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An Ethnolinguistic Study of the Yanesha' (Amuesha) Language and Speech Community in Peru's Andean Amazon, and the Traditional Role of Ponapnora, a Female Rite of Passage

par
Anna Luisa Daigneault

Département d'anthropologie
Faculté des arts et des sciences

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An Ethnolinguistic Study of the Yanesha' (Amuesha) Language and Speech Community in Peru's Andean Amazon, and the Traditional Role of Ponapnora, a Female Rite of Passage

Présenté par:

Anna Luisa Daigneault

a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

Robert Crépeau
président-rapporteur

Kevin J. Tuite
directeur de recherche

Deirdre Meintel
membre du jury

SUMMARY

The Yanesha' language is spoken on the edges of two worlds, the Andes and the Amazon, in southcentral Peru. Ethnolinguistic fieldwork was carried out among the Yanesha' people in May-August 2008 to learn about their language and the possible factors leading to its endangerment. This thesis examines the unique linguistic features of Yanesha and its place within the Arawak language family. It also discusses a puberty ritual that plays an important role in preserving musical and linguistic heritage among Yanesha' women: the *ponapnora* female initiation ritual.

Keywords: Yanesha' language, Peruvian Andean Amazon, Arawak language family, endangered traditions, *ponapnora* puberty ritual.

RÉSUMÉ

La langue Yanesha' est parlée sur la frontière de deux mondes, les Andes et l'Amazonie, au Pérou central. Un travail de terrain ethnolinguistique parmi le peuple Yanesha' a été effectué en mai-août 2008 pour étudier cette langue et les facteurs menant possiblement à sa disparition. Ce mémoire porte sur les traits caractéristiques de la langue Yanesha' et sa place à l'intérieur de la famille linguistique Arawak. L'auteure discute aussi à propos de *ponapnora,* un rituel de puberté qui joue un rôle important dans la préservation d'héritage musical et linguistique auprès des femmes Yanesha' .

Mots clés: la langue Yanesha', Amazonie péruvienne andine, la famille linguistique Arawak, les traditions en voie de disparition, le rituel de puberté *ponapnora.*

Acknowledgments

I am honored to have spent time working with the indigenous Yanesha' people of southcentral Peru while doing research related to this thesis. This work would not be possible without the help of many Yanesha' leaders, teachers, elders and community members in the settlements of Tsachopen, Loma Linda, Buenos Aires, Iscosazin, Yuncullmass, Puellas, Villa America, Raya-Laguna, San Francisco, Azulis and Santo Domingo. I am particularly thankful to the following people for giving me Yanesha' language lessons in their communities: Espiritu Bautista Pascual and his wife Cristina Bautista (Loma Linda), Ernestina Quinchuya Francisco, Pancho Espiritu, Domingo Santos Huancho, Juan Francisco Lopez, his son Cesar Francisco Quinchuya and his wife Olinda Quinchuya (Yuncullmass), Enrique Quinchuya (Puellas), Andres Huancho Bernardo (San Francisco), Augusto Fransis Lores (Azulis) and Carlos Huancho (Santo Domingo).

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I would not have been able to do my fieldwork without obtaining a travel grant from Université de Montréal's *Maison Internationale*. This research would not have been possible without the help and support of *El Instituto del bien común* (IBC) and its director, the linguistic anthropologist Richard Chase Smith, who has spent over 30 years working with the Yanesha' people. Smith is one of the only non-Yanesha' researchers in the world who has a deep knowledge and insight into Yanesha' culture, mythology, music and ritual, and I would not have been able to gain the trust of Yanesha' people without working with Smith. The other employees of the IBC who helped me along the way include Percy Summers (IBC Oxapampa office), as well as Carlos Soria and Maria Rosa Montes (IBC Lima office). I also worked with Smith's and

Bautista's Yanesha' musical archives at *Pontificia Universidad Catolica's* Ethnomusicology Institute. There, I would not have been able to complete the task of organizing the archives without the guidance of Raul Romero (director), Diego Giannoni (resident videographer and technical assistant) and especially Efrain Rozas (a Peruvian ethnomusicologist and musician), who was very helpful and encouraging. In Peru, I also met international doctoral students such as Céline Valadeau (France) and Peter Larsen (Netherlands) who influenced my research.

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Most of all, I am thankful towards all my family members and friends in Lima, Peru who took care of me while I stayed with them. I would like to recognize the hospitality of my relatives Carmen Nuñez Fernandez, Karina Nuñez, Susy Nuñez Loza, Alexander Luis Alberto, Lucho Fernandez, Maria Cubas, Mirella del Pilar, Estrellita Fernandez, Joshua Fernandez and Mary Caruzo Ruiz, and the kindness and generosity of my friend Leonardo Camacho, as well as his wonderful circle of musical friends.

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A Glimpse of the Andean Amazon

> It is before dawn, and I am lying curled up on the floor of a jungle hut. In the dark, the deep voice of the chief's father wakes me, in all of its melodic splendor. It is his custom to sing sacred Yanesha' chants every morning, to honor the ancestors. His old voice sounds so strong, steady and clear. In my thin sleeping bag on the ground, I listen in silent awe while the elderly man finishes performing his ritual songs. He then puts on his clothes, picks up his walking stick and hobbles out the door. I hear the chief also rise quickly and exit, following his father. The chief's wife, asleep with her two children, next to me, begins to stir. I hear the villagers making noise as they wake up. Some of them joyfully scream,
>
> "*Ahueney ponapnoro*!"
>
> which means, in the Yanesha' language, "Let's go to Ponapnora!"
>
> (excerpt from author's field notes, July 2008)

The situation described in the above passage may one day no longer be observable by anthropologists, or even by members of the Yanesha' (Amuesha)[1] culture. For the Yanesha' people of Peru, ancient cultural traditions such as sacred singing and participating in *ponapnora*, a female puberty ritual, are becoming increasingly rare.

The Yanesha' are a small tribal nation of approximately 9 000 indigenous people living in the tropical forest-covered eastern slopes of the Andes, in southcentral Peru, in the departments of Pasco, Junín and Huánuco. They live at the intersection of two vibrant cultural worlds, the Andes mountain range and the Amazon jungle. The Yanesha' culture exhibits hybrid qualities that reflect both the tropical and alpine characteristics of this region, and their language is substantially influenced by Quechua, one of the most widespread languages of the Andes. The

[1] The Yanesha' refer to themselves as amuesha, yanehsha', yamotsesha' or acheñ depending on the context (Smith 1985). I will use the term 'Yanesha' because it is the term that was the most frequently used by the indigenous people I met during the course of my fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon in 2008.

Yanesha' language is part of the Arawak family, which presently contains 40 living languages, many of which are spoken by small Amazonian indigenous groups whose way of life is now in danger of becoming extinct (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 65). While the grammar of Yanesha' is typically Arawakan, the Yanesha' lexicon shows an very remarkable import from the ancient Yaru dialect of Quechua, spoken in the eastern Andes during the time of the Inca Empire before the Spanish conquest (Adelaar 2006: 290). The Yanesha' language is therefore a unique example of past contact between Andean and Amazonian peoples before colonization. Here is a map of the Yanesha' territory and its location within Peru:

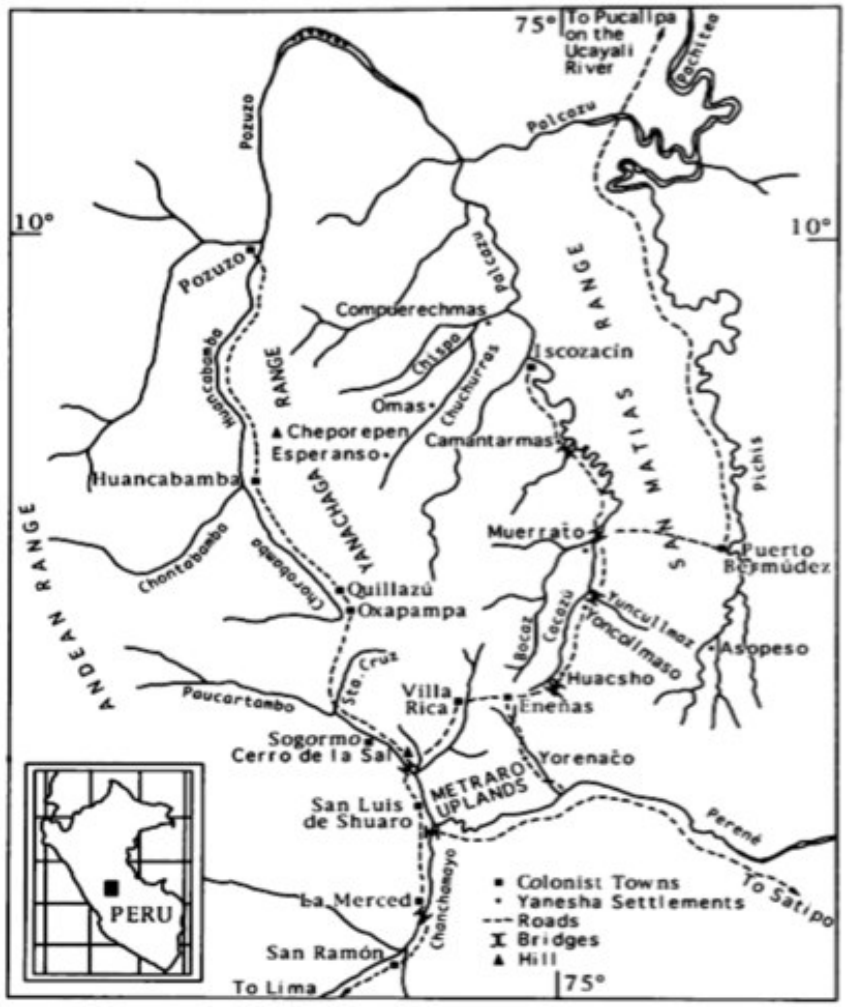

Figure 1. Map of Yanesha' Settlements, 1997. (Santos-Granero 1998: 130).

In areas of the world such as the Peruvian Amazon, where the Yanesha' people live today, human life is deeply intertwined with the natural environment. Deforestation and urbanisation are among the long-term impacts of colonialism and free market capitalism that are affecting the indigenous populations who have lived in the Amazon for thousands of years. As trends associated with globalization reach the remote areas of our world, many members of tribal nations are currently in the process of giving up their ancestral ways and adopting new lifestyles that favor economic development and their survival within the capitalist system. Many indigenous languages and cultures in South America remain poorly documented, so it is imperative to record their traditions before they disappear. Witnessing ancient customs, such as attending women's puberty rites and seeing performances of sacred songs, are becoming rare oppurtunities that are like treasures not only for the field of anthropology, but for knowledge of human history as a whole.

Fieldwork Goals and Motivation Behind This Thesis

The initial goals of my ethnolinguistic fieldwork in 2008 were to collect Yanesha' linguistic data, identify factors leading to language endangerment, and to study any efforts being undertaken by the local people to revitalize their language. My fieldwork led me to discover the beauty of Yanesha' women's culture, in particular the *ponapnora* ritual and sacred singing. These aspects of women's culture are disappearing over time and documenting them became important to me, along with examining why the Yanesha' language is also in danger.

Asking *why* a language (or a linguistic tradition, such as sacred singing) is disappearing places the researcher at the nexus of many contemporary as well as historical issues. When one indigenous language is in the process of being replaced by a dominant colonial language, there are many political and economic issues involved, and cultural as well as environmental resources

are at stake. In this thesis, I will give a glimpse of what the Yanesha' people currently face as a marginalized tribal nation located in a 'developing' country in a rapidly changing world. In examining their situation through the lens of their language, which is currently has low numbers of children learning and fluently speaking it, I got a tangible sense of one cultural world being steadily replaced by another. At times, my fieldwork was a disturbing experience. Observing the erosion of ancient cultural knowledge can be emotionally difficult to digest.

I would like to emphasize that the research presented in this thesis is preliminary because it is based on only three months of Master's level fieldwork. However, it is the first seed of ongoing research that I intend to pursue among the Yanesha' in the coming years. I was very inspired during the course of my fieldwork to go back and spend more time with the Yanesha' people in the future. A year after completing fieldwork, I am still in contact with my informants and I am planning my return.

The motivation for this research stems from a connection to Peruvian culture through my mother's family[2], an intense interest for the Amazon as a cultural region, as well as a great respect for societies that live on the fringes of the modern world. While I do not idealize Amazonian cultures, I realize that the tribal communities of the Amazon are the remnants of a different world that once existed before our industrial era, one that valued knowledge of indigenous plant and animal species, developed subsistence strategies in harsh climates, and celebrated a profound spiritual connection to the land. All of this traditional knowledge is encoded and expressed through indigenous languages, and therefore their languages must be

[2] My mother was born and raised in Lima, Peru and immigrated to Canada in the 1970s, when she was in her early twenties. She helped her whole immediate family immigrate to Canada, and married a French Canadian, my father. My mother brought me to Peru on several occasions throughout my youth and I have always been interested in doing ethnographic research there.

protected, or at the very least, they deserve to be documented and preserved in some form, for the sake of future generations who wish to learn about these languages and revive them.

Thesis Organisation

In Chapter 1 *Among the Yanesha': Fieldwork, Theory & Methods*, I will first present a chronology of the time I spent in Peru. Both personal and scientific, this account allows the reader to understand the stages of discovery and learning I went through in the field. Next, in the theoretical section, I discuss the urgency of studying the world's endangered languages, citing the recent works from linguists and anthropologists. I present my theoretical stance and field methodology, and mention some of the difficulties I encountered in in the field.

In Chapter 2 *The Yanesha' Language and People,* I look at the spatio-linguistic context of the southcentral Andean Amazon and the position of the Yanesha' language within the Arawak language family. I present the two Yanesha' dialectical zones and examine the factors leading to the endangerment of the language. The ethnographic information in this chapter is mostly based on the fascinating research of American anthropologist Richard Chase Smith. The ethnolinguistic information stems from my observations and interviews with Yanesha' speakers.

In Chapter 3 *Yanesha' Linguistics*, I will give a formal presentation of the Yanesha' language. I will give an overview of past linguistic work published in this field, and devote sections to phonology, morphology and syntax of the Yanesha' language. This chapter presents many useful tables that synthesize linguistic information, and gives a good general introduction to the language itself, with analytical commentary on its orthographic system invented in the 1950s by SIL linguists.

In Chapter 4 *On the Dawn of the Full Moon: The Ponapnora Rite of Passage Among Yanesha' Women*, I will examine the *ponapnora* female puberty ritual in detail. It plays a role in

cultural transmission among women, and in the preservation of Yanesha' linguistic heritage. The disappearance of *ponapnora* is a microcosm of the larger-scale disappearance of Yanesha' culture in our modern era. There is a lack of documentation on this puberty ritual and this chapter seeks to fill the gap by presenting data from Yanesha' women's narratives of their experiences. It was during a puberty rite celebration that I first heard the *Mellañoteñrech* song performed by Yanesha' women. I will present and briefly analyze the lyrics of this sacred song within the context of the *ponapnora* ritual.

Chapter 1. Among the Yanesha': Fieldwork, Theory and Methods

In order to understand how the cultural and linguistic knowledge I present in the coming chapters was constructed from a collage of experiences and information collected on a journey, it is useful to first examine the timeline of my journey in Peru. In this chapter, I present a narrative of my fieldwork experience, followed by a theoretical discussion focusing on the importance of documenting endangered languages, and a section on my theoretical approach and methodology.

