic activity in sending the dead to *Pipwa*.

It is experiences such as these, for which neither Catholic nor Evangelical Christianity offer an easy explanation, that continue to give traction to the kinds of accounts of the dead supplied by the shamans and the *kwenta*. As I have tried to suggest, such a characterisation arises not out of an *a priori* account of the kind supplied by Christian theology, but out of highly personal *ad hoc* attempts to assimilate an extremely varied range of anomalous experience.

Conclusion

The current chapter has followed a rather circuitous route, tracking as it has the unpredictable flow of a series of loosely structured interviews. Many of the questions it raises remain unanswered either due to the limitations imposed by my own ignorance or the economies of brevity and style. However, over the course of its development I have endeavoured to present my material in as transparent a way as possible and with it to illustrate something of the ambivalence of Tsachi people's attitudes towards the dead, and the way that they are both confirmed and challenged by personal experience particularly in the context of the competing claims of Catholic and Evangelical Christianity. It should be noted that these claims are not always antithetical, as we saw in the previous chapter in connection with the Catholic rituals of the Day of the Dead. In different ways Evangelical and Catholic positions cut both with and against the grain of people's experience. For example, while my Tsachi interlocutors tended to regard the dead as a threat to be avoided and expelled from the orbit of the living, their grandparents still more so, the Catholic Church has institutionalised a continuity between this world and the next. Here the salient distinction is not that of a categorical antinomy between the living and the dead, but between the baptised and unbaptised, between good people and bad people, whether they are alive or dead. The baptised ostensibly exist in a trans-mortal communion and the Church's regular prayers for the dead to ease their passage through Purgatory are predicated on the kind of affective ties and obligations between the living and the dead which Tsachi people have historically gone to such great lengths to sever. On the other hand the Church offers an endlessly repeatable

procedure for delivering the deceased safely into the hands of God and ensuring that they rest in peace. Thus, as Ventura suggests, the priest can be seen to have taken on something of the role of the shaman in negotiating this problematic relationship, and his instruments have in turn been incorporated into the shaman's repertoire. If we consider the teachings of the Evangelicals, we can see how the Bible may be invoked to support the postmortem survival of the person, but equally how an insistence on the immediate passage of souls from this world to the next fails to concord with the manifest presence of the dead in this world. Here we may note that Catholic and Evangelical teachings suffer, as it were, from opposite extremes when compared to the experiences of the Tsachila. The former insists on too much continuity between the living and the dead, the latter on too automatic a separation. Both arise from propositions that require one to become a "believer", to go beyond the evidence available to one's own senses. They ask one to accept from a single source an account of experience which prejudices all others, claiming to be universally applicable and demanding adherence not only because of but also potentially in spite of one's own experience. Thus the Catholic doctrine of prayer for the dead enjoins one to attend to the deceased not primarily when they can be heard and seen, but when they are quiet and apparently absent. The Evangelical position on the other hand requires the opposite: one must accept the absence of the dead from this world despite all the noises that they make, because scripture teaches that they are consigned by God immediately to Heaven, Hell or Hades. In the interests of accuracy it should be noted that there is in fact considerable disagreement among Christians as to what the Bible has to say on this subject. But regardless of what pastors and priests may teach, the continued reluctance of my Tsachi interlocutors to depart from the evidence of their ears and eyes, or to pronounce upon the divergent accounts of their neighbours, attest to just how much weight they accord to personal experience. Furthermore, it should be noted that the evidence of their ears and eyes, presented in the constantly circulating narratives of their own encounters, is rarely entirely quiescent with any of the competing accounts of the dead. Instead it is susceptible to various interpretations, and the narratives themselves display this ambiguity along with a subversive potential for repeated re-evaluation. To echo Ventura's words, they are indicative of a faithfulness to perception which militates against generalisation and sits uneasily with the *a priori* accounts of the afterlife offered by Catholic and Evangelical Christianity.

VII. Conclusion

By now it should be clear just how intimately connected people's understandings of *oko* were with instances of their own experience of encounters. Over the preceding chapters we have traced an arch beginning from an example of such an encounter and following the category of *oko* through the experiences of everyday life, its disruptions, suspensions and points of crisis, both historic and contemporary, and have ended back where we began, with talk about *oko*, as it is deployed in the face of concrete instances of personal experience. I began, in Chapter II, by highlighting the recalcitrance associated with these experiences and the way in which this can be identified in the internal dialogue implicit in people's accounts of them, between a single uncontested descriptive element and partial or multiple interpretative elements. This dynamic within people's narratives of their own encounters with *oko*, I have argued, is the same dynamic between anomalous experience and its assimilation in general. It is this that provokes and constitutes people's narratives about *oko* in the first place. Such a narrative, we observed, is inherently disruptive, and only partially subject to the narrator's intention, suggesting that the phenomena themselves (whatever they may be) are only partially (or perhaps provisionally) assimilable. They at once provoke, constrain and defy people's attempts at interpretation. This means that for whatever purpose to which these accounts are put by means of retellings there is a limit to what they can plausibly be made to say, and this is dictated by the relationship between what is considered to be incontestable yet problematic within the narrative and what are regarded as legitimate ways to assimilate it. This dynamic, I argued, is shaped by, but also significantly constrains and often challenges, each new attempt at interpretation.

