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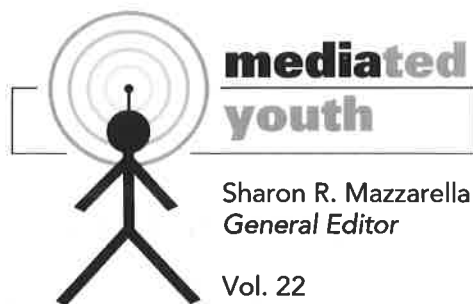


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“I Turn INTO A Pink Dolphin”

Apurinã Youth, *Awiri*, and
Encounters with the Unseen

PIRJO KRISTIINA VIRTANEN

On a hot June day, I was sitting at the back of a schoolroom in an indigenous village next to the Tumiã River in Brazilian Amazonia. The students, ages 7 to 22, were sitting at their desks and learning to write and read in their local Apurinã language. They were trying out a new primer to see how it would work in practice and whether it would correspond to variations in the Apurinã spoken language. The Tumiã indigenous reserve is an unusual area because the Apurinã language dominates over Portuguese in daily life. Until now, these teachers could only rely on Brazilian state school materials, which were all published exclusively in Portuguese. This was the case despite the fact that most of these students only knew their native Apurinã. About one hundred people live in this indigenous territory, of which about 20 study together every weekday morning. While observing and working with these students, I noticed that during their school hours, even the youngest among them would be snuffing *awiri*, a plant substance the Apurinã people have prepared and used for generations. This *awiri* powder (known as *rapé* in Portuguese and also referred to as *awiry*) came from a bottle that had been left at the school following the previous night's *kyynyry* celebrations. The teacher and I noticed that even the youngest children used a rolled paper as a way to inhale the green powder. While this seemed rather peculiar to me, the teacher did not even raise an eyebrow. Instead, he proceeded to teach his pupils how to write the letter “W.”

The Tumiã indigenous reserve is situated on both sides of the Tumiã River, which is one of the tributaries of the Amazon Basin's Purus River and is about 540 miles south of Manaus. The Central Purus is considered the original home of the Arawakan-speaking Apurinã people. They identify as *Pupÿkary* ("a group of humans") and are currently divided into two moieties, the *xiwapurynyry* and the *meetymanety*, which have exogamous marriages. They continue to populate this large area, from Rio Branco, Acre state's capital, to Manaus, the Amazonas state's capital city (see also Facundes 2000). The Apurinã population has increased over the last three years and today numbers approximately 8,000 people who identify in this way. Like neighboring indigenous groups, the Apurinã have suffered the aftereffects of colonization. This is apparent in their often-depressing economic situation and paternalistic treatment by the state. Contemporary difficulties are usually conflicts with farmers, riverside extractive communities (such as nut collectors), loggers, and fishermen—all of whom continue to invade the Apurinã's demarcated lands. Thus, alongside already longstanding disagreements among community members and other neighboring settlements, territorial conflicts with non-Apurinã groups have caused even more internal strife. This is one of the key reasons why many Apurinã live in urban centers today.

Based on my fieldwork in both urban and rural areas, I have seen the Apurinã produce and use a green-colored snuff called *awiri*. Its use is one of the oldest Apurinã practices to continue today. *Awiri* is prepared by mixing the leaves of a particular bush and bark of a specific tree and the leaves of a particular bush (the Apurinã preferred that I not identify either plant or their scientific names). Other Amazonian peoples, such as the Cashinahua or Yawanawa (also in Western Amazonia), use snuffs, but each community has its own preferred ingredients and techniques for preparing them. This means that each kind has a particular color and texture. Some snuffs may be highly hallucinogenic, such as the snuff used among the Yanomami (in northwestern Amazonia). Overall, these substances are prepared from plants that are regarded by their native producers and consumers as having properties and powers that are significant for everyday life and, most importantly, allow for a deeper understanding of the self and others. Their consumption is ritualized and can be understood in the context of many other shamanic herbs, such as those used for babies, pregnant women, hunters, and in witchcraft. Given this long tradition and the many changes in the Apurinã's daily lives, how might young Amazonians like the Apurinã understand the potential powers of such shamanic plants? Furthermore, how do they view shamanic experiences during the course of their lives? This line of inquiry is essential to an understanding of present-day youth cultures in Amazonia.

This chapter looks at the usage of shamanic plants among Amazonian indigenous youth by focusing on the Apurinã's use of *awiri* snuff. Until now, this indigenous people and their preferred shamanic substance have been relatively unknown.

As such, this specific narrative of *awiri* use by young Apurinã has remained hidden. Therefore, this chapter charts a new perspective on Amazonian youth and the way shamanic substances can enlighten young people about coming-of-age matters specific to their culture. The analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2010 and 2014 in the Central Purus region, including interviews and participant observations. During 2003 and 2006, I also studied indigenous youth, including Apurinã, in the city of Rio Branco. To respect the privacy of my indigenous contacts, all names mentioned here are pseudonyms.