1.1 Chronology of Fieldwork

The information I gathered on the Yanesha' people and their language came from many different sources, people and experiences. In the three months I spent in Peru, I worked as a volunteer intern for the anthropologist Richard Chase Smith[3], the director of *El Instituto del Bien Comun* (IBC) in Lima, the capital of Peru. Smith is one of the few researchers in the world with an in-depth knowledge of the Yanesha' culture and language and has spent over 30 years doing fieldwork among them. When I wrote to him from Montreal about wanting to do an ethnolinguistic study on the Yanesha' language, he agreed to take me on as a temporary intern in his organization. Under his watchful guidance, I would have access to the Yanesha' communities and work on one of his projects.

- Mid-May to early June 2008 : Lima, the IBC and Tsachopen

[3] Richard Chase Smith completed his Ph.D in Anthropology on the topic of Yanesha' music at Cornell University in 1970. He then founded *El Instituto del Bien Comun* (IBC), a Peruvian non-profit civil association, in Lima. The organization is devoted to protecting the rights and lands of indigenous peoples in Peru. One of the IBC's focuses is to make maps of ancestral territories belonging to Amazonian peoples, specifically with the Yanesha' and others.

I arrived in Lima in mid-May 2008 and got settled into my aunt's apartment, not far from the IBC's head office. I spent some time visiting my family members and re-connecting with my Peruvian heritage, as well as finding my way around the teeming streets of Lima.[4] I got a sense of the tense political climate and rapid economic development taking place in Peru. Competing political murals covered any available wall space and the whole city was a giant construction site with gleaming shopping centers growing out of the ground.

Being half-Peruvian allowed me to integrate quickly into situations. Because I definitely have Peruvian features, I was not immediately treated as a foreigner by the people I met. However, when I spoke at length, it would be acknowledged from my accent and mannerisms that I had come from another country, but I was part Peruvian. Eventually, after a month, I managed to mask my accent in such a way that it would not immediately be suspected to be foreign. (Later, when I spent time in Yanesha' communities, having *sangre peruana* - Peruvian blood - was seen as a positive attribute, and I was quickly welcomed into some of the communities because of it).

From the time of my arrival, I noticed that many of my family members in Lima did not understand why I wanted to spend time doing linguistic fieldwork in Amazonian communities, and they thought it was a dangerous and bizarre endeavor for me, a young single woman, to undertake. From their discourse, I realized that they considered the Amazonian people to be inferior, uneducated and 'primitive'. They even joked with me that I would come home pregnant and give birth to a *shipibito* (a baby from the Shipibo tribe) or perhaps I would bear some kind of monkey-child. I quickly saw that Amazonian people are very marginalized within mainstream Peruvian culture.

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[4] Being Canadian with a Peruvian mother, a curiosity about my own cultural identity played a role in my fieldwork.

Smith needed assistance with the organization of his Yanesha' music archives, which he had recorded from 1967 to 1979. It is an enormous compendium of over 200 hours of Yanesha' cultural, linguistic and musical data, and I was really pleased that I could be of service in organizing the digital version of this amazing archive and be immersed in the sounds of Yanesha' language and music. My task was to make copies of his entire collection, which had been recently digitized at the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music, and to finalize the catalog accompanying the digital version. Additionally, many tape recordings made by a Yanesha' elder, Espiritu Bautista, needed to be digitized and organized, and Smith and I agreed that I would work on that as much possible as well. I needed official permission to access the archives and make the copies, which were located at *Pontificia Universidad La Catolica – Instituto de Etnomusicologia* in Lima, and while waiting for the bureaucratic permission to be granted by the university, I decided to take one-week trip to the Andean Amazon in order to visit a Yanesha' community and see the region in which they lived.

I crossed the Andes by bus and arrived in the eastern foothills of the Andes, where the Amazon jungle begins. I stayed alone in Smith's house located just outside the town of Oxapampa, and spent several days studying Yanesha' language and culture through books in the IBC branch office library located in the town. On several occasions I traveled by bicycle and spent the day in the Yanesha' native community of Tsachopen, located near Oxapampa. I met Tsachopen community members and finally began learning how to correctly pronounce some words in the Yanesha' language. I realized that their writing system, invented by two American missionary-linguists in the 1950s, did not capture many of the phonetic subtleties of their language (this is further explained in Chapter 3).

I spent time with many different artisans who live in Tsachopen, visited the Yanesha' cemetery and took long walks with a Yanesha' man named Pancho Espiritu, who showed me

around the valley and took me to visit a 100-year-old Yanesha' woman, Teresa Ballesteros. Pancho asked Teresa to sing some of her sacred songs to me, and when she began singing, I was overwhelmed by the power of her performance. The astonishing beauty and complexity of her songs gave me a lot of enthusiasm and motivation to return to Lima and work with Smith's and Bautista's Yanesha' song archives. This first insight into women's culture influenced me to focus on women's singing.

- Early to Late June: Working at the *INSTITUTO DE ETNOMUSICOLOGIA* in Lima

Upon my return to the capital, I was given permission to work in the archives of the university's Ethnomusicology Institute and I went to work there every weekday from 10am to 6pm, for 3 weeks. It was an amazing and wonderful experience to be able to listen to 12 years worth of Yanesha' recordings made by Richard Chase Smith. I spent the first week making digital copies of his collection for the IBC, and the last two weeks digitizing the collection of Yanesha' myths and songs recorded from 1987 to 2005 by Espiritu Bautista. I managed to digitize 30 of his cassettes, which was an astonishingly tedious process, as there were many problems with the sound quality of the recordings and the physical categorization of Bautista's cassettes. This whole process was a kind of high-speed cultural and phonetic immersion in the Yanesha' world, and by the end of it, I felt like I was ready to return to the Amazon and visit more Yanesha' communities in order to get a better sense of their way of life.

- July 1 – July 5, 2008 : The 39TH ANNUAL YANESHA' TRIBAL CONGRESS

Smith said that it would be a good idea for me to see some of Yanesha' political life, so when it came time for the Annual Yanesha' Congress, I went with Espiritu Bautista to the tribal

conference in order to talk about the progress that was being made at the IBC in making the recordings of the sacred songs accessible to the Yanesha' communities.

Attending the conference of tribal leaders in the native community of Buenos Aires really opened my eyes to all the issues the indigenous communities currently face: acculturation, loss of language and culture, the impacts of evangelization, lack of material and financial resources, little knowledge about women's rights, difficulties in access to secondary education, logging activities as a source of income but also of devastation, oil and gas companies exploring and beginning extraction on the indigenous territory, the politics of land claims, and the violent dangers associated with the narco-trafficking of the coca plant in the region. Despite these numerous challenges, the Yanesha' communities still clearly have a strong sense of cultural pride and unity, and seeing them come to consensus on certain matters was very inspiring.

During this period I also learned that a Canadian oil company, Petrolifera Petroleum (based in Calgary, Alberta), was setting up exploratory seismic lines and drilling holes in Yanesha' communities in search of natural gas. A representative of the company came to the conference to meet with tribal leaders and answer their questions. I was terribly appalled to see just how little the Yanesha' people were being consulted with the regards to the exploration process taking place on their own land. Most of them were not aware of the environmental impacts of drilling for hydrocarbons. I became determined to study the impacts of corporate neo-colonialism on the Yanesha' in the future. Their situation reminded me of the plight of indigenous people in Canada; they are marginalized and often insufficiently consulted when it comes to the economic exploitation of their lands. I realized that indigenous peoples around the world directly suffer from the impacts of corporate resource extraction in remote areas[5].

[5] I decided that I will further explore « The Impacts of Petrolifera Petroleum on Amazonian Communities in Peru » in a 30-minute documentary that I will begin filming in Peru in January 2010.

- July 6 – July 27, 2008 : Visits to Six Yanesha' Communities

In this 3-week period following the congress meeting, I visited as many Yanesha' settlements as I could, and fully devoted myself to learning the Yanesha' language. I made two journeys to the community of Yuncullmas, where there are still relatively high numbers of native speakers of the Yanesha' language and I attended a girl's puberty ritual (*ponapnora*) there. The rite of passage left a very strong impression on me and I became even more fascinated with women's culture. I also visited the community of Loma Linda twice, participating in another *ponapnora* there and stayed with one of my main contacts, Espiritu Bautista. I also spent a few days in the communities of Azuliz, San Francisco, Villa America, Castilla and Raya. In each place I made contacts with interesting, welcoming, as well as skeptical individuals and became acquainted with different aspects of modern-day Yanesha' life. For example, I saw an evangelical baptism in a river; learned how to cultivate manioc with Yanesha' women; I saw the men fishing in the rivers with non-traditional methods such as dynamite (!); I observed the extremely deteriorated state of several elementary schools, etc.

I also met many older Yanesha' women and interviewed them about their sacred songs and their perception and experience of the *ponapnora* female puberty ritual. My interviews with the Yanesha' women were very informative and valuable because no anthropologist had previously had access to the Yanesha' women's world. Gender roles are very distinct in Yanesha' culture, and Smith, as a man and anthropologist, had spent much of his time working with men, while women remained in the background. Their voices and struggles came alive to me as I did my best to learn as much as possible about their traditions and chants. After spending a few days in a community, the women would soon become receptive to my presence and curious about my work, and they began to approach me with questions, and soon opened up with their stories. I

made some strong connections with Yanesha' grandmothers, mothers and daughters and promised to return to their communities to document more of their songs, which are becoming increasingly rare, as the younger generations cease to learn them.

- July 27 – August 7, 2008: Finishing the Catalog in Lima and Departure

Although I would have liked to stay longer in the communities, I had to go back to Lima because my flight was approaching and transport in the entire country was about to shut down for several days for the Peruvian national holiday (July 28). I finished revising Smith's digital catalog and handed over copies of all the documents I had been working on, as well as the digitized versions of Espiritu's cassettes to the IBC. I said goodbye to my family members and new friends in Lima and went back to Canada on August 8th, 2008.

Reflections on Fieldwork in the Andean Amazon

My first experience doing ethnolinguistic fieldwork was challenging, beautiful, upsetting and inspiring. As a Spanish speaker, I did not have trouble communicating in Spanish, but at the beginning, I did have some trouble pronouncing Yanesha' words, especially the retroflex consonants and the 'breathy' vowels (see Chapter 3 for descriptions of these sounds). Near the end of my fieldwork, my vocabulary and understanding of Yanesha' phonetics had increased, so I could at least determine the general topics of Yanesha' conversations and understand who was being addressed and in what circumstance. At first, I was anxious to learn as much as possible about Yanesha' culture and language, and was frustrated if I felt I had not assimilated what I thought was 'enough' in one day. After a short time, I adopted an approach in which I focused my intentions on learning the Yanesha' language through elementary school books, and also by recording linguistic and musical data, and trying to transcribe traditional songs. While many

Yanesha' speakers could teach me how to say sentences like *where is the river?* or *Paco went to the mountain to hunt squirrels,* few knew enough about their cultural heritage to explain the meaning of the lyrics in a sacred song such as *Mellañoẗeñrec̈h* (I will discuss the difficulties in transcribing the song in Chapter 4).

I adopted an open and experiential approach in which I acknowledged that all conscious experiences that I had within the communities would allow me to learn about different aspects of Yanesha' culture and thus complement my investigation into why their language is disappearing. By taking long walks with Yanesha' men, women and children in order to visit several different communities as well as two sacred sites, I observed that the Yanesha' people possess profound insight into the dynamics of their environment, the Andean Amazon, as well as the hundreds of species of animals that inhabit it. They told me stories of sacred mountains inhabited by ancestor gods and how songs are actually divine gifts received from divine beings living in geophysical features of the landscape. Their cosmo vision transformed my view of the natural world and their traditional songs left deep imprints on my mind.

On the Disappearance of Yanesha' Women's Sacred Chants

Most of all, the songs of Yanesha' women were the most captivating aspect of my research. As I interviewed Yanesha' grandmothers, I became aware of a dying tradition: the transmission of the sacred songs from mother to daughter. This would once take place during the elaborate and symbolic female puberty ritual, *ponapnora,* a custom in which a young girl is shut up in a jungle hut for a period of anywhere between 1 and 6 lunar cycles (see Chapter 4 for more details). During this time she would learn to weave, sing and her body would be purified and able to endure the harsh environment for many years to come.

There are fewer girls who participate in this tradition today because, among other reasons, as children they often leave their communities to find work in towns and cities. Reflecting on this sad situation, I wrote in my field notes one night, « I came here to learn the dying songs of the Lungs of the World ». It occurred to me that the gradual disappearance of *ponapnora* is a microcosm of cultural erosion, and I became determined to make it one of the central themes in my thesis. Therefore, the last chapter is devoted a description of *ponapnora* and to the factors leading to the disappearance of it, as well as a short ethnolinguistic analysis of *Mellañoẗeñreëh*, a song that was performed by local women at a *ponapnora* ritual in Loma Linda.

1.2. Theoretical Approach.

In this section, I will look at the general context of language endangerment around the world. Citing recent publications, I will explore why it is important to study speech communities where an indigenous language is being replaced by a colonial language. After giving some background on factors surrounding language loss in Amazonia, I will describe some prevalent attitudes and mistaken assumptions about Amazonian peoples that have been further reaffirmed by missionary-linguists in the 20th century. Within this explanatory framework, I will describe my own experiential approach and field methods, highlighted by some field experiences that illustrate how I was perceived by Yanesha communities.

On the Urgency of Studying the World's Endangered Languages

Why do some languages cease to be spoken? From the 15th century onwards, powerful European nations began the colonization process, thus imposing their political, economic and linguistic dominance in many parts of the world. European colonizers began enforcing their languages in many countries, which accounts for the shift away from indigenous languages and

the spread of colonial languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, German and Dutch. This process is not only widespread, but its pace is actually increasing due to the ubiquity of urban migration and the abandonment of ancestral ways by young generations. As K. David Harrison observes in his recent book *When Languages Die*, 'the accelerating extinction of languages on a global scale has no precedent in human history' (2007: 7).

R.M.W Dixon (*The Rise and Fall of Languages,* 1997) argues that the process of intensive global colonization provided a 'spectacular' and 'violent punctuation' (ibid: 4-5) in his *punctuated equilibrium* model for the development of languages. Before large-scale European colonial expansion, the human languages around the world were in a state of relative 'linguistic equilibrium' in which features gradually spread through diffusion and also through smaller-scale processes of punctuation. However, with the rise of global imperialism through colonialism, characterized by superior weaponry and many other related factors, some people and their languages grew so powerful that colonial systems took unprecedented control over vast areas of linguistic diversity (ibid: 4). This extreme punctuation in the linguistic balance of the world began a large-scale shift towards more economically prestigious colonial languages. Harrison describes this as a 'crowding out' process (2007: 5) in which the speakers of many smaller languages abandon their ancestral tongues in favor of regionally dominant languages in order to survive in new, imposed economic systems.

The first continents that began to be taken over systematically were the Americas, in the 16th century. The rest of the world soon followed, and by 1910, the only countries that had not been colonized were Liberia, Ethiopia, Thailand, China, Tibet, Japan and Korea (Dixon 1997: 103). Nevertheless, between the 18th and 20th centuries, the indigenous peoples of the world seized the power back for themselves or were grudgingly handed it by the departing heads of colonial regimes. After the Second World War, European dominance somewhat diminished in the

areas of the world where the indigenous peoples still composed the majority of the population; for example, many parts of Africa, Asia, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands have managed to retain widespread use of their ancestral tongues, even though colonial languages still linger and often still dominate in the bureaucratic realms. However, the situation in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand is rather different. Because of the rapid spread of diseases and the genocidal violence that decimated indigenous populations in those places, the European settlers (and *mestizo culture* in South America*)* eventually established a dominant culture that was both more 'numerous and socially prestigious' (ibid: 104) than the original indigenous cultures, giving way to new Europeanized nations.