From this starting point we turned to a more general consideration of *oko* in the context of everyday life. In Chapter III, following the analyses made by Overing, Passes, Rivière, Gow and others with respect to Amazonian societies, I suggested that the noises, strange figures and frightening encounters which my interlocutors identified as *oko* constituted part of a constantly threatening background against which the tranquillity and evenness of everyday life had to be actively maintained. It was a threat, I have suggested, which was implicitly acknowledged in the conventions surrounding visiting and greeting, and the general tenor of discretion so

well described by Ventura which permeates everyday life among the Tsachila. I have suggested that it may also be linked to people's style of clothing and care for their appearance. In all these instances we can observe a concern to be seen and heard in a properly human way, that is to say, as an ordinary sociable human being. I have shown how this contrasts with the way in which *oko* are heard and seen. They were identified with disturbing noises, ambiguous, antisocial and uncommunicative, which lacked an apparent source. They were identified with figures who could not be clearly seen, who appeared in the twilight or the darkness of the night, figures that disappeared, whose faces were obscured or who did not respond to greetings. To repeat what I said in the conclusion to Chapter III, the *oko* that people described having encountered were incoherent or anomalous manifestations of humans and animals. They were at once perceptually and socially unavailable or only partially available, being visible but silent, or audible and invisible, seeing and hearing but unseen and unheard, or seen and heard but unresponsive. We saw how this contrasted with the way *oko* were said to appear to shamans when they went "into *oko*". Here, by entering a trance-like state which appears to be similar to lucid dreaming the shaman attained a clear vision in which *oko* appeared to him as humans and he conversed with them accordingly.

Also in Chapter III I attempted to link these observations with the circadian patterns of sound, light and human activity by which everyday life is structured. I suggested that these established a set of experiential associations connecting the phenomena of *oko* with the night-time and with the forest. The night-time, in particular, in which the visual and auditory clarity of the day was suspended, was, I have argued, the time of *oko*, but it was also the time for the 'bailes' — the dances — a suspension of ordinary life of a different kind. Taking my inspiration from Praet's analysis of "Shape-shifting" among the Chachi, I suggested that in these 'bailes' the Tsachila undergo a similar, purposeful, shift of shape with the help of alcohol, adopting the eating habits, music and language (in the MC's commentary) of their Mestizo neighbours.

In Chapter IV I presented a selection of ancestral stories, *kwenta*, of the kind widely known among Tsachila of middle-age and older, about *oko* and about animals. Seen in the light of these stories, I suggested, the features of everyday life discussed in

Chapter III, the phenomena associated with *oko* and the implicit “Shape-shifting” of the ‘bailes’, take on a decidedly perspectivist hue. In the *kwenta* we hear of a time ‘más antes’ — a while ago — when the *oko* of the dead (*puyan oko*) used to come back as walking corpses: they climbed out of the grave body and all, and attempted to carry on living with their surviving relatives. A detailed examination of a selection of these stories led me to suggest that underlying them is an assumption that the boundary between the living and the dead is not to be taken for granted. The dead would, could and have in the past, come back and the *kwenta* illustrate why they should not be allowed to do so. Like the *oko* which people encounter today there is a perceptual divide between the walking corpses depicted in the *kwenta* and their surviving kin which renders it impossible for them to carry on living together. In the *kwenta* this takes the form of a series of dramatic inversions which make explicit the associations I suggested in the previous chapter. These walking corpses see the moon as the sun, they try to dry clothes by moonlight, they set out to catch fish and come back with poisonous centipedes, they attempt to bathe their grandchildren in boiling water, they mistake their own rotten flesh for salt.

I pointed out how these stories centred around the culinary and eating habits of the dead rather than their horrible appearance or their status as dead *per se*. It was the strange eating habits of the dead which were portrayed in these stories as inspiring fear and precipitating the actions of their living protagonists to enforce the boundary between the living and dead by killing them all over again. However, rather than the difference between the living and the dead being all about behaviour as opposed to appearance or bodily form, as Praet’s analysis of the Chachi suggests, I have argued that these Tsachi stories show that the behaviour of the dead is closely connected with their bodily appearance. The disruptive anti-human behaviours which they exhibit in the *kwenta* are portrayed as the result of a sort of perceptual or psychological decay which both proceeds from and is implicated in their bodily decay. What is the difference between the living and the dead? They do not think “like us”. But this lack of “human thinking” has bodily correlates and bodily consequences. They do not wash themselves or their clothes properly, they do not look after their hair, they do not use soap, they do not cut their fingernails, they do not wear shoes, in short they do not look after themselves properly and their bodies are falling apart: they have rotting noses, rotting teeth, knees and armpits.

Furthermore, this process of behavioural and bodily decay is portrayed in the *kwenta* as being brought to a definitive end by the destruction of the physical organ of the heart when the mother of the earthworm is summoned by the shamans to pass through it. Thus we see, in the case of the decomposition of the dead depicted in the *kwenta*, that bodily and behavioural changes are mutually implicated. This, as I have pointed out, echoes the formulations made by Viveiros de Castro (1998), Vilaça (2005) and others to the effect that in Amerindian cosmologies there is no spiritual change which is not also a bodily transformation (see also Seeger et al. 1979, McCallum 1996, Conklin 1996, Turner 1995).

In the *kwenta* which I presented dealing with animals who take on human form and marry Tsachi women, we saw a similar pattern. Here, as in the case of the dead, the boundary between humans and animals was shown to be all too fluid. The identity of an animal imposter in human form was signalled by strange eating habits which led to various kinds of disruption of the tranquil lives of the humans associated with them, and ended in exile, murder, death, and the imposter's resumption of his animal form. Identifying the commonalities between these stories about animals and those about the dead I suggested that they echo the perspectivist analyses offered by Vilaça, Viveiros de Castro and others: the difference between humans and animals and between humans and the dead are made and made-manifest by the behavioural schemata of bodies, and the transgression of these boundaries is unstable and tends towards the horizon of death as the definitive transformation. Let me emphasise here that when seen in the context of the stories about the dead it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this horizon is ultimately one of bodily transformation, exemplified by the decomposition of a corpse, and not of behavioural change alone. However, I argued that a certain amount of caution is called for in applying a perspectivist model to the ethnographic material I have presented. What we have here are a set of associations, a kind of inchoate perspectivism, which lacks the systematicity of Viveiros de Castro's theoretical vision. To test to what extent such a model is applicable to the Tsachila would require more ethnographic data than I currently have at my disposal, and more than Ventura has thus far presented.