Though *awiri* does not come from any hallucinogenic plants, as is the case with the Amazonian brew *ayahuasca*, it is still a shamanic substance that can induce visionary transformational experiences. My previous research on *ayahuasca* shamanism emphasizes how *ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) plays a vital role in young people's transition to adulthood (Virtanen, 2012). Here, it is also fruitful to compare the use of shamanic plants to recreational drug use among Western youths because of some drastic differences. It must be acknowledged, however, that Brazil is growing into a global, economic, and political power. As a result, chemical/recreational drugs are on the rise in Western Amazonia, at least according to the media. Though all such substances can open youths to new experiences, alter the body and mind, or provide users with a new ways of perceiving the world, attitudes toward drug use are culturally specific. This is also true in terms of how different cultures monitor any given drug's production and use. For Western youths, for instance, recreational drug use often occurs amongst similarly aged friends. This practice situates drugs as entertaining and social and also as something that may represent allegiance to a certain lifestyle or subculture (Hunt, Moloney, & Evans, 2010; Measham & Moore, 2009). Heavy consumption of drugs or alcohol can merely be youthful experimentation, even if it involves physical risks or leads to violence and social disturbance (Martinic & Measham, 2008). Dominant Brazilian society, for example, often regards natural hallucinogenics, such as *ayahuasca*, as illegal drugs (cf. Coomber, McElrath, Measham, & Moore, 2013). Meanwhile, various herbal snuffs (such as *awiri*) can be purchased in local herb shops ("organic pharmacies") in Amazonia. Overall, the key difference between shamanic plants and many of the drugs used in other cultures is that indigenous peoples think of shamanic substances as medicine and "teachers" (see Belaunde, 2010; Gow, 1991; Hugh-Jones, 1993; Londoño Sulkin, 2012; Virtanen, 2012). This is so whether those using such substances are young or old and, for my purposes here, it is true of Apurinã youth.

Young Apurinã use *awiri* as a way to develop their identity and personhood as they emerge as adults in their community. Therefore, both the motivation for its use and its impact are different from what Western culture would attribute to "medicine," because it affects social relations with other beings. The use of *awiri* also brings up coming-of-age issues that are related to culturally unique notions of

temporality (i.e., how to conceptualize the past, present, and future). Once youths become adults, they are perceived as subjects who are able to plan actively for the future. This reveals something unique about Amazonian youth cultures: the use of plants is intertwined with the development of human subjectivity. Thus the insights that *awiri* can provide to young Apurinã are significant to this process. An indigenous practice such as this reveals a culturally specific transition to adulthood. Young people are not only relating to community members through these rituals, but, as will be evident, are introduced to edifying nonhuman entities, as well.

To better understand *awiri* practice among the young Apurinã, this chapter is organized as follows. First, I introduce the Apurinã socio-cosmos and present other typical elements of Amazonian thinking on humanity. Next, I examine the use of *awiri* snuff and how ritual substances are thought to affect the human body and personhood. This is because plant substances often are perceived as nonhuman agents that help shape a young person's identity. Next, the focus is on Apurinã youths' dreams and visions through their use of *awiri*. Importantly, young people explain in their own words how shamanic plants have affected their everyday lives. This then leads us to how Amazonian young people deepen their shamanic knowledge. Similar to the importance of *ayahuasca* among other Amazonian indigenous people I have studied, *awiri* is also integral to the Apurinã's ancient means of understanding the world and social relations. Therefore, in giving Amazonian indigenous youth and the Apurinã people's use of shamanic plants due attention, it is important to contextualize the relationship of Apurinã youth with *awiri* within narratives of other indigenous people's use of the better known shamanic substance, *ayahuasca*. This is done by referring to my previous work on Manchineri youth (another native Amazonian Arawakan-speaking people). This, in turn, fosters discussion about indigenous notions of temporality. This last section highlights how using shamanic plants connects Apurinã youth to past and present generations. I discuss why shamanic experiences assist youths in defining their identities as budding adults.

UNDERSTANDING THE APURINÃ SOCIO-COSMOS

The effects of *awiri* can be understood in the context of the Apurinã socio-cosmos. Since it is a shamanic substance, *awiri* needs to be contextualized in the so-called shamanic ontology, or what can be called a perspectivist philosophy. This suggests that external entities have the power to produce changes in individuals. The Amazonian cosmos, therefore, comprises social relationships among people, animals, plants, and many other entities (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). According to the Apurinã, animals, plants, trees, and stones, for instance, are thought to live very similarly to humans. However, their spirits tend to be invisible in everyday life.