In 2009, we are still witnessing the alarming ripple effects of this replacement of indigenous cultures and languages. As Harrison notes, "An immense edifice of human knowledge, painstakingly assembled over millennia by countless minds, is eroding, vanishing into oblivion" (2007: 3). In quantitative terms, scientists state that in the year 2001, there were at least 6912 human languages spoken in the world, but they estimate that by 2101, only half of these languages will continue be spoken. This precarious situation is due to the fact that one half of the world's languages currently has fewer than 5000 speakers left speaking each of those languages. Harrison explains that 3586 of the world's smallest languages are spoken by only 0.2% of the global population (ibid: 14). Among these tongues on the verge of disappearance are some 548 languages that each has fewer than 99 speakers left, and these tongues will almost certainly disappear within the next couple of generations (ibid: 4). These figures allow us to see that an enormous amount of linguistic diversity exists within the hands of relatively few people.

Ongoing migration to urban centers accelerates the process of language abandonment, because crowded cities are not the ideal conditions for small languages to survive. The greatest linguistic diversity is found in the parts of the world where populations are small and sparsely

distributed (ibid: 11). Therefore, thinly populated, vast or naturally divided areas such as islands, jungles, deserts, and mountainous regions are all places that encourage the most linguistic diversity. Many of these unique types of areas are also characterized by high biodiversity. Studies now show that that the diversity of life on earth is at once biological, cultural, and linguistic, and these facets of "biocultural diversity" are in fact co-evolved, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing (see Carlson & Maffi 2004). Many scientists and researchers argue that we are currently experiencing a rapid, converging crisis of the extinction of the biocultural diversity of life on earth. "The challenge of protecting, maintaining, and restoring the diversity of life on earth is the challenge of supporting and promoting diversity in nature and culture," (from the principles of Terralingua, 2009).[6] The emerging field of *ecolinguistics* [7] also examines the relationships between languages, societies and natural ecosystems that sustain life. Among many related topics, ecolinguists study how ecologically destructive ideologies such as anthropocentrism are cognitive obstacles to understanding the primordial inter-relatedness of all life.

What does humanity stand to lose from the erosion of human languages and biocultual diversity? We lose entire systems for encoding cultural knowledge, ways of expressing and transmitting cultural and environmental information, as well as rich poetic and musical traditions that were kept alive over time across generations. We lose ideas, wordplay and linguistic creativity, ways of learning about the universe and relating to the world. Because shifting to another language disrupts the way the information is packaged and transmitted, the loss of a language can actually lead to the death of entire traditional knowledge systems, such as plant and animal categorization systems, ways of analyzing weather patterns, etc (Harrison 2007: 15-16).

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[6] See www.terralingua.org for more on current projects to preserve 'biocultural diversity' around the world.
[7] For more on current work in the field of ecolinguistics, see www.ecoling.net

We lose the finely tuned customs and practices that have guided human interaction with the natural world for millennia: the accumulated wisdom of the generations that preceded us. One of the areas of our planet where languages and biocultural knowledge are currently being lost at astonishing rates is in Amazon rainforest, the Lungs of the World.

Language Loss in Amazonia.

On the whole, the indigenous populations of South America have decreased dramatically in size since the arrival of Europeans. The impacts of systematic extermination, racial oppression, epidemics as well as the dynamics of cultural assimilation, have all combined in such a way that indigenous cultures are now among the most under-privileged minorities of South America (Dixon 1997: 104). Amazonian populations are among the most under-studied and often forgotten of these minorities, and their languages are among the most poorly documented in the world.

Language loss in the Amazon basin is historically related to population loss through genocide, enslavement and the spread of infectious diseases. Hemming (1978) relates how entire Amazonian tribes were exterminated when Portuguese settlers, at the mouth of the Amazon river, periodically traveled upriver to enslave tribal groups and then forced them to work under harsh conditions in colonial plantations, where the tribes people would eventually die. In the many dense parts of the Amazon rainforest, Europeans could not reach very far inland until the end of the 19th century - but their diseases, such as smallpox and measles, would precede them, wiping out entire uncontacted tribes (Dixon 1997: 108). Some scholars estimate that since colonization, native Amazonian peoples may have lost three quarters of their original numbers. The exact amount of languages that have ceased to be spoken is unknown. Because there is so little in-depth documentation concerning Amazonian languages, the prehistory of Amazonian languages has

been yet to be fully reconstructed (Aikhenvald 2002). With the current rapid pace of language disappearance, a complete picture of Amazonian linguistic prehistory may never be known.

In 1500, there were between 2 and 5 million people living in the Amazon (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 7). They had vast trade networks that brought them in contact with each other, so multilingualism was and continues to be necessary among Amazonian tribes (ibid: 5). One example of this, according to accounts of early colonists in the central jungle of Peru, is that the Yanesha people were heavily involved in the salt trade that spanned both the highlands and the jungle region of central Peru (Adelaar 2006: 293). Thus, the Yanesha were in contact with many different linguistic groups, including Quechua-speaking groups from the Andes and other Arawak languages in the jungle. This example of multilingual contact informs us of how pre-colonial Amazonian cultures existed and circulated in dynamic environments, in which diverse grammars and lexicons were in contact over long periods of time. However, as we lose the languages belonging to these cultures, we lose sight of ways to learn about what the Amazon was like before colonization.

When the Europeans arrived in Amazonia, different tribes allied themselves together, in order to resist invasion with greater numbers. Some tribes, decimated by diseases, only had a few members left, and integrated themselves into larger tribes. In these new settings, languages also mixed, borrowed from each other and influenced each other's grammatical structures. Therefore, the tribal alliances during colonial times also contributed to the diversified linguistic landscape that one can observe today in Amazonia (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 6).

Today, the indigenous Amazonian population of South America is estimated at 400 000 people. Of the 300 living Amazonian tongues, only a handful of them correspond to groups that contain more than 10 000 people. Experts theorize that in one hundred years, only a fraction of those 300 Amazonian languages will still be in active use (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 7). The

survival of indigenous languages is closely connected to the survival of the jungle environment in which the speakers live. In our current era, tribal nations are still constantly threatened by economic reforms and policies imposed by the state. The deterioration of the tropical ecosystems in Amazonia is caused by the many impacts of colonization, including urbanization and pollution, the construction of roads, drilling for oil and natural gas, and widespread deforestation for lumber and cattle grazing.

Because these economic activities lead to the disappearance of many biological species, the analogy of being 'in danger of extinction' is also applied to languages. This leads some researchers to view dying languages as a doctor would view a patient on an operating table. But while languages may 'die out', their speakers live on, having opted for another language to express themselves in. What are the ethnographic details surrounding these situations? What views do the speakers themselves express on the gradual death of their language? One must take a more descriptive, in-depth approach in order to find out what is really happening to the people in each specific area, rather than just relying on the stark coldness of statistics. In the rest of this chapter, I will describe my ethnographic approach and field methodology, and how they are related to the history of linguistic and anthropological research in the Peruvian Amazon.

Working on the Heels of Missionary Linguists In Amazonia

The region of Amazonia is often depicted as vast and remote, and its people portrayed as isolated, primitive and dangerous. How did these assumptions come into modern consciousness? Tribes were thought of as little islands of humanity stranded in a huge inhospitable forest, instead of flourishing cultures that are part of large exchange networks. Even today, Amazonian tribes in mainstream Peruvian media are portrayed as backwards or evolutionarily inferior, instead of

being recognized as possessing impressive traditions and rare encyclopedic knowledge about the magnificent array of plants and animals existing around them. How did this skewed view about their lives come into existence? The worldview of early missionaries representing the Catholic Church played a role in molding our perception of them.

The written histories documenting the missionary effort in Latin America have had an enormous impact on outsiders' perceptions of the Amazonian world in Peru, in particular concerning the *Selva Central* (central jungle). The historical documents and geographical descriptions paid little attention to the social realities of the area, and 'created a kind of epic aura around the missionary effort itself' (Smith 2004: 15). The Franciscans wrote that the 'montaña' region (also known as the Andean Amazon) was practically impenetrable until they established and improved trails, and that the isolated infidels they met there were dangerous and even cannibalistic. (Smith's cartographic work shows that the central jungle was *not* isolated, and that many Inca trails already connected the central jungle to the rest of the Inca Empire. I will expand more on this in Chapter 2). In any case, the later historiographers of the 19th and 20th centuries relied heavily on these flawed early Franciscan sources, upholding the view that the montaña region is an enormous barrier to penetration and communication (Smith 1977).

This corpus of historical texts has had a profound influence on the public perception of the original inhabitants of Peruvian Amazonia and was reaffirmed once more with the activities of the SIL. As Smith observed in 1975, 'Some Amuesha have been subjected to the activities of Catholic missionaries for over one hundred years, others to the activities of the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries for forty years, and still others, by far the majority, to the influence of Evangelist missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics for 25 years' (Smith 1975a).

The Peruvian Amazon has been visited by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) since 1945. In that year, the SIL, a Christian missionary organisation, entered into agreement with the

Ministry of Education of Peru through a presidential decree signed by Presidente Manuel Prado. It was agreed that the SIL linguists would 'penetrate the jungle in search of primitive tribesmen, live among them, reduce their languages to writing, translate the Bible and cultural material for them, and help the Government integrate them into national life' (Bentley Tanner 1955: 3). How did they accomplish such a task? Financed by American evangelical organisations, they set up a 'Jungle Base of Operations of the SIL' on the banks of Lake Yarinacocha in the central Peruvian jungle. It was a supply depot and jumping-off point for the missionary-linguists who worked with 26 different tribal groups. Every year, pairs of linguists (often husband-wife teams) would mount expeditions and set off by plane for periods of 6 to 8 months to live among tribes deep in the rainforest, connected to their base via radio communication. The linguists all reported the same difficulties in their fieldwork, 'primitive living conditions, distrust on the part of the Indians, and the long, discouraging task of learning a difficult unwritten language' (ibid: 25). But the missionary-linguists were convinced that they were doing God's work and they persevered.

The SIL linguists were of the opinion that the 'jungle Indians of Peru' were primitives in isolation from centuries of progress. These 'primitives' were in dire need of technological advancements and must participate in social integration with the rest of the nation of Peru. The SIL linguists also firmly believed that through their evangelical work, they were saving the Amazonian tribes from eternal damnation. Missionary linguist Louise Bentley Tanner, who spent many years among the Piros, sums up the SIL ideology when she vividly writes,

> "The jungle is opening and the light of education, progress and spiritual truth is infiltrating its darkness. Stone Age Indians are taking in giant strides what much of the world has slowly evolved through many centuries. […] Indians who were once ashamed of their own unwritten language now proudly read with ease the textbooks, story books, and portions of the Bible, written in their own tongue. As they become literate in their own idiom, it is much easier for them to learn Spanish, the national language. […] The Summer Institute of Linguistics is highly gratified that, along with the primary purpose of its linguists to translate the Bible into these languages, they have also been useful in beginning the transformation of the lives of people from

> superstition and fear-bound isolation into integration with their nation, and with Christianity" (1955: 26).

From an anthropological standpoint, the work of the SIL has been disastrous because it has separated the Amazonian tribes from their original cultural heritage. Under the proselytizing gaze of SIL missionaries, the people were taught that their ancestral spirituality was pagan, which was interpreted as dark and demonic. Their oral history was seen as trivial folklore in comparison to the Christian New Testament, and their ancient sacred rituals were seen as quaint at best. In Peru, in 1975, there was constant clamor for the government to expel SIL, following a long newspaper campaign which alleging contacts with the CIA and accusing it of having directly exploited gold and uranium resources (Calvet 1987). The SIL was blamed for having instilled a rigid and puritanical morality upon Amazonian peoples, and creating factional religious conflict between evangelical Protestants and Catholics within indigenous communities. However, in April 1977, the government declared that the country "needs the work of the linguists of the SIL" (ibid) and they were permitted to stay.

The patronizing gaze can be noted in Bentley Tanner's short description of the SIL's work among the Yanesha': "Martha Duff and Mary Ruth Wise and Pete and Mary Fast work with the Amuesha tribe further south. The Amueshas call the sun 'our father', dance and sing to it, and deck themselves out because the sun is pleased when they look pretty" (1955: 19). Tanner's tone is rather belittling when she is referring to traditional sacred Yanesha dance and dress codes. It is unfortunate that the SIL had access to some of the most authentic spiritual ceremonies among the Yanesha (these are called *cosharñats* in the Yanesha language) but did not make any methodical ethnographic recordings or descriptions of them. In Martha Duff's own work, she merely lists the names of the different types of men's and women's songs and dances, but does not provide any cultural explanation of them (see Duff-Tripp 1998: 420).

My field methodology was fundamentally different from that of the SIL linguists. I took an experiential approach that valued my cognitive experiences among the Yanesha instead of arriving with predetermined views about them, or with the mission of preaching to them. My goal was to record their songs and linguistic data, following the same route as Richard Chase Smith. However, because I was doing mostly linguistic documentation, many community members assumed I was a missionary linguist, judging from their past experience.

When I arrived in the Yanesha communities, it was difficult for me, as a first-time field linguist, to reconcile my own approach with the perception the Yanesha had of me. Every tribal leader asked me if I had come to share the Word of God with them. This was bewildering to me at first, until I realized that the only frame of reference they had for someone in my position was the work of the SIL linguists in the past. Here is an excerpt from my field notes which describes my entry into the Yuncullmass community and the way I was perceived by the people.

> One of first native communities I visited was Yuncullmass, a remote village hidden in lush, green mountains. Over the past sixty years, only seven foreigners have visited this particular Yanesha settlement, so imagine the villagers' surprise when the only daily transport in the region (a half-broken pick-up truck crammed with local people, parcels, pigs) dropped off a dusty, weather-beaten foreign girl, in front of the small battered structure that serves as a medical clinic. There were about fifteen Yanesha residents under its small tin roof, waiting for a package to arrive, and they just stared at me in shocked silence. Many of them were young women with several children clinging to them. I announced in their language that I was new in the area, and the Yanesha Tribal Council had recently approved my visit - had they not received the message about my arrival? They told me they had not. Messages circulate slowly in this part of the jungle, where there is no electricity or telephones.
>
> Luckily the community chief was there, and after staring at me for some time, he said to me in Spanish, « I knew something odd was going to happen today. Look, the clouds are still hiding the faces of the mountains, and it's already noon. The mountains are protecting themselves from the arrival of a strange person in the valley. They do not want you to see their faces.» I felt very awkward indeed. It was true that the clouds usually

> cleared up earlier in the day, but at that moment they were hanging ominously low. The villagers looked at the cloud-covered mountains, then back at me. No one spoke. I stammered a few Yanesha phrases I had learned, « I am of the Canadian tribe and my land is very far away. I think your language is beautiful. » Slowly, smiles began to creep onto to the lips of the people. Soon they all began laughing at my ridiculous foreign accent in their native language, and everyone relaxed. I explained to them I was working at an NGO in Lima with Señor Richard Smith. They knew him well and admired him, so the chief, Cesar Quinchuya, invited me to stay with his family.
>
> I walked with Cesar down a long dirt path, up a hill, and he kept repeating how strange it is that I had decided to visit them, and he was wondering if I was sent by the Christian God for some particular mission. I didn't really know what to say, but I assured him I was not a missionary. He led me to his small hut, where his wife and two small daughters were preparing food. The girls shrieked in fear when they saw me and the wife looked very confused. The chief invited me to sit down on a small wooden bench and gave me some cooked manioc roots and a hard-shell river fish to crack open and eat. He asked me many times in Spanish what my intentions were, I repeated that my research was going to one day serve the Yanesha communities, and that I didn't intend to learn their language just so I could earn more money in my country. The chief and his wife stared at me incredulously; why would I have embarked on such a long journey from North America if it was not for my own economic purposes? Did I intend to steal their culture away from them so I could get rich, just like the foreigners who come to steal the trees and extract oil out of the ground? And why did I want to help the Yanesha, a tribal nation so often ignored by the Peruvian government? I explained over and over that I was helping Smith organize all his anthropological data, and to do so, I must learn the Yanesha language." (excerpt from field notes, July 2008).