Also in Chapter IV I examined the relationship between the 'más antes' of the *kwenta* and people's contemporary experience. To begin with I attempted to

demonstrate how, despite there being significant differences between the *oko* of people's own encounters and the *oko* described in these ancestral stories, these two poles of experience nevertheless rolled into one another in such a way that the distinction between them was vague, debatable and subject to revision in the light of new encounters. We saw in this regard how people referred to the protective power of shamans, of Christianity, of increased population density and the fumes of contemporary motor traffic to explain why *oko* didn't come back now in the way that they were said to have done in the past, and I pointed out how none of these changes constituted a definitive shift in the way the world worked: it is possible for shamanic power to fail; there are still bad, un-Christian, unbaptized people who might still produce particularly frightening *oko* when they die; there are still unpopulated places far away from the protective fumes of motorised traffic. The boundary between the relative tranquillity of the present and the frightening and disruptive past described in the ancestral stories about *oko* was one which, just as I suggested in Chapter III, had to be constantly maintained and reinforced.

In Chapter V I examined one particular instance of such boundary maintenance: the Catholic celebration of All Souls' Day — the Day of the Dead. Here I argued that the Catholic cult of the dead has intersected with the apotropaic concerns of Tsachi mortuary rituals in such a way as to extend the short-term ad hoc management of deceased relatives into an annual institutionalised management of the dead in general. We saw how the celebration of the Day of the Dead presented an uneasy mixture of exorcistic and invocatory elements which were open to multiple interpretations, but which nonetheless resonated with the carefully calibrated combination of apotropaic and solicitous treatments of the deceased which are observable in the ethnographic record regarding Tsachi burials. I suggested a connection between this institutionalisation of the management of the dead and the sedentarisation of the living: the living could no longer leave their dead behind by moving and building a new house as they once did, and there was no longer enough available space in the forest to bury them there and simply let them disappear, and so the dead have undergone a parallel sedentarisation to the living, being confined to an increasingly permanent abode in the cemeteries. As the presence of the dead among the living has become increasingly permanent, so the effort to keep the two apart has become unending. The tombs of the dead, like the houses of the living, have

changed from being made of wood to being made of concrete, but these marks of their permanence are at the same time the method of their confinement, and in the Catholic celebration of the Day of the Dead they are annually reinforced with holy water, candles and prayers.

In Chapter V I also suggested the possibility of a further interpretation, one which again echoes that offered by Praet with regard to Chachi wakes. I suggested that in the Day of the Dead we might have another example of the kind of “Shape-shifting” which Praet talks about among the Chachi and which I identified with Tsachi dances in Chapters III and IV. In Chapter III I suggested that in the dances, under the influence of copious amounts of alcohol, the Tsachila adopted the “Shape” of Mestizos out on the town, and in Chapter IV we saw the transformative properties of alcohol illustrated in the *kwenta* with examples of animals alternately taking on human form and inadvertently losing it at dances. The Day of the Dead, I noted, was another example of a communal gathering characterised by the copious consumption of alcohol. Here however, although the dead were also supposed to be present (the *oko* were said to come with the wind from *Pipwa*), they showed no sign of being so — there was none of the kind of “noise” usually associated with them. I suggested that the people in the cemetery might be regarded as having gone “into *oko*” and having adopted the Shape of the dead at a party in *Pipwa*, the land of the dead. However, although there are reasons for thinking that this kind of transformation, akin to Praet’s account of Chachi wakes, may once have been more clearly observable, it is now at most only implicit and further fieldwork would be required to test this interpretation.

Having, in the preceding chapters, talked about *oko* in fairly general terms and introduced the various accounts of the dead supplied by the *kwenta* and the shamans, and by Evangelical and Catholic Christianity, in the last chapter I returned to specific instances of people’s interpretations of their own encounters. Here I presented detailed analyses of excerpts from four interviews. In the first of these we saw how Reginaldo, a committed Evangelical, preferred to profess ignorance on the question of whether the *oko* of the dead were really present on the Day of the Dead, rather than to assert that they were not, as Evangelical teaching required him to believe. If he had done so he would have implied that he thought his grandparents had been

mistaken when they used to take food to the cemetery themselves on the Day of the Dead to offer to the *oko*. Instead he drew my attention to the possibility that although the *oko* did not appear, and the food did not diminish, they could be there eating the food “in *oko*” (*okobi*). Here he deferred to the authority of the shamans who, as he pointed out to me, were the only ones who knew what went on in *oko*. We saw also how he identified the contradiction between what the Tsachila say about *oko* (that some of them are manifestations of dead people) and what the Bible says (that all *oko* are actually evil spirits). We saw how, having identified this contradiction, despite his Evangelical allegiance, he concluded unequivocally in favour of the conventional Tsachi account as opposed to the supposedly Biblical alternative. In the second extract, from another interview with Reginaldo, we saw how he asserted a direct knowledge of *Pipwa* (the land of the dead), on the basis of a dream in which he was taken to see it by his dead grandfather. We saw how his dream was indebted in many respects to shamanic accounts of the afterlife, and although he could have downplayed these in favour of a Christian interpretation, he in fact explicitly highlighted the connection with what the shamans say.

In the third extract we examined the account of a young woman, Margarita, who had been recently bereaved. Five months prior to our interview she had given birth to her second child two months premature and he had died after just three days. She described to me how he had subsequently appeared to her in a series of dreams in which he rapidly grew to be a handsome young man in the company of his great-grandparents who were also deceased. At the same time she described how she and her husband and their older son had been disturbed by a noise like the crying of a newborn in the room in which the child had died and this had induced them to move out of the room to avoid it. I pointed out how this kind of situation where the deceased are available to the living in dreams while no longer available in waking life echoes the perceptual divide explored in previous chapters between the way the dead appear “in *oko*” (as humans) and the way they appear “in reality” (as uncommunicative and disturbing noises and apparitions).