The Apurinã elders also told me that their socio-cosmos harbors specific spirits, namely the *tukĩtxi* (a name for nonhuman entities with long heads), the *kamatxi* (a name for spirit beings living near moriche palm trees), and the so-called *kamjry* beings, often translated simply as "spirits." These beings are generally avoided, because they cause illnesses or misfortune by shooting invisible arrows and darts that only shamans know how to remove, thus curing the person in question (field-work diaries and interviews, 2010, 2013, 2014; see also Schiel, 2004). Different animal spirits, such as peccaries and pink dolphins, also have a central position in the Apurinã socio-cosmos.

Some of these spirits are incredibly powerful. Several Apurinã adults explained that they can cause everlasting pain in the body (such as back pain or pain in the ears) or cause a person's death, if they are approached too closely, suddenly, or without respect. Only shamans can cure people from harmful effects of these nonhumans. In order to master relations with nonhuman entities, shamans have developed techniques to communicate with these spirits. They turn temporarily into nonhumans so as to negotiate with these animal and plant entities. This deeper spiritual and shamanic knowledge requires long and intensive training. In Tumiã, there are no shamans, and the closest one is in one of the neighboring Apurinã territories.

Babies (*putsukaru*), children (*amaryny*), and adolescents (*atakury*) are especially vulnerable to these spirits. Young Apurinã girls who have passed their first menstruation or boys whose voices have changed are considered to be already more resistant to these spiritual forces. Animal and plant spirits more profoundly affect humans who are literally still "taking shape"—that is, fetuses in utero and newborns (Vilaça, 2005). In this socio-cosmos, bodies are formed by all "agents" of the social environment, whether human or nonhuman. Nonhuman agents also can fortify babies and endow them with stamina—for example, through the juices or smoke of plants used by many Amazonian Indians. In the case of adolescent Apurinã, these youths must take part in various local and age-specific rituals. They are prescribed specific foods and are often required to isolate themselves from others so as to develop properly. Apurinã youths from Tumiã often told me how their parents advised them not to face strong sunshine, not to bathe in the river at dusk, and not to walk in the rain. Contrastingly, the oldest man of Kanakuri village in the Tumiã region disregarded such advice. He worked outdoors and cleared the yard whether it was sunny or raining. Clearly, his contrary activities suggest that age determined what was appropriate or "safe" for members of the community.

Subsequently, Amazonian people are often socialized into their culture through processes concentrating on embodiment or the body *per se*. This is evident through their use of clothing and ornamentation (Seeger, da Matta, & Viveiros de Castro, 1987; Turner, 1995) and traditions connected to eating, working, sharing, and communal living (Conklin & Morgan, 1996; Gow, 1991; Overing &

Passes, 2000). Imbibing various substances also contributes to this development. This includes the consumption of breast milk, game, cassava, and herbs—all of which are perceived as mirroring the way a person acts and thinks. Many Amazonian people think that animals may also use cigars, snuffs, *ayahuasca*, or other shamanic substances, which illustrates the thought that “human activity” is shared with nonhumans.

Too many interactions with animal or plant spirits may make a person too similar to nonhumans and therefore too different from their own kin. Interactions with the nonhumans (such as plant spirits) are therefore controlled by collective rites and ritual acts. This ontology is so entrenched in the minds of the indigenous Amazonians that parents often limit their children’s interaction with certain animal or plant spirits so as to safeguard the baby’s or child’s humanity and, by implication, their own. These so-called *couvade* practices start before the birth of the baby, because what happens to the body of the Apurinã father or mother is considered to impact the fetus (Virtanen, 2012). Therefore, the father will avoid hunting certain animals whose spirits could harm the fetus or newborn baby. Moreover, in Amerindian thinking, certain objects also have agency in fabricating bodies. Baby slings, stools, and ornaments, for instance, can protect and fortify young children in the Amazon (Santos-Granero, 2009). It is the parents’ task and responsibility to control and take care of their children so that they and the people around them avoid situations that could harm a growing youth’s personhood. A young person’s spiritual wellness is crucial when using *awiri*. This merging of human spirit and sacred substance helps define the relationship between youths and spirits within the Apurinã socio-cosmos. Such experiences, in turn, will shape these young Amazonians’ journeys into adulthood (see also Virtanen, 2012).