I had trouble with the concept of learning the language for 'free' because I eventually realized that everything must be reciprocal among the Yanesha'. There must be a 'symmetrical exchange of good through reciprocal generosity' (Smith 1977 : 21). In the case of Yuncullmass, the villagers made me promise that I would do future good deeds for Yanesha communities. Only after they had made me sign a contract that one man wrote out for me would they agree to give me language lessons without charge.

1.3. Field Methodology

The majority of my work with informants was carried out in Spanish because I am unable to speak Yanesha', although by the end of my fieldwork I began understanding portions of the language. My methodology was to live with speakers of the Yanesha' language and allow my informants to show me the most important facets of their culture and language as well as the reasons why they are eroding. Living within a culture so different from one's own can be upsetting and uplifting. With no one to bounce ideas off of, I began to feel like an alien at some points. I didn't even know what to think about situations; I lost my sense of self because I was far away from my own framework of understanding. It was clear to me that the Yanesha' people were in a process of extreme transformation, and I seeing them in a state that was in between two worlds. I wrote in my field journal, 'they just keep losing, and losing; they are never gaining anything from the current situation. First they lose their resources, then they lose their culture, then they lose their identity. One would think they would gain something from this shift to another culture. But they barely obtained anything physical from the Western material culture. Their schools are falling down and their clothes are all ripped. Perhaps what they ended up getting was mostly ideological' (excerpt from field notes, July 2008).

I felt that it was important to follow the paths that the Yanesha' suggested. In being open towards them, and allowing them be my guides, I learned an incredible amount. The themes that constantly returned in conversations were the ones I paid close attention to : the older generations put an emphasis on their concern with poverty, child migration, and the influence of mainstream Peruvian culture and the subsequent loss of their traditions. The younger generations put an emphasis on wanting to be able to go to high school, finding decent work, where would they live and how they would survive. All Yanesha' below 30 that I spoke to were somewhat concerned with the loss of their language, but few were concerned about the loss of the rituals. It did not

seem important for their survival. Instead, they worried about obtaining and paying for means of transport, clothing, food, etc. As one 16-year-old Yanesha' girl working in Chatarra told me, 'if you want to wear something nice, you need the money to pay for it. Our parents don't have the money to give us. So we have to leave and find work so we can pay for our things. That's just the way it is.'

I established my choice of fieldsites for language learning according to the following criteria: (1) accessibility to speakers of all ages, (2) most of the community still maintains the language, (3) accessibility by road. When I presented these criteria to the Tribal Congress in Buenos Aires, the leaders unanimously decided that I should spend most of my time in Yuncullmass, one of the communities deemed to be most traditional and that fit my criteria. They also suggested I spend time in Loma Linda because it also fit the criteria to a certain extent, although there are less fluent speakers of Yanesha' there.

Here is a general summary of my methodology from the beginning to the end of my fieldwork among the Yanesha' :

1) *Contact local Peruvian scholars from afar and secure research position in an organisation that participates in cultural preservation.* This is what I did with the IBC and it allowed me to participate in a meaningful manner in a pre-established research project, as well as gain access to Yanesha' communities through a trusted source.
2) *Establish network of activists and anthropologists in Lima.* Upon my arrival in Lima, I met with local researchers and indigenous rights solidarity workers to gain a better understanding of the overall situation that indigenous people face.
3) *Immerse myself in cultural and linguisti data and learn as much as possible.* When I was working for Smith as a musical archivist, I had a wonderful immersion into Yanesha' phonology with his archives of hundreds of hours of songs recorded in the 1970s.

4) *Discuss entry into communities with experienced researchers*. Smith helped me arrange entry into the communities, along with help from Yanesha' elder Espiritu Bautista. They helped me orient myself and introduced me to many people.
5) *Determine and study communities where there is high proficiency in the Yanesha' language.* I did this by questioning tribal leaders at the Congress meeting in Buenos Aires and they decided where I should stay.
6) *Meet local teachers, leaders and elders, interview them and receive language lessons.* I was able to do this in several different communities, and obtained varying results on why the language is disappearing over time (see Chapter 2).
7) *Find out more about ponapnora ritual.* Before embarking on fieldwork, I had hoped to at least find out more details about the ritual, but I did not expect being able to attend two ponapnora puberty rituals and discuss the events with women. This added a whole extra dimension to my field experience. I was able to inquire about women's experiences, and found out that learning sacred songs was once an important aspect of *ponapnora.* Then I was able to piece a song together by recording elders, asking for transcription help and interviewing people about the meaning of lyrics.

Results

Through informal and formal interviews, I collected data related to the Yanesha language (grammar, lexicon, parts of speech, idioms, etc); establish some reasons why the language is currently in the process of disappearing; data related to women's culture, puberty rituals and sacred songs; and information related to the impact of the oil industry on the Yanesha people. On these topics, I interviewed many different informants, some formally, and some informally. In some situations, it was difficult for me to record our conversations. During activities such as

hiking, wading through rivers, cultivating manioc, there was too much physical exertion to make formal, clear recordings, but I have many informal recordings of this nature. Each person contributed their own knowledge, and insight to the questions I asked concerning the endangerment of the Yanesha' language.

Chapter 2: The Yanesha' Language and People

In this chapter, I will first discuss the Arawak language family and the position of the Yanesha' language within it. I will then include some ethnographic and historical information about the Yanesha' people, their dialectical zones, and factors leading to the endangerment of their language and culture.

2.1. Yanesha' Within the Arawak Family

The Arawak language family contains the largest number of indigenous languages in South America; it spans countries in both Central and South America. Most of its languages are presently endangered, and only two of them are considered healthy because they are spoken by communities of over 50 000 people, Guajiro in Venezula and Colombia, and Garifuna in Central America (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 72). The Arawak family presently contains 40 living languages, the majority of which are spoken by small Amazonian indigenous groups and are now in danger of becoming extinct (ibid: 65)

The first native people encountered by Columbus in the Bahamas were Arawak-speaking Taino, whose language became extinct within the first hundred years of the white invasion. Indo-European languages such as Spanish and English presently contain loan words from Arawak languages such as *hammock, tobacco, potato* and *guava,* as well other names for flora and fauna. Most of Arawak linguistic material collected by Spanish chroniclers between 1600 and 1900 consists of word lists, phrases and a few paradigms (ibid: 72).

The family's genetic unity was first recognized in 1873, when a Christian missionary by the name of Father Gilij noticed systematic links between far-flung Arawak languages when he compared the Maipure language from the Orinoco Valley (Guianas) to the Moxo language

spoken in Bolivia (ibid: 73). Comparative linguistic studies by G. Kingsley Noble (1965) and Matteson (1972) are commonly cited as standard sources on the Arawak family, but these studies are considered deeply flawed by Amazonian specialist Alexandra Aikhenvald because they attempt to establish the family's internal sub-grouping without enough descriptive data for many of the Arawak languages (ibid: 74).

Most of the data collected on Arawak languages in the second half of the 20th century are by SIL linguists (ibid: 72), whose goal was to translate the Bible into indigenous languages, with conversion to Christianity in mind. The quality and quantity of the SIL data varies. Although some non-SIL specialists such as Aikhenvald have done extensive field research among Arawak languages, there is still a lot of work to be done concerning the internal genetic relationships of the family and its possible genetic relationships with other groups. Large-scale geographical expansion of Arawakan tongues and considerable linguistic diversity within the family itself lead to challenges in distinguishing areal from genetic phenomena. Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial for precise morphological reconstruction of earlier Arawak forms. Today, Aikhenvald states that, "the reconstruction, internal classification and subgrouping of Arawak languages are still a matter of debate and further detailed work is needed on both the descriptive and the comparative fronts" (ibid: 73). Certain languages within the Arawak family such as Yanesha', Resigaro, Inapari, and Bahwana are still considered problematic because they show considerable influence from neighboring non-Arawak languages.

Factors Obscuring the Classification of Yanesha'

The classification of the Yanesha' language has often perplexed linguists. While its syntax and morphology resembles other Arawak languages, its lexicon is quite different, containing many words of unknown origin, and many others that resemble Quechua. Also, Yanesha' has 3

basic vowel qualities where Arawak languages usually have four. In terms of consonants, Yanesha' has nine more consonants that its closest Arawak neighbor, Ashaninka (Smith 1977: 33). For these reasons, in the early part of the 20th century Yanesha' was often referred to as a 'language isolate' or was tentatively classified as an isolated part of the Arawak language family.

However, since Mason's classification of South American languages there has been little doubt concerning the Arawak affinity of the Yanesha' language (Mason 1950). The problem is now to clarify its genetic relationship within that family, seeing as Yanesha' has many distinctive qualities that differentiate it from its neighboring Arawak languages. Payne (1991) classified Yanesha' within the Western division of the Pre-Andine branch of Arawak. Aikhenvald (1999: 68), on the other hand, considers Yanesha' to be one of 10 major sub-families that she places into the Southwest macro grouping of Arawak.

Of these nine consonants that distinguish Yanesha' from Ashaninka, six are palatalized forms, two are retroflexed forms and one is bilabial semi-consonant (see Chapter 3 for more details on Yanesha' consonants). According to a pioneering article by Mary Ruth Wise (1976), the palatalization and the retroflex quality of these consonants are characteristic of the Quechua I dialect (Yaru) that was spoken during the Inca Empire in the Andes bordering the Yanesha' homeland. Yanesha' also contains many lexical imports from the Yaru dialect, and therefore shows a remarkable lexical hybridity with Quechua.

Adelaar (2006), a Quechua specialist, has recently began to compile the grammatical impacts of Yaru Quechua on Yanesha' in order to expand on Wise (1976)[8] and show the effects of these two grammars in contact. The source of areal diffusion of Quechua characteristics into

[8] Wise examines certain lexical items and phonological patterns that are borrowed from Quechua but does not give a systematic historical linguistic analysis of the borrowing process. Adelaar looks at phonological patterns as well, and clearly states at the end of his article that further work must be done to analyze the imported Quechua vocabulary in Amuesha (Adelaar 2006 : 310).

Yanesha' can therefore be determined. Here is a map showing the proximity of the Yaru dialect of the Quechua language to Yanesha' ancestral territory:

Figure 2: Map Showing Quechua's Proximity to Yanesha'/Amuesha (Adelaar 2006: 312)

But further mysteries in the Yanesha language have yet to be investigated. Many lexical roots and bound elements in Yanesha' cannot be traced to either Arawak or Quechua and must be derived from some other source (Adelaar 2006: 292). While Yanesha' is unquestionably Arawak, Adelaar states that it is also a layered language, and contains several stages of borrowing. Today, the most perceptible layer of borrowing is from Spanish, followed by a thick Quechua layer, and probably layers of borrowing from other languages. In particular, both Wise and Adelaar hypothesize that Yanesha' is related in some way to Chamicuro, another Peruvian Amazonian language, and possibly to the extinct language of the Chachapoyas culture, further to the north.

Adelaar also brings up the existence of scores of double forms among Yanesha' nominal classifiers, one of Arawak origin and the other of unknown origin (2006: 310), which may also be a testament to prolonged contact with another language group. Since the Yanesha' tribe is on the fringes of both the Andes and the Amazon, its spatio-linguistic setting is diverse and over time it has allowed for contact with speakers of many different languages.

2.2. Overlapping Two Worlds: The Yanesha' on the Fringes of the Andes and the Amazon

Scholars writing about the Yanesha' people in the mid-20th century mention the difficulty in determining the number of people belonging to this tribal nation, not to mention the number of speakers of the language. As Fast (1953: 191) writes, 'It has been impossible to give an exact count of the Amuesha population because none of the Amueshas live in villages, but are scattered over a wide area. For that reason statistics vary greatly. In 1881 the Franciscans stated that there were 2000; in 1925 Tessman says that only 100 survived; the 1940 census gives 4000, while an earlier one gives 9000.'

According to Adelaar (2000), the Yanesha' ethnic population is approximately 10 000 people. They live in the central and eastern parts of the Pasco region, the western jungle in the region of Junín, along the headwaters of Pachitea and Perene rivers. According to official data, today there are currently 1146 Yanesha' families, or roughly 6000 Yanesha' individuals alive today, residing in the provinces of Chanchamayo (Junín region), Oxapampa (Pasco region), and Puerto Inca (Huánuco region). This population is divided into at least 47 small groups, ranging in size from two to more than 100 families. Twenty-eight of these groups are communities recognized and titled by the Peruvian State within the past thirty years (Smith 2004: 4).

The Yanesha' people are also known under these alternate names: Amage, Amagues, Amaje, Amajo, Amoishe, Amueixa, Amuese, Amuesha, Amuetamo, Lorenzo, and Omage. The

most common of these alternate names is Amuesha, and it appears often in the literature on the Yanesha' people. They currently prefer to use the term *Yanesha'* which means in their language, *we the (group of) people.*

The Yanesha' are mainly dependent on subsistence agriculture. They use the slash-and-burn method to clear lands and to plant manioc roots, sweet potato, corn, bananas, rice, coffee, cacao and sugar cane with ancient agricultural techniques that promote biodiversity. They also live from hunting and fishing, using rifles, bows and arrows or spears, as well as from collecting fruit and vegetables in the jungle.

In part because of the Arawak origins of their language, and in part because of their tropical forest habitat, the Yanesha' have long been classified as a highland Amazonian, or "montaña" people by anthropologists. Steward wrote about these montaña peoples as if they were at a cultural dead-end, because they were the results of "a series of migratory waves that had spent their force against the barrier of the Andes, and then subsided into relative isolation" (Steward 1948: 507). Anthropologists today are working to change this mistaken view of montaña peoples: they were not at a dead-end, but rather in the middle of what was once a fascinating exchange network that existed between the Andes and the Amazon.

The anthropologist who is currently conducting the most research among the Yanesha' is Richard Chase Smith. He founded a Peruvian civil organization called *El Instituto del Bien Comun* that protects indigenous rights and examines the intricacies of tracing tribal ancestral territories. Richard Chase Smith has worked to define the ancestral homeland of the Yanesha' people of the central Peruvian montaña region for over 30 years. To do so, he has used a combination of data from ethno history, archaeology, linguistics and the study of Yanesha' oral history. The on-going project "Where Our Ancestors Once Tread" involving mapping geographic sites and elements associated with the sacred landscape of the Yanesha' ancestors has led to

further challenges and questions (Smith 2004: 3).

Smith's work among the Yanesha' has revealed a variety of hierarchical and more complex social, political and religious structures truly inconsistent with the characterization that they are an isolated people at a cultural dead end (Smith 1983). His findings reveal altitude-specific characteristics, vibrant village life, complex social hierarchy and trade routes. But many questions remain. Smith asks in his 1983 manuscript, "to what extent were lowland peoples like the Yanesha'.... developing more complex systems on their own.... within relative isolation (in Stewards's view)...or conversely, were they part of a geographically integrated process – widespread comings and goings -- that eventually led to the rise of state societies in the Central Andes?» (Smith 1983: 3).