Margarita went on to describe how one night she was visited by two figures, one whom she mistook for her husband and later identified as her dead son “walking about in spirit” and the other a terrifying figure, his face covered by a red blanket,

whom she suggested may have been the Devil, and from whom she attempted to protect herself by reciting Catholic prayers. We saw how she constructed her narrative in such a way as to highlight the benign aspects of the first figure and contrast these with the malign appearance of the second. In the process, I argued, she invoked a Catholic frame of reference in which the salient opposition is that between God and the Devil, good and evil, rather than between the living and the dead. Particularly in Catholic Christianity, as we saw in Chapter V, considerable amounts of teaching and practice are predicated on the notion that the living and the dead within the Church are united in a community of mutual care and obligation. Implicitly relying upon this Catholic framework, Margarita interpreted the first figure as being that of her dead son suffering in sympathy with his parents and watching over them, and the second figure she identified as the Devil. However, as I suggested this was not the only interpretation to which her narrative was susceptible. The one she gave involved ignoring certain elements which suggested a less benign interpretation of the attentions of her dead son: the frightening manifestation of the noise of the crying baby, for example; the possibility that her dead son, in asking his mother to go with him might have meant to take her to *Pipwa* rather than simply to give her a warning of some danger; and it involved ignoring an obvious identification of the second figure as a red *oko* in favour of the Devil which reinforced the Catholic frame of reference.

In the fourth and final extract, taken from an interview with Séptimo, a gentleman who had converted from Catholic to Evangelical Christianity and back again, we saw how he used an explicitly Christian vocabulary of good and evil and connected bad *oko* with people who had no “religion”. However, having done this he used this point to explain a very different distinction which he illustrated from his own experience between what he called “tame” and “aggressive” *oko*. The aggressive *oko*, which he attributed to irreligious people, he described as being demonised or half-demon using Christian vocabulary, but still clearly identifying them as the *oko* of dead people rather than simply evil spirits. He distinguished them from “tame” *oko* on the basis that they exhibited an intention to frighten. However, the “tame” *oko* which he described having encountered were not the good dead of Christian cosmology who came to assist the living in dreams or apparitions, but figures who, although showing no intention to frighten, were nonetheless communicatively unavailable. His

descriptions of them, I argued, recalled not a Christian account of the dead as a continuation of human beings, whether good or bad, in a different stage of their existence, but the kind of categorical antinomy between the living and the dead which we explored in Chapters III and IV, where the dead appeared as a parallel society or species in various ways perceptually separated from and socially incompatible with the living.

I noted in the introduction how, for my Tsachi interlocutors, there was no firm or generic notion of what an *oko* ought to be like, but that experience was the arbiter. Now we are in a position to see that the results of their arbitrations are somewhat surprising. They throw up, as it were, a trouble spot, not only for Catholics and Protestants, but also for anthropologists. Here, by way of conclusion, I want to draw the reader's attention to a curious ideological convergence. Consider the situation which we have been discussing in the previous chapters. We have two religious ideologies asserting competing accounts of the afterlife. Catholic teaching says that the souls of the faithful departed go to Purgatory and that we should pray for them to ease their progress thence to Heaven. Evangelicals say that the dead go straight to their ultimate destiny and that we have nothing further to do with them. Either way the souls of the dead are not here, they have no theological reason to linger, and although Catholic teaching allows for their occasional return, it does not require it. The absence of the dead which is required by Evangelical theology is at the same time quite compatible with official Catholic teaching. Neither Catholic nor Evangelical accounts of the dead appeal to any direct experience for their authority, but rely upon different interpretations of a supposedly divine revelation pertaining to aspects of reality which, according to their own doctrines, normally remain beyond our awareness. Hence, Catholic and Evangelical concepts of the spiritual realm, most of the time at least, fit quite comfortably into a model of "supernature" as the super-empirical object of beliefs rather than experience.

There is a further convergence here, since on this point the social sciences have historically shown a tendency to fall in line with the Platonic-Christian tradition from which they emerged. They have often preferred to treat spirits only in so far as they are representational or symbolic realities, the stuff of religion or ideology, whose involvement in the domain of quotidian experience is taken to be indirect and

highly mediated. There are, of course, plenty of exceptions, Tylor providing perhaps the most notorious example, and more recently Horton, Csordas, Willerslev and Praet being others. In fact, increasingly in ethnographic treatments of spirits the conceptual baggage of Platonic-Christian vocabulary is being problematised (among Amerindianists see, for example, Praet 2006, Fausto 2007, Whitehead 2002) while in anthropological theory the distinctions between nature, culture and supernature are being deconstructed and reworked (see, for example, Descola 1992, Ingold 2000, Viveiros de Castro 2005).

In the forgoing chapters I have attempted to develop a further, and I hope striking, illustration of why such a prizing apart of sociological and Christian accounts of spirits is so necessary in producing faithful ethnographies. Consider the alternative. If, indeed, the social scientist were to take her cue for a study of “spirits” from the philosophical-religious heritage of the Christian tradition, in which such entities appear as the objects of a belief the contents and authority of which are super-empirical, then she would expect refutations between them to consist of the assertion of rival propositions which follow from alternative axioms, and make only indirect use of empirical observations. Put another way, conversion would entail the acceptance of a new version, from a new authority, of what exactly it is that we cannot see: a clear path to Heaven or Hell, a passage through Purgatory, or, perhaps, simply oblivion, since each alternative escapes observation. What is at issue between these alternative accounts is the validity of the different assumptions and the relative weight or credibility of the competing oracles on which they depend, since they all concur with the same empirical observation that a person after her death is absent from the world.