PLANT SPIRITS AND GENERATIONAL INHERITANCE

The Apurinã inhale *awiri* snuff individually and directly from a palm through a self-constructed tube-like device. The Apurinã people claim that their preparation and use of snuff has not changed since ancestral times. This continuity is thought to connect them to the knowledge of the previous generations. Similar to the use of other shamanic plants among indigenous Amazonians, the Apurinãs’ *awiri* is used to ignite relationships with spiritual entities and consequently offer insights to its user. A female Apurinã elder shared that, according to myth, there was a shaman in Tumiã who dreamed of a bee that led him to a riverbank where there were many plants to make *awiri*. He took their seeds to grow more of them. Later he shared this newfound knowledge about *awiri* and its use with his people. A small tube, a *mexikana*, which is usually made from a curassow’s bone, is used for *awiri*’s inhalation. First it was used only by shamans, but later all people adopted

it (Marta, personal communication, June 6, 2013). Traditionally, snuff is kept in a *mekaru*, a shell, which is topped with feathers for decoration. Both *mexikana* and *mekaru* are used today by Apurinã political leaders, especially in urban areas. They normally place these objects in front of themselves while negotiating various matters. However, most villagers store their snuff much more informally, often in a small plastic or glass bottle (fieldwork diaries and interviews, 2010, 2013).

Awiri is also carried in a pocket or bag when away from home. Overall, *awiri* is meant to inspire favorable interaction with nonhumans. It is usually consumed in the evenings but also during the day when hunting or visiting with others. The snuff is used to harmonize the body, as it can attract protective spirits and open up new levels of communication and understanding for those using it. In Amazonian communities, this might be linked to one’s development as a hunter or spokesperson, choosing a partner, or one’s attitudes toward schooling (such as to finish studies). In effect, the ritualistic experiences that shamanic plants offer young Apurinã foster their attentiveness to perceived entities of their culture’s socio-cosmos: a worldview in which the relationships between human and non-human entities are of great importance. Furthermore, the use of *awiri* connects young people’s transition to adulthood to the spiritual past of their ancestors, even if they are not first aware of it. Such shamanic insights are often interpreted in the context of events that have occurred to both immediate kin and to one’s ancestors. As a result, this study of the Apurinã helps explain this culture’s notion of temporality from the point of view of young people. Their ritualistic use of *awiri* enables constant returns to the past and, also, to the future.

An example of this is what happens during the *kyynyrys*, also known as the *xingané* festivities. Many people consume *awiri* because it is a ritual space where spirits are invited to join human celebrations. The *kamatxi* are called through chants and literally through the moriche palm leaves carried by the men. Many men, but also some women and children, consume *awiri*. The snuff also serves an important purpose when people arrive for the celebrations: the spokesperson of the community meets and “evaluates” the participants by using the snuff (see also Schiel, 2004). Because the people who take part in these celebrations are often visitors to the community, the sharing of snuff demonstrates that peace has been made and that they are now welcome participants. At these celebrations, it is also about sharing a culturally valuable substance with friends or potential affines, creating a setting where alliances can be made (Virtanen, 2014).

For many indigenous Amazonian groups, shamanic plants, as well as animal spirits, are considered to “interact” with humans in diverse ways during everyday life. This may include the perception that plants are “talking to them.” These nonhuman entities are also thought to contribute greatly to human development. Such spiritual encounters can occur while people are gardening, hunting, fishing, weaving, taking care of their children, and so forth. As is typical of animistic

ontologies, and as mentioned previously, these spirits are thought to live similarly to humans. They eat food, drink beverages, and even live in a kind of house (Fausto, 2007; Lima, 1999; Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Some plants are regarded as great teachers and consequently are referred to as the mothers or fathers of all plants.

Generally, though, Amazonian Indians regard many drugs as being similar to food and drink, because all three substances contribute to the development of people's bodies. As Hugh-Jones (1993) argues, the Desana in the northwest Amazon do not classify food, beverages, medicines, or drugs into different categories, as would be true in most Western societies. Similarly, the Muinane people in Colombia think that their bodies are constituted of plant substances like chilies, tobacco, coca, manioc, and herbs. The further consumption of such substances keeps the evil spirits at bay. Ironically, such spirits are believed to imbibe many of these plants too. However, it is thought that substances grown by humans have a different quality, thus making human bodies dissimilar to those of the spirits (Londoño Sulkin, 2012). The Muinane also think that the use of plant compounds is gender-specific and that this ultimately results in different female and male bodies and persons.

The use of various substances is also linked closely to indigenous views of morality. Londoño Sulkin (2012) shows how, among the Muinane people, tobacco makes humans have thoughts that are endowed with love and care. If a Muinane person misbehaves, it is often blamed on a lack of tobacco use or the lack of other divine substances (e.g., coca, specific herbs) in one's body. This deficiency can even block a person's thinking (Londoño Sulkin, 2012). Importantly, among Amazonian indigenous peoples, the intake of certain types of cassava (manioc), tobacco, and game meat is considered to sustain the continuity of certain types of bodies over many generations (Gow, 1991). Notable differences between people's diets are often mentioned in Apurinā mythology, and such stories describe *embodied* distinctions between various groups of people. Essentially, these myths are about different types of nutrition, substances, and practices that are thought to construct people's bodies and thus personhood. As the next section of this chapter shows, a crucial way in which Apurinā youths develop their personhood is through the use of *awiri* snuff. This substance is said to provide dreams and visions that allow these young people to see their world in a new light.