The location of the homeland of the Yanesha', a jungle corridor along the foot of the high Andes, along with a large body of ethnographic and linguistic evidence, suggests that this tribal nation played a role as a cultural buffer on the cultural-ethnic frontier between the Andean peoples to the mountainous west, and the Pano- and Campa-speaking peoples to the tropical east (Adelaar 2006: 295). And yet the Franciscan insistence on the lack of suitable trails and the impenetrability of the montaña corridor argued strongly that there had been little mixture between the Yanesha' and their Andean neighbors.

Smith's explorations of the trails in the region have shown that by the Inca/Spanish colonial transition period, there were no less than ten trails that linked the entire Yanesha' homeland with the major Cuzco- Quito highway of the Inca state (Smith 2004: 15). Few of these trails had the elegant stone paving, drainage canals, bridges and sidewalls that the Inca State built for the Pumpu-Huancabamba road, but nevertheless, the remains of pre-historic settlements along them suggest that they saw considerable traffic.

Smith's work shows that the Andes and the Amazon were closely linked and actively

exchanged material and cultural goods (Smith 2004: 16). The results of this research demonstrate that the Yanesha' were part of a much larger world and had frequent and direct contact with both highland Quechua-speaking peoples to the west and the Campa- and Pano- speaking peoples to the east. Smith, working with Yanesha' elders such as Espiritu Bautista, has been meticulously putting together a large-scale of the Yanesha' ancestral territory. At the insistence of many of the Yanesha' elders who accompanied the mapping work, the research team organized several visits to the mountainous areas of Tarma, La Oroya and Yauli where they identified over 150 Andean features related to Yanesha' oral history (Smith 2004: 13).

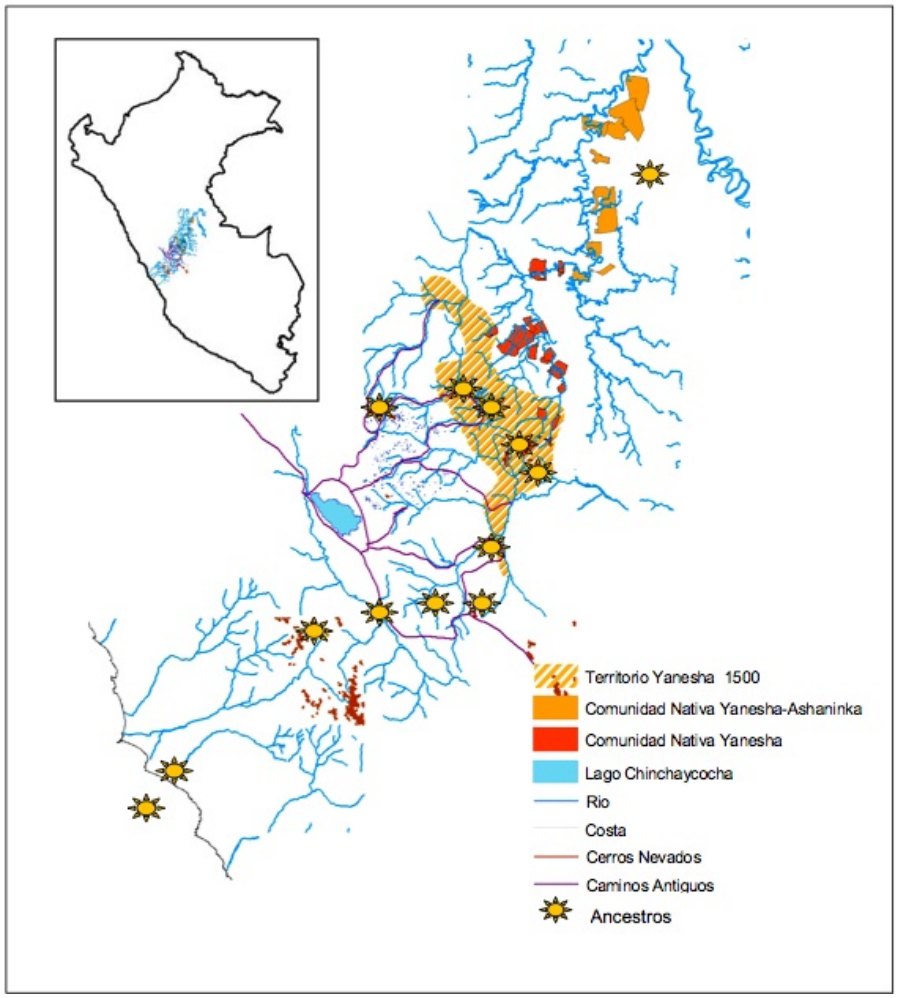

Figure 3: Map of the Yanesha' Sacred Landscape (Smith 2004: 20).

In the map above, Smith outlines in yellow the traditional Yanesha territory as it existed in 1500, and with yellow sun symbols he places in the landscape elements from Yanesha' culture that extend over the Andes all the way to the Pacific coast. Smith shows that the Yanesha' have brought with them from the past an oral history that is linked with both flanks of the Andes and with symbolic structures that seem more related to the Andean world than the Amazonian. Their understanding of their ancestors and their relationship with the landscape contains aspects of Central Andean culture, which must be further analyzed.

However, the Yanesha' speak a language of the Arawak family, and all other members of this language family are located in the Amazonian jungle. Does one assume an Amazonian origin for the Yanesha' people? What processes brought about the Arawak-Andean mixture? These are also matters for further research. Smith suggests that perhaps, the important thing for Andean peoples, prior to their European colonial experience, was not so much a boundary line that demarcated a polygon of territory, but rather a sense of belonging to a wider kin group that shared powerful ancestors. What guaranteed one's membership in this group was the care and service given to these ancestors who protected and animated their descendents (Smith 2004: 25).

2.3. Dialectical Zones

There are two major dialectical zones in the Yanesha' territory, known as *upriver (rio arriba* in Spanish*)* and *downriver (rio abajo).* These two Yanesha' dialects are associated with verticality: the *upriver* dialect is higher in altitude and closer to the Andes than the *downriver* dialect. At the highest part of the *upriver* dialect, the Yanesha' are living at 2 000 meters above sea level, therefore there are terms for animal and plant species in the *upriver* dialect that do not exist at all for speakers who use the *downriver* dialect (many of whom live at 230 meters above sea level. However, in general, the dialects are mutually intelligible and differences stem from the

pronunciation of vowels, resulting in different phonological patterns and orthographic spellings in the two dialects. Here is a map of the dialect zones according to Santos-Granero in 2000. 'Parte baja' means *downriver* and 'Parte alta' means *upriver.*

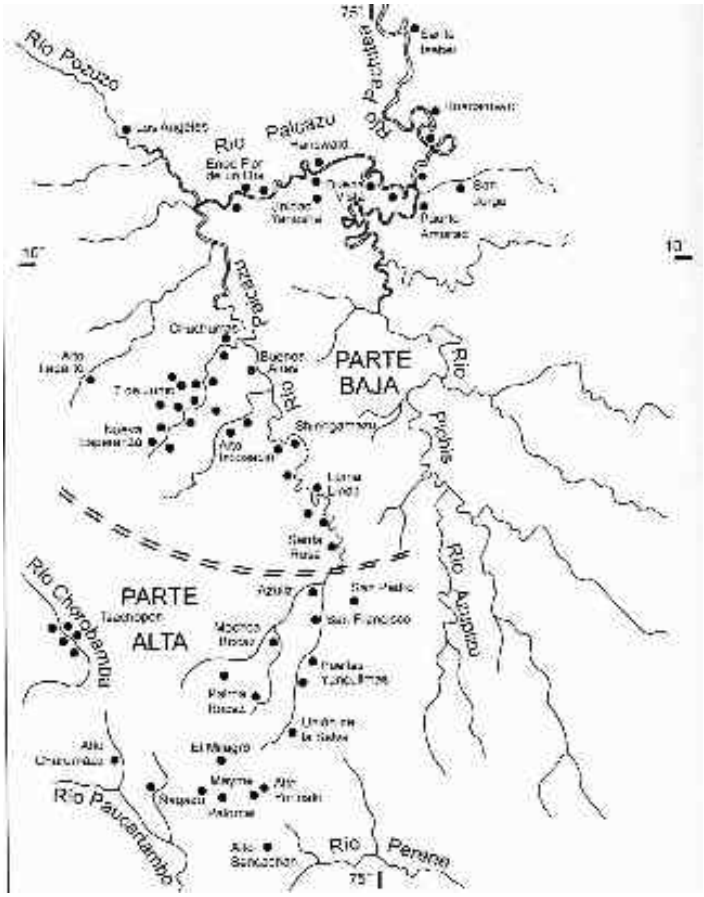

Figure 4. Map of Yanesha' Dialect Zones (Santos-Granero 2000: 164).

Although there are no studies that show which dialect is more archaic, it is possible that the *upriver* dialect is older because, as section 2.2 showed, the Yanesha' people themselves say that more of their ancient traditions originate in the mountains than in the lowland jungle. They told me that many of the lowland communities are new and do not correspond to their ancestors' territory. It follows perhaps that the *downriver* dialect is a more recent dialect in the history of Yanesha' speech. Once Smith's mapping project is complete, I would like to analyze the

distribution of toponyms in order to assess the impact of verticality on linguistic diffusion among the Yanesha'.[9]

According to Duff (1998: 13-14), the *upriver* dialect employs an 'e' where the *downriver* dialect has an 'o'. This implies a backing and lowering of the mid vowel 'e' to a back rounded 'o'. Also, the *upriver* dialect sometimes employs an 'a' where the *downriver* dialect has an 'e', which implies a raising of the low front vowel 'a' to a mid-vowel 'e'. This results in a lot of variation in pronunciation. Sometimes there is vocalic variation in one community and even in one person's speech, which means there are currently no rigid barriers on the dialectical zones. Here are some examples of dialectical variation in the following table:

Table 1. Distinctions between Yanesha' Dialects.

Vowel Distinctions	**Upriver Dialect**	**Downriver Dialect**	Translation
'e' VS 'o'	**E**nteñets	**O**nteñets	*'To see'*
	T**e**no	T**o**no	*'upriver'*
	p**ue**t̃apor	p**o**t̃apor	*'his wife'*
	T**e**po	t**o**po	*'downriver'*
	ese'cheñets	**o**se'cheñets	*'to want to eat meat'*
'a' VS 'e'	c**a**c̈hpueñets	que**c**̈hpueñets	*'to abandon'*
	t**a**ma'roc	t**e**ma'roc	*'species of guacamayo'*

2.4. Factors Leaning Towards Language Endangerment

Language loss is a vast and complex process. Merely pinpointing a few general factors contributing to language disappearance does not necessarily shed light on *what it is like to lose*

[9] It will be difficult to assess the exact role of verticality in the two Yanesha' dialects. Not only have the people been displaced by missionaries for the past two centuries but also, the speakers of different dialects move around considerably in one lifetime and spend time in different *upriver* and *downriver* communities.

one's language. An ethnographic and linguistic analysis among the people who are shifting from one language to another is necessary to find out what are the everyday factors, in their specific context, that are contributing to language loss. In the case of the Yanesha' people, there are a multitude of complex factors that are interacting and leading to the loss of their culture and language. Why do languages disappear? Why do people choose to speak one language over their native tongue? To answer this question, one must dive into their context and find out what are the myriad of factors influencing the cultural and linguistic situation. One must begin analyzing the 'roots and agents of their forced annihilation' (Smith 1977 :1).

Spatial Analysis

While the two dialectical zones are useful in describing linguistic variation, it is also possible to analyse the Yanesha' communities in terms of three spatial categories that are often referred to in the socio-political realm: *zona alta, zona media* and *zona baja.* These zones, like the dialectical ones, also refer to different altitudes : *zona alta* designates the Yanesha' communities that are located in the forest-covered eastern foothills of the Andes, *zona media* refers to a transitional area that is both hilly and covered in jungle, and *zona baja* refers to a much flatter, lowland jungle area. These three zones face different social and political realities and are at different stages of language endangerment. I was told by Yanesha' leaders at the Tribal Congress that the Yanesha' language is almost completely dead in the *zona baja;* it is relatively vital in the *zona media;* and it still very vibrant and strong in the *zona alta.* In my fieldwork, I set out to verify these claims.

I stayed in communities located in each of the three zones and observed that the language was falling out of use in each place, but in complex and non-uniform ways. It was not as cut and dry as I had been told at the Tribal Congress. In the *zona baja,* I stayed for several days in the

community of Villa America. In the family that I stayed in, I observed that the only remaining speakers of the Yanesha' language are members of the grandparent generation. Because my visit was short, I did not visit every family in the settlement. People told me that the children of Villa America are speaking Spanish much more than Yanesha', and most of them do not understand very much Yanesha'. However, when I visited the nearby community of Castilla, it appeared that all generations were still fluently speaking Yanesha', including the youngest generation. In Castilla, the language was being used orally and learned by children as their first language, however in nearby Villa America that was not the case. There is therefore variability in linguistic proficiency in the zones themselves.

In the *zona media,* I stayed in the community of Loma Linda on two occasions. I was expecting to hear more of the language than I did. In Espiritu Bautista's family, everyone spoke Yanesha' a lot of the time, including the children, but they also had a lot of conversations in Spanish as well. Sometimes the parents would speak in Yanesha' and the children would respond in Spanish. There was also a great deal of code-switching going on, where a person would begin a sentence in Spanish, and finish it in Yanesha, and vice versa. In the rest of the community, I heard much more Spanish than Yanesha', especially among young speakers. All the adults and elders were fully bilingual, and some elders had a thick accent because Yanesha' was their primary language.

In the *zona alta,* I stayed in the community of Yuncullmass. There, all members of the community were fluent speakers of Yanesha' except for the children, who all spoke Spanish. It appeared that the child-bearing generation (aged 16 +) knew the language well enough to use it with their elders but quite a few of them are choosing not to transmit it to their children, and most of the children were speaking Spanish amongst themselves. I asked some parents about this situation, and they said they preferred to have their children learn Yanesha' in school, rather than

at home. Teaching Yanesha' language in school seemed to have a paradoxical effect in this community: the parents were convinced that their children could only learn the language properly *in school*. This was very frustrating to me, because I knew if the language is not spoken in the domestic setting, the language is not truly vibrant. I wondered if the prestige of academic education had stopped the parents from addressing their children in Yanesha' – did they think the spoken version of Yanesha' was *inferior* to written Yanesha'? I suspected that they thought that the amenities of modern culture, including modern education, are superior than everything associated with the old ways, including oral culture.

In all the communities I visited, everyone listened to the radio a lot. This form of mass media, and other cultural products such as newspapers were all in the dominant language, Spanish. Because mass media is highly valued, the dominant language receives a higher status, while the heritage language (Yanesha') obtains a lower status.

Contact between the Yanesha' and other parts of Peruvian society has varied from one community to another, Smith already observed this in 1977. And thirty-one years later, in 2008, the situation is still the same, but cultural contact has been more intense. In the *zona baja*, the contact has been intensive, with the close proximity of the growing Amazonian city of Pucallpa. People from this region told me that the old ways are all but gone, and people rely much more on consumer goods than on subsistence farming and hunting. Certain cross-sections of communities, such as those in the *zona baja,* have 'become dependent on the market economy for their livelihood, while others remain practically independent of it' (Smith 1977 : 4).

In conclusion, acculturation, migration, and employment mobility lead to the disintegration of the Yanesha' heritage language community. Labor markets in Peru require knowledge of Spanish, the dominant language, and departures of speakers towards labor markets negatively affects the Yanesha heritage language because it loses speakers. Multilingualism is

valued by elders and adults who wish to preserve their culture, but monolingualism in the dominant language is considered sufficient and desirable by many younger speakers. Integration into the Peruvian economic system leads people to belive that the dominant language is the one that is the desirable for the state, not the indigenous language. For some individuals, that translates into the belief that children must choose between learning their heritage language or learning the dominant language, and not learning both.