The gap between such an account and the ethnographic situation presented above should now be apparent. What we have heard here from the Tsachila (and what Carneiro da Cunha reports of the Krahó, and what Praet says of the Chachi) simply does not follow this pattern. As we saw earlier, when I asked Dario and his friends and neighbours about *oko*, they told me of noises, whistles, cries, and disappearing figures in the forest, knockings on the door, clattering in the kitchen, people dressed in white who speak through their noses, the laughter of a dead relative during her wake, the invisible throwing of mud and sticks, the crying of invisible babies,

anomalous animals, a mother returning bodily from her grave. This is a very different kind of account of spirits from that offered by philosophers and theologians; not propositional and general, but particular and descriptive, not super-empirical, but sensory. As we have seen in the preceding chapters *oko* appear as more than simply the super-empirical spirits of ideological pronouncement, and we found that conversion entails not only the adoption of different ideas and rituals vis-à-vis a super-sensory world, but also an alternative interpretation of specific sensory phenomena associated with the dead. Whatever one thinks about the afterlife, the question remains as to what are all these strange things that people see and hear. The pattern one finds when one asks about them (among the Tsachila at least) is one of narratives of encounters in which a certain kind of distinction emerges between belief and experience and, particularly in the case of devout Evangelicals, we begin to see something of the problematic relationship which exists between these two.

But a further question also comes into view because the narratives of contemporary encounters, although resonating in certain ways with the *kwenta*, are in other respects very different. It would appear therefore that the relationship between these experiences and common knowledge of any kind is far from straightforward. The phenomena identified as *oko* in the end are not entirely consistent with any of the attempts made to explain and to deal with them. This reflects that aspect of these experiences which, borrowing from Zeitlyn, I have called their recalcitrance. That is to say, in various ways they resist our purposes, our expectations, our attempts to make sense of them and to assimilate them within the flow of our everyday activity. This is, I have argued, one of the defining characteristics of *oko*. They are identified with those moments when an encounter with what appears to be a human or an animal begins to exhibit some feature which interrupts the ready flow of the interaction, what Zeitlyn might call a trouble-spot, or what, in Heideggerian language, we might describe as an instance in which we are suddenly alerted to the phenomenon in question as something “unready-to-hand”. Heidegger argues that it is precisely when something is “unready-to-hand” that it becomes conspicuous, and that at the same time we become aware of its context, the web of involvements in relation to which it is ordinarily ready-to-hand. In this way, he argues, the world announces itself and comes to our attention as that which is presupposed by these involvements (Heidegger 1927:102-105). Seen in such terms, as instances of the

world's "unreadiness-to-hand", phenomena such as those we have been considering here under the name of *oko*, far from escaping the context of our experience, can be understood as part and parcel of that context, and as in fact drawing our attention to it by way of interruptions and disturbances in the otherwise ready flow of activity in which the world ordinarily recedes from our explicit awareness.

I began this thesis by quoting Carneiro da Cunha, who suggested that the afterlife provided the Krahó with a "free field of fabulation" in which the unfettered play of imagination could produce a symbolic reflection upon society (1981:172). It should now be apparent what a marked contrast is offered in this respect by Tsachi accounts of the dead, in which the "field of fabulation" is far from free, being highly constrained in various ways by experience. A detailed examination of narratives of specific instances of encounters with *oko* has allowed us to see that they are related to the more mundane situation of everyday life, not as imaginative reflections upon it, as Carneiro da Cunha suggests, but as interruptions, ruptures, anomalies, disturbances in the ready flow of ordinary activity. The imagination is brought to bear upon them only secondarily in attempts to find interpretations and respond with appropriate action, and we have seen that such attempts, while shaped by the personal history and intentions of the narrators, are nonetheless dependent upon and constrained by the particularities of the phenomena in question.

Oko then, whatever else may be said of them, are not simply the souls of dead people that are thought to be there even though invisible. They are identified with instances of sensory experience which are in a variety of ways anomalous, but which are no less sensory for being so. Such anomalous experiences, as I have argued, are relatively common and all human societies have to contend with them. It may be noted that what we think they are, though it may influence the ways in which we respond, makes no difference to the fact that they are something to be contended with. You might decide to call them imaginary, or hallucinatory, you might attribute them in some way to the structures of society or to what people already believe about the world, or you might associate them with the dead, or with supposedly occult creatures, or with aliens perhaps. But however you choose to deal with them, however your imagination goes to work on them, whether you locate them in some way in the world or in people's heads, they appear not with the compliance which we

might expect of ideas fashioned by us in order to act in and on the world, but with the recalcitrance of the world within which we find ourselves constrained to act (Zeitlyn 2009). Sociologists and anthropologists might rack their brains to find an acceptable way of studying such things, but for most people that is not the burning question. They simply deal with ghosts, as with everything else, as and when they appear and with whatever they have to hand. Such an attitude is neatly summed up by a Galician proverb which one of my friends quoted when I told him about the subject of my thesis:

“Yo no creo meigas, pero haberlas, haylas.”¹

¹ This is a Spanish rendering of the original Galician. It has no easy translation in English, but is usually rendered “I don’t believe in witches... but they exist.” Perhaps one might say, “I don’t believe in witches, but when they’re there, they’re there.”