LEARNING TO DREAM

Many Apurinā prepare their own snuff and carry it with them when walking, hunting, working, or visiting people. Both girls and boys prepare it. A young woman of 18 told me that she had started using snuff when she was 10 years old.

According to her, and among the Apurinā more generally, young people start using *awiri* as early as age 10. Overall, women consume smaller amounts than men (fieldwork diaries and interviews, 2010, 2013). This young woman told me that she makes her own *awiri* as she had seen her mother prepare it. She explained that *awiri* was very important to her and that she took it almost every evening to dream. She also used it when travelling. In general, she took it "to feel better." According to her, "Sometimes, when I take the snuff [in the evening], I dream of myself there below [in the lower world of the river] and I turn into a pink dolphin. There are people who dream very well" (Elisa, personal communication, June 2, 2013). Her dream demonstrates how *awiri* use can inspire visions beyond the confines of everyday life.

The dream to which this young woman refers occurred during a normal night's sleep. Therefore, it should not be confused with hallucinogenic visions caused by substances such as *ayahuasca* used in ritualistic contexts. However, there are common elements to both of these shamanic plants. They both facilitate encounters with invisible nonhumans, and both consumption patterns inspire creative thinking. *Awiri* gives youths communication with the spirit world, which is often symbolized by the animals in their dreams. As the aforementioned Apurinā girl explained to me, due to her initial use of *awiri* and as evident in subsequent dreams, she was able to witness the invisible and inaccessible aspects of the world, or "the unseen." She saw and experienced the underwater world like a pink dolphin. She *was* a dolphin, with all the animal's power and capabilities. She took on the perspective of the animal. Others might also experience the perspective of plants or other nonhumans while using *awiri* (Lima, 1999; Viveiros de Castro, 1998). The snuff acts as a portal for transformational knowledge because it brings hidden realities to light. The substance also allows fluidity between spirits and humans. *Awiri* prepares the body and mind for new kinds of experiences and perceptions of the world.

As discussed in several ethnographies of native Amazonian communities (e.g., Barcelos Neto, 2002; Tedlock, 1987), dreams are often perceived as the knowledge transmission from nonhumans. In some visions, the users are even transformed into animals. Pink dolphins are considered to be enchanted beings, and it is common for the Apurinā shamans to transform into them. In the Amazon, pink dolphins are also symbolic of beautiful women, which is another reason why they may appear to young women using *awiri*. Insightful visions are also possible without the *awiri* snuff, but the substance facilitates this process. Some Apurinā women told me that they also take *awiri* to attract fish and game for the male members of their community. The men also used it for hunting, as it was needed in order to dream better while attending to this communal duty. Clearly, some people think that they can affect events by using *awiri* (fieldwork diaries and interviews, 2010, 2013). As the aforementioned young woman stated earlier,

“Some people dream very well” (Elisa, personal communication, June 2, 2013). In this respect, good dreams or visions foster successful outcomes.

The strong connection between dream encounters and everyday cultural practices was illustrated to me by a young Apurinã man, who explained that dreaming was an important part of his hunting. While encounters with animals figure in his visions, he knows that if he dreams specifically of blood, he will catch some game. He also told me that dreaming of different types of animals or envisioning many people celebrating meant that he was going to catch a peccary. Or dreaming about a pregnant woman would equate with eventually finding a tapir in the forest. The young man emphasized that it was better not to tell one's dreams to anyone, since doing so could jeopardize a hunter's success.

Some youths take *awiri* to approach animals better while hunting. A young man explained that once, when he was in the forest, a band of peccaries stayed out of his reach. He had *awiri* in his pocket and thought, “I will take *awiri* to get close to them.” He used the snuff and got close to the peccaries. However, he could still not kill any of them. Later, in his village, a male elder said to him that he should have followed the peccaries. The elder continued explaining that, according to one Apurinã myth, a shaman would take *awiri* early in the morning—before the chief of the peccaries took snuff—to gain an advantage over the animals (cf. Lima, 1999). As explained earlier, it is thought that animals often use the same substances as people. In this myth, the shaman's people used *awiri* and went after the peccaries. After a long chase, they finally got them. (Marco, personal communication, June 4, 2013). When speaking with two young Apurinã men who lived in the city of Rio Branco, I was told that they would ask people from their village to bring them snuff. They would use it when they had the flu, and it helped them recover quickly. The snuff also “gave a different look to the positions of the things;” the “pictures” that its use gave them provided a new perspective. They also mentioned that the snuff brought them luck. However, these boys could not explain what this “certain something” was (in *awiri*) that gave them a new outlook; it was just “something” (*Tem alguma coisa aí*) (Paulo and Pedro, personal communication, November 24, 2003).