Chapter 3. Yanesha' Linguistics: A Basic Introduction to Yanesha' Phonology, Morphology and Syntax

I will now turn my attention to the mechanics of the Yanesha' language itself. There is a small, but growing body of literature dealing with the formal linguistics of the Yanesha' language. The main work in this field has been done by SIL linguist Martha Duff-Tripp. She dedicated her whole life to working on the Yanesha' language and contributed to its formal study by publishing a grammar and a dictionary[10]. Mary Ruth Wise (another SIL linguist) has also published a number or articles dealing with Yanesha' phonology, morphosyntax and issues related to its classification. In recent years, Alexandra Aikhenvald, an Amazonian linguistics specialist, has made enormous contributions to the study of the Arawakan linguistic family in general, thus clarifying the position of Yanesha' on the edges of this language family. Willem Adelaar has also recently written on the impact of the Quechua language on Yanesha' grammar.

In this chapter, I will present a linguistic sketch of the Yanesha' language, based on the work of past authors.[11] This will allow the reader to get a general 'feel' for the language. I will focus on general findings concerning phonology, morphology and syntax, and also present the tenets of the Yanesha' orthographic system, pointing out linguistic factors that are linked to modern-day difficulties in the Yanesha' writing system.

3.1. Phonology

From a phonological perspective, Yanesha' is quite different than its neighboring Arawakan languages. This has made the classification of Yanesha' somewhat difficult in the past

[10] These books were published in limited quantities in Peru (*ILV Serie Linguistica Peruana Nos 43 & 47*), and distributed in Yanesha' schools. They are also available for free download through the SIL website. www.sil.org/

[11] I rely on the works of Fast (1953); Wise (1958a; 1976), Duff-Tripp (1957; 1997; 1998), Aikhenvald (1999) and Adelaar (2006). I am grateful to Wise for making me a copy of her article (1958a), which is difficult to obtain.

(see Chapter 2.1.Yanesha' Within the Arawak Family). In general, there are very few in-depth studies on Yanesha' phonology. Furthermore, to my knowledge, no large-scale systematic comparative analysis has been made concerning the divergent phonology that exists in Yanesha's two main dialectical zones (see section in Chapter 2 related to dialectical zones).

In this section, I present a synthesis of the phonological works of Fast (1953)[12], Wise (1958a)[13] and Duff (1997). The work of Fast and Wise are rather different from each other and can cause confusion upon comparison. Not only do the authors use two different (and now outdated) phonetic writing systems[14] to represent Yanesha' sounds, but furthermore they do not agree with each other concerning the phonemic value of many of the Yanesha' sounds. In particular, they come to different conclusions concerning the features of vowel nuclei and allophonic variation among consonants. To sum up the short history of Yanesha' phonological studies, Wise seeks to correct some aspects of Fast's pioneering work, then Duff (1997) adds several elements to Wise's analysis but generally maintains the same views as her.

I will present these linguists' data using the latest version of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) system, and I incorporate two non-canonical symbols (_ʰ and _') to highlight certain features of the vowels.

Yanesha' Vowel Phonemes

Yanesha' has three basic vowel qualities, /e, a, o/. This 3-vowel system is quite different compared to the 4-vowel system commonly found in other Arawak languages, /i, e, a, u/

[12] Fast's analysis is based on data collected between 1947-50 with three bilingual speakers, but he does not mention what communities they are from, therefore their dialectical zone(s) is/are unknown.
[13] Wise's work is based on data from three monolingual speakers residing in one community, Raya Quebrada, between 1953-56. She affirms that 'other dialects of Amuesha have a somewhat different allophonic system' (Wise 1958a: 16) therefore the phonemes and allophones listed in this section do not apply to all dialectical zones.
[14] Their style of presenting phonemes is influenced by the 'tagmemics approach' which was common among SIL linguists before Chomsky's model became the standard.

(Aikhenvald 1999: 76). This may be due to the impact of Quechua's three-vowel system on the Yanesha' language.

For each vowel in Yanesha', there is a short and long form [:], and a kind of 'breathy' form [ʰ] as well as a glottalized form [']. For the 'breathy' vowel, I borrow the [ʰ] symbol more commonly used for aspirated consonants because it reflects the puff of air that can be heard on the offset of this type of vowel. I put it in hyper-case form to show it is part of the vowel nucleus, and not a separate phoneme [h]. I also use the ['] symbol instead of the traditional glottal stop symbol [ʔ], because ['] is used to represent glottal offsets in vowels in the Yanesha' writing system. The full vocalic spectrum is therefore: /e, e:, eʰ, e', a, a:, aʰ, a', o, o:, oʰ, o'/. This makes a total of 12 phonemic vowels.[15]

For example, one can observe the phonemic difference between short and long vowels in this minimal pair: /zomwé'/ means '*he grasped'* while /zo:mwé'/ means *'dead'*. To illustrate phonemic glottalic vowels, here is a minimal pair: /naʰpwé:na'/ '*I'm going to bathe myself'* versus /naʰpwé:na/ '*I am bathing myself'*.

Concerning the phonemic value of 'breathy' vowels, Fast (1953) had first analyzed the sound [ʰ] as an allophone of the consonant phoneme /x/, and therefore claimed that the Yanesha' vowel system only contains 9 vowels (all those outlined above, without /eʰ, aʰ, oʰ/). But Mary Ruth Wise modified this claim by asserting that the [h] sound is in fact 'part of the vowel nucleus of the syllable, paralleling vowel length and glottal stop in distribution' (Wise 1958a : 15) and thus expanded the vowel system into 12 vowels.[16] Essentially, the vowel debate seems to

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[15] This conclusion is based mostly on the work of Wise (1958a), who expanded on the work of Fast (1953).

[16] While Fast would transcribe the term for '*my abdomen*' as /naxtʃʲ/, Wise would transcribe it as /nahtʃʲ / (which I choose to transcribe as /naʰtʃʲ /, to highlight the [h] being part of the vowel nucleus.

gravitate around how to interpret the final segment of the vowel nuclei. While Fast would argue there is a separate phoneme [x] that comes into play, Wise argues that the 'breathy' sound is part of the vowel itself, and therefore is interpretable as a type of final devoicing. Based on Wise's findings, one can extrapolate that there may be 4 distinct aspects, or processes, that govern the terminal nucleus offset of Yanesha' vowels:

(1) an unmarked state, which characterizes the short vowel, for example /e/,
(2) a nucleus *lengthening*, thus producing a long vowel, for example /e:/,
(3) a partial *devoicing* of the nucleus, or *relaxation* of glottal tension in the offset, thus creating a 'breathy' sounding vowel, for example /e^{h}/,
(4) an *increase* in glottal tensing, which leads to a quick and partial closure of the glottis, producing a glottalic vowel, for example, /e'/.

These types of processes (especially partial devoicing) may turn out to play a role in the behavior of Yanesha' consonants as well. But seeing as I am only a beginner in the field of Yanesha' linguistics, I will make no further claims about this topic until I have spent more time learning the intricacies of the language among the Yanesha' people.

Vowels and Yanesha' Orthography

Problems arise in Yanesha' orthography because only some of the vowel qualities are represented in the written form of the language. Vowel nucleus devoicing ('breathiness') and vowel length are *not* represented, whereas glottalization *is* represented (by the _' symbol).

Teachers in Yanesha' communities[17] told me that because of these characterisitics in the writing system, children who do not speak Yanesha' at home sometimes make mistakes in vocalic pronunciation: they omit vowel 'breathiness' and vowel length when they are reading Yanesha' texts out loud, because those qualities are not written in the script. When I asked Mary Ruth Wise about this, she told me that she had fought hard in the 1950's to at least include 'breathy' vowels in the orthography, by writing them down as /eh, ah, oh/. She said that unfortunately, the Yanesha' tribal leaders had not wanted to include these vowels, nor the long vowels. At the time, the leaders wanted the Yanesha' writing system to resemble that of Spanish as much as possible. Since spoken Spanish does not have 'breathy' or long vowels, they do not exist in the script, and this fact influenced the Yanesha' leaders to not include them in their own.

The absence of /eh, ah, oh/ and long vowels in the Yanesha' script is currrently causing some minor problems for young learners, and may in fact lead to major pedagogical difficulties in future language learning. If the young speaker does not hear the correct vocalic pronunciation of the written words by a Yanesha' native speaker, he or she might not necessarily integrate vowel 'breathiness' or length properly into his or her speech. This problem arises when young children are taught to read in Yanesha' by non-native speakers of the language, and do not have constant or direct access to native speakers of the language. Many of the teachers in Yanesha' communities are in fact non-Yanesha', and may be teaching incorrect pronunciation to children.

Elders in different communities have commented that young people now speak Yanesha' much differently than the older generations, and more research is needed in this area to see if

[17] I discussed this with Yanesha' teachers in Santo Domingo and Yuncullmass. One young Yanesha' teacher in Santo Domingo is trying to incorporate several new symbols, including one for aspiration, into the Yanesha' writing system. However, Yanesha' leaders have paid little attention to his proposal for orthographic changes because it means re-writing the textbooks, and there is little financial support to do so.

omission of vowel length and 'breathiness' plays any kind of role in the younger generation's speech. Below is an illustrative chart of vowel phonemes in relation to orthography.

Table 2. Vowel Phonemes & Yanesha Orthography.

	Vowel Phonemes	**Yanesha' Orthography**
Close-mid front vowels	/e, e:, e^{h}/ /e'/	e e'
Close-mid back vowels	/o, o:, o^{h}/ /o'/	o o'
Open front low vowels	/a, a:, a^{h}/ /a'/	a a'

As one can observe in the above chart, the short, long and 'breathy' (partially devoiced) vowels are collapsed into one sole orthographic representation (a short, plain vowel), which can lead to semantic confusion and incorrect pronunciation when reading texts in Yanesha'.

Allophonic Variation Among Vowels

For the three basic vowels /e, a, o/, there is a lot of allophonic variation in spoken Yanesha'. Fast (1953: 191) proposes that the submembers of /e/ are [e, ɪ, i]. For example, /ne^{h}se/ which means '*my brother'* can be pronounced as [ne^{h}sɪ] or [ne^{h}se], and there is no difference in meaning. Wise (1958a: 15) adds the allophone [ɛ] (which occurs in free variation) and the devoiced allophone [i̥] (specifically in a word-final, unstressed context) to Fast's allophonic list for /e/. For instance, the Yanesha' word /ma:me/, which means '*a little while'*, can be pronounced as [ma:me], [ma:mi] or [ma:mi̥].

Fast (1953) lists other vowel variants as well. For /a/, the allophones are [a, ə]. To this list, Wise adds [æ] and [a^{j}] (1958a: 16). With regards to /o/, Fast lists the allophones [o, u, ʊ] and

Wise adds the devoiced [o̥] and palatalized [o̝] (ibid).[18] According to Fast (1953), the lengthened and glottalic counterparts of the vowels also possess the same allophonic counterparts as the basic vowels, with some exceptions: all the long vowels have the same allophones as the short vowels, except that the possible allophones [ə:] and [ʊ:] do not exist with respect to /a:/ and /o:/ in the Yanesha' language. Wise does not mention the allophonic counterparts of 'breathy' vowels, but from the limited time I have spent listening to the Yanesha' language, it seems that these 'breathy' vowels have the same allophones as short vowels.

Vowel Features

All vowels can occur word initially, medially and finally. There are no vowel clusters in Yanesha'. The Yanesha' language also tends to eliminate root-final vowels (Adelaar 2006 : 297). Resulting consonant clusters are then broken up by a new internal vowel that does not necessarily reflect the eliminated vowel. For example, the Quechua word /wakra/ ('*horn*') was borrowed into Yanesha' and became /wokor/.

I also heard the root-final vowel being eliminated in the Spanish word for '*night'* (*noche)* when that word is borrowed into Yanesha': /notʃe/ often became /notʃ/ among Yanesha' speakers. The widespread use of the Amazonian dialect of Spanish is heavily affected Yanesha' speech patterns, but so far there are no available studies on this topic.

Yanesha' Consonants

While Fast (1953) lists 22 consonants, Wise (1958a) lists 24 consonants (adding /ɣʲ, xʲ/ to Fast's list), and Duff (1997) adds two more consonants, /β/ and /βʲ/. There is debate as to which

[18] To see more specific examples of vocalic allophones, as well as how they manifest in different parts of syllables, please see the lists provided in Fast 1953 and Wise 1958a.

consonants are actual phonemes, and which are allophones. For example, Wise asserts that /β/ and /$β^j$/ are actually allophones of /ɣ/ and /$ɣ^j$/ when they precede /e/, whereas Duff presents /β/ and /$β^j$ as full-fledged phonemes. Because I have not done enough fieldwork to be able to ascertain who is right, I am not taking a specific stance concerning the allophonic status of certain consonants. But having noticed that the field of Yanesha' linguistics is lacking the availability of an up-to-date, accurate consonant chart, I decided to list the principal consonants in the grid, below. I have included the 26 main consonants mentioned in the work of the aforementioned scholars:

Table 3: Principal Yanesha' Consonants.

		Bilabial		**Alveolar**		**Alveo-Palatal**		**Retro-flex**	**Velar**	
		plain	**palatalized**	**plain**	**Palatalized**	**plain**	**palatal**		**plain**	**palatal**
Nasal		m	m^j	n	n^j					
Stop		p	p^j	t					k	k^j
Affricate				ts		tʃ	$tʃ^j$	tʂ		
Fricative	**Voiced**	β	$β^j$					ʐ	ɣ	$ɣ^j$
	Voiceless			s	ʃ				x	x^j
Flap (voiced)				ɾ						
Approx-imants	**Central**				ɹ				w	
	Lateral				l^j					

The resulting chart looks similar to that of a Slavic language, with many consonants having corresponding palatalized consonants. According to Fast (1953), Yanesha' has a series of plain consonants /m, n, p, tʃ/ that are contrasted by a corresponding series of palatalized ones: /m^j, n^j, p^j, $tʃ^j$/. (The consonant /l^j/ does not contrast with any other unpalatalized phoneme since

it is the only lateral in the chart. The consonant /w/ does not appear to have a counterpart either.) Fast also notes that the bilabial palatalized consonants /p^{j}, m^{j}/ have a stronger palatal offglide than the alveolar ones. One can observe the contrast between plain and palatalized consonants in the following examples : /a'na^{h}**p**^{j}/ (*he answered him*) versus /a'na^{h}**p**/ (*he answered*) as well in /**n**^{j}a/ (*he*) versus /**n**a/ (*I*).

Wise adds that phonemes /k, ɣ, x/ also have their palatalized counterparts: /k^{j}, ɣ^{j}, x^{j}/ and she cites examples (1958a: 17). Duff later adds that /β/ is a phoneme that also has its counterpart /β^{j}/, even though Wise analyzes these as the allophones of /ɣ/ and /ɣ^{j}/. Interestingly, when one looks at the chart, one would expect to see a palatalized counterpart for /t/, but it does not occur in Yanesha'. Instead, we see four contrasting affricates : /ts, tʃ, tʃ^{j}, tʂ/ which leads one to wonder what other kinds of paradigms[19] are lurking behind these consonants. The retroflex consonants are intriguing, and future research combined with historical linguistics may reveal other phonological processes at work in this domain.