References

- Adelaar, W & Muysken, P (2004), *The Languages of the Andes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barbira Freedman, F (2002), 'Tobacco and curing agency in Western Amazonian shamanism', in Baker & Carr (2002), *Practitioners, Practices and Patients: New Approaches to Medical Archaeology and Anthropology*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, pp. 136-160.
- Beuchat, H & Rivet, P (1907), 'Contribution à l'étude des langues Colorado et Cayapa (République de l'Équateur)', *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, N. S. Tome IV (1), pp. 31-70.
- (1910), 'Affinités des langues du Sud de la Colombie et du Nord de l'Équateur (Groupes Paniquita, Coconuco et Barbacoa)', Louvain : J-B Istas, (ed.), pp. 1-94 (Extract from *Muséon* 1910).
- Bilhaut, A-G (2003), '...Soñar, recordar y vivir con eso,' *Estudios Atacameños*, 26, pp. 61-70.
- Black, M (1977), 'Ojibwa Taxonomy and Percept Ambiguity', *Ethos*, 5(1), pp. 90-118.
- Brandes, S (1997), 'Sugar, Colonialism, and Death: On the Origins of Mexico's Day of the Dead', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 39 (2), pp. 270-299.
- Caciola, N (1996), 'Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture,' *Past and Present*, No. 152, pp. 3-45
- Calazacón, C & Orazona D (1982), *Yo Imin Tsachi: 50 leyendas de los indios colorados*, Guayaquil: Museo Antropológico y Pinacoteca, Banco Central del Ecuador, S. M. no. 3.
- Calazacón, C et al. (1985), *Ilusun: Kuwenta Layakajun Pila (Una Recopilación de Cuentos)*, Guayaquil: Museo Antropológico y Pinacoteca, Banco Central del Ecuador, S. M. no. 4.
- Carneiro da Cunha, M (1981), 'Eschatology Among the Krahó: reflection upon society, free field of fabulation,' (trans. by S C Humphreys), in Humphreys, S & King, H (1981) (eds.), *Mortality and Immortality: the anthropology and archaeology of death*, London: Academic Press, pp. 161-174.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Popular and Definitive Edition, 1994), London: Burns & Oates, 2010.
- Chaumeil, J-P (1983), *Voir, Savoir, Pouvoir : Le chamanisme chez les Yagua du Nord-Est péruvien*, Paris : Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.
- Clarke, R (2012), *A Natural History of Ghosts: 500 years of Hunting for Proof*, Particular Books.
- Conklin, B (1995), "thus are our bodies, thus was our custom": mortuary cannibalism in an Amazonian society, *American Ethnologist*, 22 (1), pp. 75-101.

- (1996), 'Reflections on Amazonian Anthropologies of the Body', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 10 (3), pp. 373-375.
- Costales, A ([1956] 1965), *Los Indios Colorados*, Quito: Instituto Ecuatoriano de Antropología y Geografía, Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- Csordas, TJ (2002), *Body/meaning/healing. Contemporary anthropology of religion*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dautzenberg, L (1908 [1968]), *Ilmo. Dr. Pedro Schumacher: Un hombre apostólico de la región del Rhin en el siglo XIX (1839-1902), breves rasgos de su vida y cartas*, trans. by Wilfrido Loor, Quito: Editorial Ecuatoriana, 1968.
- Davies, O (2007), *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Descola, P (1992), 'Societies of nature and the nature of society', in Kuper, A (1992), *Conceptualizing Society*, London: Routledge, pp. 107-126.
- Dickinson, C (1999), 'Semantic and Pragmatic Dimensions of Tsafiki Evidential and Mirative Markers,' *Chicago Linguistic Society: The Panels (1999)*, pp. 29-44.
- Dickinson, C & Ventura, M (in press), 'La Narrativa Tsachila,' in *Literaturas indígenas del Ecuador. Tomo I*, edited by José E. Juncosa, Colección Historia de la literatura ecuatoriana, Vol. 8. Corporación Editora Nacional, Quito, (in press).
- Erikson, P (2000), 'Dialogues à vif ... notes sur les salutations en Amazonie', in Monod Becquelin & Erikson (eds.) (2000), *Les rituels du dialogue*, Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, pp. 115-38.
- Ewart, E (2008), 'Seeing, Hearing and Speaking: Morality and Sense among the Panará in Central Brazil,' *Ethnos*, 73:4, pp. 505-522.
- Fausto, C (2002), 'The Bones Affair: Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Contact Situations Seen from an Amazonian Case,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (N. S.), 8, pp. 669-690.
- (2004), 'A Blend of Blood and Tobacco: Shamans and Jaguars among the Parakanã of Eastern Amazonia', in Whitehead & Wright (2004) (eds.), *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*, London: Duke University Press, pp. 157-178.
- (2007), 'Ce que manger veut dire. L'esprit de la prédation en Amazonie', in Laugrand & Oosten (eds.) (2007), *La nature des esprits dans les cosmologies autochtones*, pp. 75-97, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Fortis, P & Praet, I (2012) (eds.) *The Archaeological Encounter: Anthropological Perspectives*, St Andrews: CAS, University of St Andrew's.
- Galpern, A N (1974), 'The Legacy of Late Medieval Religion in Sixteenth-Century Champagne', in Trinkaus & Oberman (eds.) (1974) *The pursuit of holiness in late medieval and Renaissance religion: papers from the University of Michigan Conference*. Vol. 10. Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 141-176.
- Goldman, I (1963), *The Cubeo: Indians of the Northwest Amazon*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Gow, P (1991), *Of Mixed Blood: Kinship and History in Peruvian Amazonia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- (2000), 'Helpless – the affective preconditions of Piro social life,' in Overing & Passes (2000), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger*, London: Routledge, pp. 46-63.
- (2001), *An Amazonian Myth and its History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2007), 'Clothing as acculturation in Peruvian Amazonia,' in Ewart & O'Hanlon (eds.) (2007), *Body Arts and Modernity*, Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishing, pp. 53-71.
- (2009), 'Christians: A Transforming Concept in Peruvian Amazonia', in Vilaça & Wright (eds.) (2009), *Native Christians: Modes and Effects of Christianity among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate, pp. 33-52.
- Grotti, V E (2009), 'Protestant Evangelism and the Transformability of Amerindian Bodies in Northeastern Amazonia', in Vilaça & Wright (eds.) (2009), *Native Christians: Modes and Effects of Christianity among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate, pp. 109-125.
- Guss, DM (1980), 'Steering for Dream: Dream Concepts of the Makiritare', *Journal of Latin American Lore*, 6:2, pp. 297-312.
- Hallowell, AI (1966), 'The Role of Dreams in Ojibwa Culture', in Von Grunebaum GE & Caillois R (1966) (eds.), *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Harner, M (1972), *The Jívaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls*, London: University of California Press, 1984.
- Heidegger, M (1927 [1962]), *Being and Time*, trans. by J Macquarrie & E Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Horton, R (1993), *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on magic, religion and science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Ingold, T (2000), *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*, London: Routledge.
- Karsten, R. (1924), 'The Colorado Indians of Western Ecuador', *Ymer*, Årg 1924, H. 2, pp. 137-152 (Centraltryckeriet, Stockholm).
- Kensinger, K (1995), *How Real People Ought to Live: The Cashinahua of Eastern Peru*, Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Kopenawa, D Y & Albert, B (2003), 'Les Ancêtres Animaux', in Albert & Chandès (1993) (eds.), *Yanomami: L'esprit de la Forêt*, Paris: Fondation Cartier / Actes Sud.
- Langdon & Baer (1992) (eds.), *Portals of Power: Shamanism in South America*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Latour, B (2009), 'Perspectivism: 'Type' or 'bomb'?', *Anthropology Today*, Vol 25 (2), pp. 1-2.
- Lévi-Strauss, C (1973), *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. II, trans. by Monique Layton, London: Allen Lane, 1977.
- Lima, TS (1999), 'The Two and its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tupi Cosmology', *Ethnos*, 64:1, pp. 107-131.