Interpretations of personal encounters with plant and animal spirits in the Apurinã socio-cosmos must be contextualized within Apurinã oral history and the community's memories of past events. For instance, in the aforementioned example, a village elder, for the young hunter's benefit, draws on a similar case of hunting in Apurinã history. The communal aspect of this oral history is also—seemingly contradictorily—linked to visions of the future. This connection between the past and the future in each indigenous group's own history is explicable in terms of their experience with the nonhuman spirit world. Generation after generation, certain nonhumans, animals, plants, or personalized forces of nature have gained importance over others. This way, every indigenous young person learns how his or her people see the world. Unlike the youth in the more developed Western world, these

young people often feel connections with a particular animal they envision and with what this animal symbolizes. If things occur differently in reality than the dream anticipated, this usually indicates that the person has not understood the teaching or guidance of a nonhuman spirit. It may also depend on the person's own receptiveness to the knowledge and energies offered by the nonhumans. In the previous example of a young Apurinã hunter, he seemed to be saying that the use of *awiri* would have enabled him to catch the peccaries if only he had pursued them further.

It is clear that plant and animal spirits, as well as many other natural elements, are considered to be important teachers. Many Amazonian indigenous peoples think these spirits offer protection from other threatening forces (Gow, 1991). Moreover, nonhumans can change into various forms to offer guidance to human beings. It is often through the use of shamanic plants that the invisible presence of nonhuman spirits becomes visible. Such plant-induced experiences allow Amazonian young people to grow into their own agency. Today, many indigenous people desire that this traditional form of knowledge acquisition be integrated increasingly into school studies. The state of Acre, in fact, has already been a pioneer in indigenous education. Belaunde (2010) notes how in Peru, and within the context of an indigenous teachers' meeting, an Ashaninka healer and painter argued that current school curricula were not adequate because they lacked provision for studying and using plants. Everything in the schools, she noticed, was based on information only found in books. However, the study of plants offered something very important: knowledge not accessible through the written word. Learning about plants in school is important because it has helped to reintegrate local youths into their traditional communities. Viewed from the indigenous perspective, Belaunde (2010) writes, “plants are good counselors because they also are, or were, human, and their spirits communicate teachings that shape young people's will” (p. 131). She concludes that spaces should be found for this type of education where both teachers and students could receive advice from community elders and plants in a more holistic context. In South America, there has not yet been larger policy discussion regarding this issue.

Though this indigenous influence in education is not yet common within the Amazon region, local youths still think their experiences with shamanic plants are valuable—even for their studies. Many young Apurinã say that *awiri* can give them strength for various activities, including studying. Alongside facilitating such everyday tasks, *awiri* use can also guide youths when more weighty matters arise. Here, the use of the snuff may inspire insights related to choosing their partner, responsibilities toward the community, and travel. These inspirations usually come during *awiri*-laced dreams. In this respect, *awiri* acts as an advisor that helps young people who are confronting various situations. This kind of knowledge is useful throughout youths' transitions into adulthood, if not for their entire lives. After all, the process of learning from nonhuman spirits through various types of

shamanic techniques is one of the important stages of becoming an adult within indigenous communities (Virtanen, 2012).

APURINĀ TEMPORALITY AND “FIRMNESS”

Young Apurinā often interpret their own dreams. If something from their dream takes place in waking life, they may point to the potency of the dream. The dream, or vision, becomes a kind of affirmation and provides a young person with a sense of empowerment. However, Apurinā youths do not share their dream experiences with others before the vision actually transpires (Kohn, 2013). As several Apurinā youths explained, for them, dream encounters with nonhumans may contain information about personal events that are still years into the future and therefore should remain private until the events occur. After that, a personal encounter with an animal, for instance, may be discussed with others—especially with elders—to confirm the event’s meaning for that person’s life (fieldwork diaries and interviews, 2010, 2013).

A unique sense of temporality is also an important aspect of their dreaming. The past *is present* in the present, but so is the future. For many Amazonian people, the future *is also present* in the present. For the Apurinā, dreams of nonhumans, events, or sounds of animals, such as birds, usually include signs of the future to come. Thus there are many possible futures, and how people react to signs in their dreams, and in the everyday present, ultimately affects their future. Young people may also encounter signs of the social and natural environment that are perceived anew. Certain animals and/or sounds could be indicative of future events. Kohn (2013) describes how for Ecuador’s Runa people, for example, certain sounds—such as the falling of a palm tree—might be understood semiotically. Kohn’s analysis, through Charles Peirce’s theories, suggests that “being *in futuro*” envisions how signs symbolize the future and how that future can affect the present. In Kohn’s words, “Signs, as ‘guesses,’ represent a future possible, and through this mediation they bring the future to bear on the present” (p. 207). He also notes that, for the Runa, the forest is inhabited by the spirits of the dead and other nonhuman beings play roles in people’s “invisible futures.” In the case of Apurinā youth, their futures will mostly be about their reactions to other entities in the web of social relations. As suggested earlier, this interconnectedness will produce a certain type of body *and* an intentionality (agency) that can best be understood through the perspectivist ontology based on altering subject positions (Viveiros de Castro, 1998).