Some Consonant Features

The palatal offglide is voiceless word-finally for /p^{j}/ and /l^{j}/ and it is absent for /m^{j}/. There are a handful of allophones for Yanesha' consonants, but for the sake of brevity I will not expand on them here (see Wise 1958a). Another general feature for Yanesha' consonants is devoicing in certain contexts. For example, the retroflex fricative /ʐ/ is devoiced in a word-final position or before a voiceless consonant: /aʐpa/ (*here it is*) → [aʂpa]. The approximants /w/ and /j/ are

[19] In terms of other possible paradigms, I suspect that there may be some kind of contextual conditioning for rhotics: the consonant /ts/ may be in complementary distribution with the retroflex /tʂ/, and similarly that /ɾ/ may be in complementary distribution with the retroflex /ʐ/ but I do not have enough data to prove this, and I will investigate it in future research.

voiceless before voiceless stops, affricates and word-finally. Devoicing appears to play an important role in Yanesha' and processes related to its effects on other consonants and vowels need to be examined in further detail in the future.

All consonants appear initially, medially, and finally, with the exception that /ɣ/ and /w/ do not occur word-finally. There are also many instances of consonant clusters. Here are the most common consonant clusters found in Fast and Wise's data, presented in a chart:

Table 4: Yanesha' Consonants Clusters.

Initial clusters	These are limited to two consonants. These have a stop in first position /pr, tɾ/[20] except for /tsʐ/, a cluster that occurs rarely.
Medial clusters	The two-consonant medial clusters correspond to the same list as the initial and final clusters. According to Fast (1953: 193), there are also three-fold medial clusters that either begin with nasals, affricates, or stops. These are merely formed when one syllable ending with one or two consonants touches another syllable that begins with one or two consonants.
Final clusters[21]	They are limited to two consonants that always begin with a nasal: /mp/, /nt/, /nk/, /nt^{j}/, /nt∫/, /ntʂ/.

[20] Fast (1953) adds /kj/, /pw/ and /mw/ to this list, but Wise (1958a: 18) reinterprets these sounds as 'palatalized and labialized allophones [that are] single complex phonemic units'. Fast also includes /t∫p, ʐp, t∫t, ∫t/ to his list, but when I investigated these unlikely clusters in Wise and Duff's work, it turns out that they are always broken up by vowels in speech. Those vowels are sometimes partially devoiced in those contexts as well.

[21] Fast (1953) wrote that 'word-final clusters consist of either a nasal or /x/ followed by plosive or affricate' but Wise (1958a) argues that the presence of /x/ indicated the aspiration of a previous vowel, and is not part of a true cluster.

To end this section on consonants, I have put together a descriptive chart showing the correspondences between the principal consonants from the consonant grid and the Yanesha' orthographic writing system. Yanesha' orthography was invented by Duff and Wise in collaboration with Yanesha' community leaders in the 1950s and its details are briefly discussed in Duff 1997 and 1998. The linguistic data presented in the chart below is based on my fieldnotes, as well as words and phonetic transcriptions from Duff (1997) and Wise (1958a).

Table 5: Yanesha' Consonants & Orthography

Yanesha Writing Symbol(s)	Yanesha Phonemic Consonant(s)	Corresponding Yanesha' word in orthogr. Script	Transcription in IPA	Spanish meaning	English meaning
B	[β]	berr	[βeɀ]	*sabroso*	*delicious*
b̆	[$β^j$]	b̆ačhayo	[$β^j a^h$tʂajo]	*lejos*	*far*
c	[k]	Cac	[ka:k]	*pescado*	*fish*
qu(ë)		huaquësh	[wakeʃ]	*vaca, ganado, res*	*cow, cattle, animal*
c̄	[k^j]	neča'm	[nek^ja'm]	*mi manga*	*my sleeve*
ch	[tʃ]	chesha'	[$tʃe^hʃ$a']	*niño*	*boy*
c̈h	[tʂ]	c̈hop	[tʂo:p]	*maíz*	*corn*
g guë	[ɣ] [$ɣ^j$]	gorr aguëñets	[ɣoɀ] [a$ɣ^j$en^{j}ets]	*anzuelo* *recibir cosas*	*hook* *to receive things*
h(u)	[w]	huamprat cohuen	[wampra^{h}t] [ko:we:n]	*tipo de diseño* *bonito*	*type of design* *beautiful*
j	[x] [x^j]	jongatseteñets ajec̈h	[xoŋɣatsɪ'ten^{j}ets] [ax^{j}etʂ]	*gritar con dolor* *Árbol / planta espinosa*	*to scream in pain* *a thorny tree or plant*

ll	[lʲ]	llollo	[lʲo:lʲo]	*abuela*	*grandmother*
m	[m]	mueñets	[mʷe:nʲets]	*dormir*	*to sleep*
m̃	[mʲ]	nam̃a	[namʲa]	*yo también*	*I also*
n	[n]	notseteñets	[no:tsɪʾtenʲets]	*masticar para hacer masato*	*to chew and make masato*
ñ	[nʲ]	ñarenen	[nʲa:ɾeʰnen]	*llegue la madrugada*	*when dawn comes*
p	[p]	poʾnanesha'	[poʾna:nesha']	*mayores*	*adults*
p̃	[pʲ]	p̃ateñets	[pʲaʰtenʲets]	*hervir*	*to boil*
r	[ɾ]	requërcanets	[ɾe:kerkanɪts]	*carrizo*	*Flute made of reeds*
rr	[ʐ]	Rreñets m̃orr	[ʐenʲets] [mʲo:ʐ]	*comer comida salada* *aire, viento.*	*to eat salty food* *Air, wind.*
sh	[ʃ]	shonteʾ	[ʃonte]	*muchos/as*	*many*
t	[t]	topo, tepo	[topo], [tepo]	*río abajo*	*downriver*
t̃	[tʃʲ]	Yet̃	[jetʃʲ]	*día*	*day*
ts	[ts]	atserr	[atseʐ]	*caliente*	*hot*
y	[j]	yerpueñets	[jerpʷe:nʲets]	*acordarse*	*to remember*

The above chart is useful because it shows the correspondences between Yanesha' sounds and writing symbols, and provides examples translated into English and Spanish. As one can observe in the chart, the principal consonants of Yanesha' are well represented by the orthographic writing system. There is a way of writing down every single one of the 26 main consonants listed previously in the consonant chart. The writing system therefore supports and

conserves the Yanesha' consonant system better than it does for the vowel system, where it obscures phonemic qualities instead of capturing them.

Syllable Stress

Fast writes, 'stress appears to be phonemic, although no contrastive pairs have so far been identified' (1953: 194). Wise argues against this idea: 'Stress, not fully analysed in Mr. Fast's article, remains so here. Whereas he suspects it would prove to be phonemic, our guess is the opposite' (1958a: 15). Although more research is required in this field, stress generally tends to occur on the vowel of the penultimate syllable, and also sometimes on the ultimate syllable. Less frequently, it is antepenultimate. Some words in Yanesha', like /otʂen/ (*comb*), have stress in free variation, meaning that stress can be placed on either syllable of the word. Fast notes that in some words, there appears to be fluctuation in stress placement according to where it occurs in a sentence, in contrast to the lexeme is stressed in isolation. He writes, 'further investigation may reveal some correlation between stress and long vowels, or between stress and sentence rhythm,' (1953: 194) but to date, no such study has been able to verify these ideas.

3.2. Morphology

Like all Arawak languages, Yanesha' is polysynthetic (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 80). Yanesha' morphology is highly complex. Words are often composed of many different morphological and lexical elements. Here are some examples of simple and complex words that exist in the Yanesha' language (data from Duff 1997 & 1998):

Table 6: Examples of Yanesha' Simple and Complex Words.

Yanesha' Words	Breakdown of Morphemes	English Translation
atarr	**atarr** = *big*	Big (adjective)
atarrpo'	(**atarr** *big* + **-po'** *house*) *House,* on its own, is: po'coll	Big house (noun)
atarrpen	(**atarr** *big* + **-pen** *mountain*) *Mountain* is usually: aspeneʔ	Big mountain (noun)
atarrech	(**atarr** *big* + **-ech** *tree*) *Tree,* on its own, is: tsach	Big tree (noun)
Cohuen	**(Cohuen =** *good-looking)*	Good-looking / good (adj)
macohueno	**(ma** *very* **+ -cohuen** *good-looking)*	Very beautiful, excellent (adj)
yecohuenroʔ	**(ye** *with* **+ -cohuen** *good* **+ -roʔ** *hand)*	With the right (good) hand
Cohueñets	**(cohu** *look* + **-eñ** *nominalizer* + **-ets** *unspecified person)*	1) The act of looking (intr. verb). 2) Wait, guard. (tr. Vrb)
Cohuaclle'cheñets	**(cohu** *look* **+ acll** *eyes* **+ e'ch** *prep* **+ -eñ** *nominalizer* + **-ets** *unspecified person)*	The act of looking at eyes (noun)
Mam	**Mam** = manioc	Manioc
mampan	(**mam** *manioc* + **pan** *leaf)*	Leaf of manioc plant
nomamar	(**no** *my* + **mam** *manioc* + **ar** *inside the house)*	My manioc inside the house
nomamañ	(**no** *my* + **mam** *manioc* + **añ** *in the field)*	My manioc in the field

Because Yanesha' words begin with various kinds of elements (adjectival roots, noun roots, prefixes, verbal stems, etc), and can end with many different kinds of suffixes, there are multitudes of ways that words and ideas can manifest themselves. All Arawak languages have a

plethora of suffixes (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 80) and Yanesha' has a high number of them. The language is highly creative and the words can often be modified to be context-specific. It is therefore almost impossible to capture all the potential Yanesha' words in alphabetical dictionary format - the book would be too big to carry! The dictionary format was invented to suit less synthetic Indo-European languages, whose words usually begin with a specific and predictable letter, but this is not the case for Yanesha' words.

Locating Yanesha' words in Duff's Yanesha'-Spanish dictionary (1998) can be tricky for a non-native speaker of the language; one usually has to start with the translated Spanish lexeme and work one's way backwards in order to obtain the right Yanesha' word for the right context. If the Spanish word is not listed, then one gets stuck easily. When I was looking up unknown words from a Yanesha' song (see Chapter 4, section 4.7), I hardly ever found them in the dictionary because I did not know what or where the root of the word was, and trying to locate the word through its first letter was often useless. (Some words from songs were also very archaic and were not listed anywhere in the dictionary). Duff exhaustively describes the intricacies of Yanesha' morphology in the book on Yanesha' grammar (1998) but some aspects still need to be developed, especially concerning morpho-phonology and morpho-syntax. Here, for the sake of brevity, I will describe only the basics of noun and verb morphology.

Noun Morphology

- Gender : Gender is not specifically marked, but there are terms that can only be used by women, and others that are only used by men. I give examples of these later in this chapter (see section 4 *Sociolinguistics*).
- Quantification : The singular appears to be unmarked. Ex : **apa** '*father',* **co'nes** '*fermented drink'.* As for quantified nouns, there are at least two ways of marking that

there are 'more than one' (Duff 1998 : 26-28). The most common way is with the suffix /-esha'/ that also manifests as /-Vnesha'/, /-(n)esha'/, /-nanesha'/ when it means 'a group of X'. Some examples are **yanesha'** '*we the people',* **yellnesha' '***the Crab people',* **cornanesha'** *'a group of chiefs',* **rreʔornanesha'** *'a group of widows',* **yomo'tsesha'** *'our countrymen',* **yerrollaresha'** *'our wives'.* The other suffix that marks the plural is /-(V)ɕhno/ which means 'various kinds of'. Some examples are **coyaneshaɕhno** '*various kinds of women'* and **tsacheɕhno** '*various kinds of trees'.*

- Nouns Classes: There are four types of nouns in Yanesha' (Duff 1998 : 29-32). Their classification is based on their expressed relationship to possession by external agents. Here is the classification that Duff proposes for nouns (and examples are further below in the discussion):

- Class 1. *Obligatorily possessed.* These nouns cannot be without a pronominal prefix. They are kinship terms for siblings, grandparents and 1st and 2nd generation descendents, as well as objects that necessarily are part of a larger object. The fact that these words are always possessed shows that in the Yanesha' view, these terms are *always* inextricably linked to another part of the world;

- Class 2. *Usually possessed.* This class is composed of all the human body parts and other kinship terms such as spouse, niece and nephew. While these words most often appear with a pronominal prefix (linked to another part of the world), they are not obliged to.

- Class 3. *Optionally possessed*. It is is the largest and most flexible noun class, containing words for animals, objects, and the kinship terms related to parents. The fact that the word for 'mother' and 'father' appear in this class shows that these kinship terms are not necessarily viewed in the same way as those in Class 1;

- Class 4. *Never possessed*. This is a very small class of words related to children, such as 'boy', 'girl' and 'orphan'. It is interesting to note that these words are never possessed, and therefore never seen as 'belonging' to anyone. More study of this category is necessary.

The nouns in the first three categories must or can incorporate one of the pronominal prefixes that indicates possession. Here is a breakdown of the patterns of these prefixes with a series of examples (based on Duff 1998: 29):

Table 7: Yanesha' Pronominal Prefixes Indicating Possession.

Possessor		**Pronominal Prefix**	**Yanesha' Example**	**English Translation**
singular	1st person	/ ne - /	**ne**coyem̃	My pot
	2nd person	/ pe- /	**pe**coyem̃	Your pot
	3rd person	/ po-, pue- /[22]	**po**coyem̃	His/her pot
Plural	1st person	/ ye - /	**ye**coyem̃	Our pot
	2nd person	/ se - /	**se**coyem̃	Your (pl) pot
	3rd person	/ po-, pue… -et /	**po**coyn̄et	Their pot

[22] These are dialectical variants, the first is used in the 'downriver' dialectical zone and the second is used in the 'upriver' dialectical zone.

To illustrate how the pronominal prefixes are used in relationship with the 4 noun classes outlines above, here are some examples[23] from each class:

Table 8: Yanesha' Noun Classes.

Yanesha' Noun Classes	Yanesha' Examples	English Translation
1) ***Obligatorily possessed*** (nouns must always take a pronominal prefix, and do not occur in isolation).	Pa'me' Po'se Po'señ Pa'cnor Pue'ñar	*Her egg (of a hen, fish)* *Her brother* *His daughter* *His/her grandmother* *His/her grandchild*
2) ***Usually possessed*** (the nouns are likely to take a pronominal prefix)	Otats / **Y**ot Oñets / **Y**oñ Choyeshe'mats / **Ye**choyeshe'm	*Hand / Our hand* *Head / Our head* *Soul /* *Our Soul*
2) ***Optionally possessed*** (the nouns may or may not take a pronominal prefix)	Pocoll / **Pa**'paquell ochec / **po**chcar noñt̃ / **po'**noñt̃ ach / **pa**chor apa / **po**papar (irreg.) rrollarets / **po**rrollar t̃aporets / **po**t̃apor	*House / His house* *Dog / his-her dog* *Canoe / his-her canoe* *Mother / his-her mother* *Father / her father* *Husband / Her husband* *Wife / His wife*
3) ***Never possessed***[24] (the nouns never take a pronominal prefix)	Chesha' Huocchanesha'	*Boy, girl* *Orphan*

[23] There are clearly some fascinating phonological changes that differentiate the unpossessed and the possessed forms of the nouns, but for the sake of concision, I will not analyze them all in this chapter, which serves as a general introduction to the Yanesha' language.

[24] These were the only examples of Class 4 nouns found in Duff's data.