- Lorenzo Pinar, FJ (1991), *Muerte y Ritual en la Edad Moderna: El Caso de Zamora (1500-1800)*, Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca. [As cited in Brandes (1997).]
- Marshall, P (2002), *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, Oxford: OUP.
- McCallum, C (1996), 'The body that knows: from Cashinahua epistemology to a medical anthropology of lowland South America', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 10 (3), pp. 347-372.
- (2001), *Gender and Sociality in Amazonia: How Real People are Made*, Oxford: Berg.
- Merleau-Ponty, M (1945), *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (1958), London: Routledge, 2010.
- (1964), 'The Philosopher and Sociology', in Merleau-Ponty (1964), *Signs*, trans. by R C McCleary, Northwestern University Press, pp. 98-113.
- Mezzadri, L (2004), 'Words of Life, Not a Life of Words,' trans. by T Davitt, *Vincentiana*, Vol. 48:6, pp. 391-393.
- Midgley, M (2001), *Science and Poetry*, London: Routledge.
- Mix, R (1982) (ed.), 'Matu to Cuenta: Cuentos tradicionales de los Tsachila, Colorados', *Miscelánea Antropológica Ecuatoriana*, 2, pp. 56-101.
- Moore, BR ([1956] 1965), *Diccionario Castellano-Colorado*, Quito: Instituto Ecuatoriano de Antropología y Geografía, Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- (1979), *El cambio cultural entre los colorados de Santo Domingo*, Cuadernos Etnolingüísticos No. 5, Quito: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- Morris, K (2012), *Starting with Merleau-Ponty*, London: Continuum.
- Overing, J (1989), 'The Aesthetics of Production: the Sense of Community among the Cubeo and Piaroa', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 14:159-175.
- (1993), 'Death and the Loss of Civilized Predation among the Piaroa of the Orinoco Basin,' *L'Homme*, 33 (126-128), pp. 191-211.
- (2003), 'In praise of the everyday: Trust and the art of social living in an Amazonian community', *Ethnos*, 68:3, 293-316.
- Overing, J & Passes, A (eds.) (2000), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger: The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia*, London: Routledge.
- Praet, I (2005), 'People into Ghosts: Chachi Death Rituals as Shape-Shifting,' *Tipiti*, 3 (2), pp. 131-146.
- (2006), *Courage and Fear: An Inquiry into Chachi Shape-Shifting*, Doctoral Thesis (unpub.), Institute of Social & Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford.
- (2009), 'Shamanism and ritual in South America: an inquiry into Amerindian shape-shifting,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (N. S.) 15, pp. 737-754.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, G (1975), *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs Among the Indians of Colombia*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Rival, L (2005), 'The Attachment of the Soul to the Body among the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador', *Ethnos*, 70:3, pp. 285-310.
- Rivet, P (1905), 'Les Indiens Colorados, récit de voyage et étude ethnologique', *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, Nouvelle Série, Tome 2, 1905, pp. 177-208.
- Rivière, P (1969), *Marriage Among the Trio: A Principle of Social Organisation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- (1994), 'WYSINWYG in Amazonia', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 25:3, pp. 255-262.
- (1997) 'Carib Soul Matters', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, vol 28 (2), pp. 139-148.
- (2000), 'The more we are together...', in Overing & Passes (2000), *The Anthropology of Love and Anger*, London: Routledge, pp. 252-267.
- Robalino, G (1989), *La Verdadera Gente: una aproximación antropológica al grupo Tsachila*, Quito: Consejo Provincial de Pichincha.
- Salomon, F (1986), *Native Lords of Quito in the Age of the Incas*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- (1997), *Los Yumbos, Niguas y Tsáchila o "Colorados" durante la Colonia Española*, Quito: Abya-Yala.
- Santiana, A (1951), 'Los Indios Colorados', in Juncosa, JE (ed.) (1988), *Tsachila: Los Clásicos de la Etnografía sobre los Colorados (1905-1950)*, Quito: Abya-Yala, pp. 153-160.
- Seeger, A (1975), 'The Meaning of Body Ornaments: A Suya Example', *Ethnology*, Vol. 14 (3), pp. 211-224.
- (1981), *Nature and Society in Central Brazil: The Suya Indians of Mato Grosso*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Seeger, Da Matta & Viveiros de Castro (1979), 'A construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras', *Boletim do Museu Nacional*, 32, pp. 2-19.
- Surrallés, A (2003), 'Face to Face: Meaning, Feeling and Perception in Amazonian Welcoming Ceremonies,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9, pp. 775-791.
- Strathern, M (1992a), 'Parts and Wholes: Refiguring Relationships', in M Strathern, *Reproducing the Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 90-116. [As cited in Zeitlyn (2009).]
- Stevenson, W (1825), *A Historical and Descriptive Narrative of Twenty Years' Residence in South America*, (Vol. II), London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co.
- Taylor, A-C (1993), 'Des Fantômes stupéfiants: Langage et croyance dans la pensée achuar', *L'Homme*, 126-128, pp. 429-447.
- (1993a), 'Remembering to Forget: Identity, Mourning and Memory among the Jivaro', *Man*, N. S., Vol. 28 (4), pp. 653-678.