Some experiences with plant spirits are so powerful that they can change the future lives of young people (Virtanen, 2012). This is especially true in the case of the hallucinogenic plant *ayahuasca*, which is used across Western Amazonia. According to young Manchineri and Cashinahua people, for instance, *ayahuasca*

has helped them in various ways. The positive effects of these shamanic experiences have been noteworthy in both schooling and partnerships and also in hunting and other activities related to their forest home. For instance, a young Manchineri girl said the following of her *ayahuasca* use:

It has so many positive sides. Sometimes we think of something [as being difficult], and when we take it [*ayahuasca*], the next day things are different, the problem passes...It has also helped me at school. Sometimes we think of abandoning the school. When I take it, it gives me some advice. Not to stop studying, but to go to the front, not to be afraid. Many things...When I started to take it—right away, I was very firm. (Catarina, personal communication, August 4, 2013)

For this young girl, becoming “firm” meant that she felt stronger and surer of herself. Furthermore, this strength was not just psychological or spiritual but also physical. This is in keeping with conceptualizations of the Amazonian body, because it is only until late adolescence that the body is understood as vulnerable to the acts of spiritual entities (Vilaça, 2005; Virtanen, 2012).

Along similar lines, this girl’s younger sister said, “At school, I thought of wrong things, but I stopped it. I was with [non-Indian] people who taught me the wrong way. I was with some people who liked lots of boys, and I also wanted just to be next to boys” (Camilla, personal communication, August 4, 2013). For the girl, it was better that she abstained from having early (romantic or sexual) relations with boys, especially considering that she was only 10 years old. In the Amazon region, and among indigenous youth, it is not uncommon for a teenage girl to fall pregnant. Moreover, “the wrong way” that this girl referred to could imply non-indigenous attitudes toward plants and other substances.

Because the use of shamanic plants may affect socio-cosmological relations, it is regarded as a very serious practice. Village elders often tell the young how the effects and signs of the shamanic plants should be interpreted. Whether or not young people speak of their encounters with nonhuman forces, and regardless of how these encounters are interpreted at a personal or collective level, these experiences offer hope and suggest the possible futures that await them. Through interpreting their dreams or visions and relating them to present-day events or actions, young people are able to better orientate their life paths. When one feels power in spirit encounters, nonhuman activity (sounds or visions) is usually perceived as hopeful and positive. Miyazaki (2004) studies the concept of hope in Fiji and demonstrates how hope serves as a method of knowledge. For the Apurinā, for example, a particular dream or sign may help people avoid having harmful relations with certain people or beings. As we see from young people’s experiences above, the use of shamanic plants has supported them in numerous ways. To give just one example, it has guided them to choose the company they keep. Similar views were expressed by many other young people related to their political

aspirations or the responsibility they felt toward their community. However, the limits of hope are varied (Miyazaki, 2004). For the Apurinā, they are not only based on the powers of each individual but also on the agency of spirits and how family can contribute to or influence the course of events.

The relations between nonhumans and humans in the Amazon are defined by myths and an oral history that continues to live through many traditional practices. The past is thus constantly present. As well as the guidance attained through shamanic plants, some indigenous people think that art, music, and myth also make the knowledge and presence of different spirits active and visible. For instance, the Apurinā *kyynyry* festivity chants mention caimans, certain birds, palm trees, and also *awiri* snuff itself as contributing to group identity and making Apurinā values visible. The powers of these animals recreate the positions and relationships among different beings in the socio-cosmos and establish differences with both other indigenous groups and non-Indians. This differentiation is established not only through Apurinā ritual acts, but also through “everyday” corporeal practices such as eating or taking care of siblings.

The use of shamanic plants is closely related to active production and reconstruction of social relations with certain entities. This interconnectedness can also be communicated to non-Apurinā. The use of snuff is obviously visible for others to see; it is carried openly and is taken with people who are considered to be friends. The young Apurinā men who have become active in indigenous politics carry their *awiri* kit and keep it visible to others. Their *mexikanas*, the tubes, and *mekarus*, the cases, are often very beautifully designed by the young men themselves.

Among Manchineris, Cashinahuas, and Yawanawas, I have also met young people who have told me that they were training more seriously in their knowledge of the nonhuman world so as to become shamans. Many of them used shamanic plants, such as *ayahuasca*, were on special diets, or used isolation as a method to receive and embody shamanic knowledge. Much to my surprise, given that shamans have traditionally been male, I discovered that some of these young people were in fact girls. Furthermore, as an anthropologist who focuses her research in the Amazon, I have rarely heard of any negative effects of *awiri* or *ayahuasca* on young indigenous persons’ development. The case of those shamanic plants used for witchcraft, for instance, is another story. For the most part, Amazonian indigenous communities carefully control who uses shamanic plants and also the purposes for which they are used.

CONCLUSIONS: DISCOVERING A HIDDEN YOUTH CULTURE

This chapter of a “lost youth culture history” has addressed the topic of an Amazonian youth community in relation to its use and experience of shamanic

plants—specifically, the use of *awiri* snuff by Apurinā youth. Similar to other indigenous youths’ engagement with shamanic plants, *awiri* use is embedded in the collective and personal histories that are indicative of Amazonian cultural life. They reflect values that are markedly different from those emphasized in recent studies about drug use in Western societies. Youthful drug use outside the Amazonian context is often connected with self-expression and consumption—both common values in Western countries (Hunt, Milhet, & Bergeron, 2013). The recreational use of substances—particularly those that alter consciousness—in non-indigenous cultures cannot be compared with the ritualistic use of substances like *awiri*. This is because the use of chemical substances among Western youth differs greatly according to age and is usually more typical of adolescents and young adults. However, the use of consciousness-changing substances by indigenous people continues well into adulthood. Moreover, chemical substances favored by Western youths are used in territorialized leisure spaces, such as nightclubs, and are closely bound up with specific scenes or subcultures (Hunt et al., 2013; Measham & Moore, 2009). Even if this experimental drug use is not related to criminal activities, it is usually kept hidden from parents and other adults. This also differs from indigenous cultures, whereby the ritualistic use of substances like *awiri* is known and sanctioned by the adult community.

Even if one were to argue that both illicit drugs and shamanic plants have the ability to alter one’s worldview or offer an alternative way of interacting with others, shamanic substances are usually more focused on individual development and subsequent community experiences. While recreational or experimental use of hallucinogenic drugs may today be seen as a rite of passage among mainstream, Westernized youths, the use of shamanic plants is an important part of young indigenous people’s transition into adult life within a larger context. It signals becoming a full member of their community, since they are capable of experiencing and interpreting socio-cosmological encounters for the benefit of themselves and others.

The concept of temporality also differentiates indigenous youth cultures from their Western counterparts. As discussed here, Apurinā youth acknowledge that the past is important for understanding the present. However, their future is also constantly present, as the future can be encountered through *awiri*-induced visions of other entities, such as animal and plant spirits that inhabit their surroundings. Clues to these young people’s futures also manifest in everyday visions and actions, but they are interpreted in the context of cultural traditions rooted in the past or by reflecting on events that have already passed (see also Ulturgasheva’s [2012] discussion on the future of Siberian indigenous youth).

For Amazonian youths, the first independent experiences with plant spirits are especially significant. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, young Apurinā students snuffed *awiri* in their classroom, and these acts were not hidden

but visible and accepted by others. The young students even tried to find a correct way to use snuff by experimenting with their own methods, such as using a piece of paper to make a tube. For the Apurinã, plant spirits are entities with which one interacts similarly to the way one does with human beings. In that sense, shamanic ways of knowing are not separated from everyday life. With the help of the shamanic snuff *awiri*, young Apurinã people experience altered states of consciousness that provide guidance. This type of experience is not always regarded as mystical but is instead a pathway to knowledge that cannot be attained through books or from teachers. This practice has remained unknown and misunderstood in Western countries due to the fact that dominant society (increasingly in the form of Pentecostal churches) often have seen these acts as dangerous, illegal, and unnecessary. The fact that *awiri* users themselves consider the substance sacred and as something that leads to ancestral knowledge also has veiled the practice from the outside world.

Whether veiled or unveiled, it is clear that shamanic plants and practices are an extremely important part of Apurinã youth culture, and their use continues during times of change or when residing in urban areas. *Awiri* use gives young Apurinãs insights into how to establish their identities in relation to other entities in the socio-cosmos. It also cements their role as adult members of their community. Unearthing this lost history shows how different this coming-of-age process is when compared with those in Western societies. Amazonian village life and its shamanic rituals are literally and figuratively distanced from those of Western adolescents trying to establish themselves in a globalized world. Unlike the intensely locally interconnected Apurinã, the Global Village necessitates that Western youth embark on adult life usually far removed from family and community networks. This then begs the question: Who or what is there to guide *them*?

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