- (1996), 'The Soul's Body and Its States: An Amazonian Perspective on the Nature of Being Human', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 2 (2), pp. 201-215.
- Thomas, K (1971), *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England*, London: Penguin, 1991.
- Toren, C (1993), 'Making History: The Significance of Childhood Cognition for a Comparative Anthropology of Mind', *Man*, Vol. 28 (3), pp. 461-478.
- Turner, T (1980), 'The Social Skin,' in Cherfas & Lewin (eds.) (1980), *Not Work Alone: A Cross-Cultural Study of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, London: Temple Smith, pp. 112-140.
- (1995), 'Social Body and Embodied Subject: Bodiliness, Subjectivity, and Sociality among the Kayapo', *Cultural Anthropology*, 10(2), pp. 143-170.
- Tylor, E B (1958[1871]), *Religion in Primitive Culture*, New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Ventura, M (1995), 'En el camino: Los Tsachila en el complejo étnico de la selva occidental de Ecuador,' in A Alvarez, S Alvarez, Fauría, & Marcos (1995) (eds.), *Primer Encuentro de los Investigadores de la Costa Ecuatoriana en Europa*, Cayambe: Abya-Yala, pp. 433-465.
- (2000), *A la Croisée des Chemins : Identité, rapports à autrui et chamanisme chez les Tsachila de l'Équateur*, Doctoral Thesis (unpub.), EHESS, Paris.
- (2000a), 'Several representations, internal diversity, one singular people', *Social Anthropology*, vol. 8(1), pp. 61-67.
- (2000b), 'Transformations formelles d'une cosmologie réceptive : Notes sur la colonisation chrétienne du chamanisme tsachila (Équateur)', in *La Politique des Esprits : Chamanismes et Religions Universalistes*, edited by D Aigle, B Brac de la Perrière & J-P Chaumeil, Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie (2000), pp. 209-226.
- (2009), *Identité, Cosmologie et Chamanisme des Tsachila de l'Équateur : À la croisée des chemins*, L'Harmattan: Paris.
- (2011), 'Is the Past another Time? Ancient Objects in Tsachila Cosmology' in Fortis & Praet (eds.) (2011), *The Archaeological Encounter: Anthropological Perspectives*, St Andrews: CAS, University of St Andrew's, pp. 56-79.
- (2012), *En el Cruce de Caminos: Identidad, Cosmología y Chamanismo Tsachila*, trans. from French by M R Álvarez Orgaz, Quito: FLACSO/Abya-Yala.
- Vilaça, A (2000), 'Relations between Funerary Cannibalism and Warfare Cannibalism: The Question of Predation', *Ethnos*, vol. 65 (I), pp. 83-106.
- (2002) 'Making Kin Out of Others in Amazonia', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 8, pp. 347-365.
- (2005), 'Chronically Unstable Bodies: Reflections on Amazonian Corporalities', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11, pp. 445-464.
- (2009), 'Conversion, Predation and Perspective', in Vilaça & Wright (eds.) (2009), *Native Christians: Modes and Effects of Christianity among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate, pp. 147-166.

- Viveiros de Castro, E (1998), 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4, pp. 469-488.
- (2005), 'Perspectivism and Multinaturalism in Indigenous America', in Surrallés, A & García Hierro, P (2005) (eds.), *The Land Within: Indigenous Territory and the Perception of Environment*, Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, pp. 36-74.
- (2007), 'The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits', *Inner Asia*, 9(2), pp. 153-172.
- Von Hagen, W (1939), 'Los Indios Tsachela del Oeste Ecuatoriano', in Juncosa, JE (ed.) (1988), *Tsachila: Los Clásicos de la Etnografía sobre los Colorados (1905-1950)*, Quito: Abya-Yala, pp. 81-151.
- Whitehead, NL (2002), *Dark Shamans: Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death*, London: Duke University Press.
- Whitehead NL & Wright R (2004) (eds.), *In Darkness and Secrecy: The Anthropology of Assault Sorcery and Witchcraft in Amazonia*, London: Duke University Press.
- Wilbert, J (1979), 'Magico-Religious Use of Tobacco Among South American Indians', in Browman & Schwarz (1979) (eds.), *Spirits, Shamans, and Stars: Perspectives from South America*, The Hague: Mouton, pp. 13-38.
- Willerslev, R (2004), 'Spirits as 'ready to hand': A phenomenological analysis of Yukaghir spiritual knowledge and dreaming,' *Anthropological Theory*, 4 (4), pp. 395-418.
- (2007), *Soul Hunters: Hunting, animism, and personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs*, London: University of California Press.
- Wooffitt, R (1992), *Telling Tales of the Unexpected: The organisation of factual discourse*, Exeter: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Yancey, P & Brand, P (1993), *The Gift of Pain: Why we hurt and what we can do about it*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Zeitlyn, D (2009), 'Understanding anthropological understanding: For a merological anthropology,' *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 9 (2), pp. 209-231.