Among the examples given above, most possessed nouns require only the pronominal prefix, but some of the animated objects (those related to family members and pets that are alive), especially in Class 3, require an additional possessive suffix /-Vr, r/. Some examples are: **pochc<u>ar</u>** *'his/her dog',* **porroll<u>ar</u>** *'her husband'* and **poʔap<u>or</u>** *'his wife'.* Also, some unpossessed words in the 2nd and 3rd classes such as **otats** and **rrollarets** contain the suffix /-ets/ which designates '*unspecified person*' or *unspecified ownership*. That signifies that if the word is in its unpossessed form, it implies that belongs to 'a random person' or someone in general. For example, the word for 'eye' **otats** would be most commonly found in relation to someone, not in its unspecified form, because eyes usually belong to someone. Therefore to say 'eye' on its own would require a special marker to show the eye does not belong to anyone.

Nouns + pronominal suffixes can also be used to form nominal predicates. Here is a chart (based on Duff 1998: 41) with the basic forms of these pronominal suffixes, and examples of how they are used to create one-word sentences in Yanesha' (recall that **chesha'** means 'child'):

Table 9: Pronominal Suffixes that Form Nominal Predicates.

Agent		**Pronominal Suffix**	**Yanesha' Example**	**English Translation**
singular	1st person	/ - Vn /	**Chesha<u>n</u>**	I am a child.
	2nd person	/ -Vp̃, -Vp /	**Chesha<u>p̃</u>**	You are a child.
	3rd person	Ø	**Chesha' (**Ø)	He/she is a child.
Plural	1st person	/ -Vy /	**Chesha<u>y</u>**	We are children.
	2nd person	/ -Vs /	**Chesha<u>s</u>**	You (pl) are children.
	3rd person	/ - et /	**Chesh<u>et</u>**	They are children.

In this manner, Yanesha' speakers are able to create predicates with one word (noun + suffix), and therefore they do not have a verb that resembles the verb *to be* in English (or the verbs *ser* and *estar* in Spanish.

Verbal Categories

Yanesha' verbs express actions or states and they are the nucleus of utterances. Like in all Arawak languages, the verb is the most complicated part of the grammar, and the only obligatory constituent of a clause (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 85). There are four types of verbs in Yanesha' : intransitive, transitive, reflexive and reflexive-transitive. The verbal roots are often very simple, for example: **m- '***to sleep'***, ent-** *'to see'***, rr-** *'to eat'***,** and **cosh-** *'to be happy'* (Duff 1998: 107). However, the number of possible affixes that verbs can carry is staggering! Approximately sixty affixes have been pointed out by Duff (1998: Chapter 4). Among these are affixes that designate aspect, time, direction, adverbs, transitivity, reflexivity, and many others. A verb always carries between one and three suffixes, but it is not uncommon to find up to six or seven affixes attached to a verb at once. Here is an example of a typical string of verbal suffixes (from Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 87, citing Wise 1986: 582).

> Ø – omaz – amy - e ʔ t - amp^{j} - es – y - e:s – n - e:n – a
> 3sg.-go.downriver-DISTRIBUTIVE-EPENTHETIC-DATIVE.ADVANCEMENT-EPENTHETIC-PL-EPENHETIC-LATE-PROGRESSIVE-REFL
> 'He is going downriver by canoe in the late afternoon stopping often along the way.'

Valency-increasing markers, directionals and mood markers tend to come closer to the verb stem than optional markers such as tense/aspect/evidentiality and lexical aspect markers. In Wise (1986) evidentiality in Yanesha' is discussed briefly, but requires further study.

The majority of the verbs (deemed to be the 'regular verbs' by Duff) carry their subjects in the form of pronominal *prefixes* that are very similar to those outlined in the section for the possessive prefixes of nouns. However, there is a class of 'irregular' verbs whose subjects manifest as pronominal *suffixes*, and these are identical to the suffixes that form nominal predicates, also outlined above. Here are is small chart illustrating this phenomenon

Table 10: Yanesha 'Regular' and 'Irregular' Verbs

	'Regular' Verbs	**Translation**	**'Irregular' Verbs**	**Translation**
Singular				
1	**Ne**taruasen	I work	Osen**en**	I have fever
2	**pe**taruasen	You work	osen**ep̃**	You have fever
3	(Ø) taruasen	He/She work	osen	He/She has fever
Plural 1	**ye**taruasen	We work	osen**ey**	We have fever
2	**se**taruasen	You (pl) work	osen**es**	You (pl) have fever
3	taruasen**et**	They work	osen**et**	They have fever

More research in this field of regular and irregular verbs may reveal historical grammatical transformations that led to the current distribution of subject affixes.

3.3. Syntax

Yanesha', like many other Arawakan languages, is a VSO language (verb-subject-object).[25] Here I will present some syntactic data from a piece of oral history recorded by Martha

[25] I noticed that many speakers often place the subject of a sentence at the beginning of phrases, in the topic (or theme) position, indicated by the topicalizing suffix /-pa'/ (Duff 1997: 231). I am curious to study the occurrence of this morpheme in the future to see if it has been influences by Spanish. I suspect this particular structure is coming into use much more frequently among young speakers because of the influence of Spanish, which is a SVO language, and commonly places subjects or referential phrases at the front of its sentences.

Duff (1957). She (like Fast and Wise) wrote down her data in an old phonetic transcription system so I will write down selected data in phonemic form of modern IPA. I break down her data with interlinear explanations and supplement it with some elements that stem from my own basic understanding of the language. The original data from Duff[26] is:

1. 1. {(S, N.; Ap, D) [$_2$(AxV, Pt; P, V) [$_1$O, N (Ps, N; Ap, N)$_1$]$_2$]} enkpaʔ añ oʔ yo·ra poʔseñ yo·s yahtyo·s *Inca this-one already he-took his-daughter god our-god.* 2. (At, At; P, V) ata·z azceʔma *Much he-angry.*

19. {(AxV, Pt; P, V/O_2) L, N} oʔč nehnaʔne·nepʸ pehša·lepno *Will I-be-leaving-you at-your-mountain-name-sake.* 20. {L, D [(AxV, Pt; P, V) L, N]} alohčʸñapaʔ oʔč a·we·zepʸ pepa·pa·rešo *There-from-yes will go-back-you to-where-your-father-is.*

Breakdown:

/enkpa'	**añ**	**o'**	**jo:ra**	**po'señ**	**jo's**	**jahtjo:s /**
Inca (topic)	*this-one*	*already*	*he-took*	*his-daughter*	*god*	*our-god*
Noun	Demonstr.	Particle	3ps-Verb	3ps-Dir.obj	Noun	1pp-Noun
[Subject]		[	Predicate			]

'Inca, this one, had taken god's daughter, our god.'

/Ata:ʐ	**akʐe'ma /**
Much	*he-angry*
Adverb	3ps-Verb
[attributive]	[Predicate]

'He was very angry.'

[26] Duff 1957: from pages 171-178, I use examples 1,3, 19 and 20.

/o'tʃ ne^{h}na'ne:nep^{j} pe^{h}ʃa:lepno/

Will I-be-leaving-you your-mountain namesake-at

Aux.V 1ps-verb-2ps.dir.obj 2ps - noun - preposition

[[particle] Predicate]

'I am going to leave you at your mountain namesake.'

/alo^{h}tʃ^{j}ñapa' o'tʃ a:we:ʐep^{j} pepa:pa:reʃo/

From-there-yes[27] *will go back-you your-father-is-at*

Loc-demonstr-TOPIC Aux.V Verb-2ps 2ps-father-preposition

[location] [[particle] Predicate]

'From there, you will go to where your father is.'

These examples illustrate the complexity of Yanesha' sentences and give the reader a general idea of some possible utterances.

Conclusion

This chapter serves as a basic introduction to the Yanesha' language and it is useful because it synthesizes some of the work of past scholars up until today, in the fields of Yanesha' and Arawak phonology, morphology and syntax. The tables, charts and general comments on Yanesha' orthography may also be useful for linguistic conservation efforts in future generations, because these elements do not exist elsewhere in any other resources that I have found in my search for literature on Yanesha' linguistics.

[27] In 1958, Duff seems to analyze the suffix /-pa'/ as a kind of 'affirmative' marker, but in her 1997 grammar, page 231, she presents it as a thematic morpheme that indicates the topic of the sentence.

Chapter 4. On the Dawn of the Full Moon: The Ponapnora Rite of Passage Among Yanesha' Women.

In this chapter, I will describe in detail the *ponapnora* women's ritual and emphasize its role in cultural transmission. I argue that this ancient rite was one of the cornerstones of Yanesha' women's culture and played a role in conserving linguistic and musical heritage.

Ponapnora is a word in the Yanesha' language that describes a young woman who is undergoing an ancient rite of passage linked to menarche, her first menstruation. The word *ponapnora* is derived from the intransitive verb *po'napñorateñets*, which means 'the act of becoming an adult woman' and is used to designate the process of a woman reaching puberty through a menstruation rite. The *ponapnora* tradition, an indigenous initiation rite that was once an integral part of every Yanesha' woman's life, is becoming increasingly rare. As Yanesha' culture becomes assimilated into mainstream Peruvian culture, ancient customs such as this one are in the process of going out of use. *Ponapnora* is therefore in danger of completely disappearing in the coming generations.

The *ponapnora* puberty rite begins when a young girl, menstruating for the first time, is put into confinement inside an enclosure or leaf hut for an extended period of time, in order to undergo a lengthy purification. According to Yanesha' tradition, while the girl is inside the hut, she fasts, bathes with medicinal plants, and learns from her female relatives how to weave and sing. Her emergence from the hut, which marks her passage into womanhood, is highly ritualized and celebrated by community feasting, manioc beer drinking, dancing and singing.

Because there are very few detailed descriptions and no in-depth ethnographic analysis of this ritual available to a general audience, I will offer some basic details of this fascinating tradition based on my observations of two *ponapnora* rituals that I attended in July 2008 in Yanesha' communities. I informally interviewed a total of 15 different women on the topic of this

puberty rite, and obtained the information that I will present in this chapter. This will provide some preliminary, yet much needed information on the topic.

I argue that *ponapnora* is an important ritual for the transmission of cultural, linguistic and musical knowledge among Yanesha' women, and it is the process of eroding. Many Yanesha' mothers and grandmothers expressed to me that *ponapnora* is a crucial step that girls should take in order to develop into strong, healthy and knowledgeable women, but for many complex reasons, fewer girls now embark on this rite of purification. Judging from the women's narratives, I believe that *ponapnora* also once played a very important role in the transmission of women's songs, and therefore in the preservation of Yanesha' linguistic heritage. It was during *ponapnora* that popular and sacred songs were transmitted from adult women to young women. I base this chapter on Yanesha' women's narratives that I recorded in interviews during my fieldwork in the communities of Yuncullmass and Loma Linda in July 2008. I supplement these findings with some ethnographic data from Santos-Granero (1991), and discuss the politics of Yanesha' musical culture song transmission with data from Smith (1977; 1984). Lastly, I compare *ponapnora* to other indigenous menstruation rites, using data from Waisbord (1989), Bentley Tanner (1955) and Buckley & Gottlieb (1988).

4.1. Ethnographic Background on the *Ponapnora* Ritual

I first read about the intriguing *ponapnora* ritual in Fernando Santos-Granero's ethnography of love and hierarchical relations among the Yanesha' (*The Power of Love*, 1991). Santos-Granero is the only anthropologist [28] to publish some general details about the *ponapnora*

[28] Smith (1977) also mentioned the ritual in his writing, but did not give any detailed information about it, because it was not the focus of his dissertation. A literature search among other authors only revealed Santos-Granero's work. In terms of other available background sources, an online search of the term '*ponapnora*' only reveals a handful of pictures from my fieldwork that I have recently put online.

tradition, within the context of gender roles and power hierarchies in Yanesha' society. As a man working in the highly gendered spaces of Yanesha' culture, it is possible that he did not have much direct access to women's culture during his fieldwork.[29] So, his portrayal of *ponapnora,* which emphasizes fatherly love and the role of the prospective husband in the ritual, probably stems from his interviews with Yanesha' men, rather than drawing from Yanesha' women's personal experiences of *ponapnora*.

Santos-Granero emphasizes in his writings that paternal love is a broad cultural dynamic that is present in Yanesha' cosmology on different levels, and it also dominates marriage relationships. In his view, the compassionate love that male deities have for human beings parallels the type of love that men have for their wives. In the past, until the second half of the 20th century, an adult Yanesha' man would traditionally choose his wife amongst the female children of his community or his descent group, and he would then raise his prospective wife until she was old enough to marry him. Santos-Granero asserts that this traditional type of marital arrangement was quite common until the early 1970's, in most Yanesha' communities (1991: 212 - 216). The agreement was usually made between the man and the parents of the pre-pubescent girl. The man would fulfill his bride service period (by working for the girl's family) or provide the parents of the prospective wife with a suitable quantity of material goods, and then he would take the child-bride with him and raise her in his home. After she had undergone her *ponapnora* puberty ritual, she was ready to be married. It is unclear in Santos-Granero's work how this arrangement would work if the girl came from another community, or how old the man usually

[29] As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Smith told me that Santos-Granero's ethnographic work is based on very limited time spent among the Yanesha'. Judging from SG's writings, it seems that most of his informants were Yanesha' men. Smith also told me that despite his own many years of fieldwork among the Yanesha', he feels that he mostly had access only to men's culture. He spent a lot of time in the company of men, and although he did extensive interviews with Yanesha' women, he says he never quite had access to the inner workings of their world as much as he did to the men's world. In consequence, most of his published works relate primarily to men's culture. I too have noticed the relative silence of Yanesha' women when men are speaking in a room, so it makes sense that their world is less accessible to male anthropologists.

was at the time of prospecting for a wife.

The practice of raising one's child-wife would ensure a very close father-child relationship between husband and wife. Santos-Granero writes that the Yanesha' told him that when a man brought up his future wife, divorce practically never occurred. The time that the Yanesha' girl is being raised by her future husband is called *cohuampeñets*[30] – it refers to the act of consciously looking after and protecting a person. This is a word most often used in the case of pubescent girls, but also in the case of shamans protecting their shamanic apprentices (ibid: 321). Santos-Granero writes that the apprentices were ritually placed in isolation and cared for by shamans; this process was known to allow the apprentice to accumulate 'life force'. He argues that *cohuampeñets* also refers to giving this 'life force' to someone in a liminal state: protecting a person and allowing him or her to accumulate spiritual power while undergoing a serious transformation, with the goal of attaining a whole new state. Interestingly, Richard Chase Smith also writes extensively about other ways the Yanesha' people sought to accumulate what he calls 'cosmic power': they held vigils and went on 'song quests' to acquire divine musical knowledge (Smith 1977: 77) which allowed them to become closer to the gods.

Santos-Granero goes on to affirm that the transformation of the girl into a woman culminates during the *ponapnora* rite of passage: all Yanesha' pubescent girls must undergo ritual confinement after their first menstruation (1991: 217) in which they must stay inside a small leaf hut and avoid eating certain foods. Santos-Granero claims that this whole process symbolizes a kind of death and resurrection: a girl is confined when she is immature and she emerges out of her confinement as a fully mature woman. This period of confinement may last up to six months, during which the Yanesha' girl loses her color and her face becomes pale like the

[30] Duff (1997: 138) writes that the verb *cohuampeñets* is a synonym of *cohueñets,* which also means looking after someone. Both are transitive verbs that are related to the word *cohuen,* which means beautiful, good, right, and is commonly used when the appearance or nature or something or someone is well-liked and positive.

moon, or the dead (ibid: 218). The end of the *ponapnora* puberty ritual is celebrated early at dawn, following the night of a full moon. The young men present at the celebration tear apart the leaf hut in which the girl has been confined, and she appears to be very white and frail as she stands before them (ibid: 218). Her shaven head is covered by a square piece of cloth (which resembles a practice in Yanesha' funeral rites) and this represents her symbolic death. According to Santos-Granero's interpretation, the girl is then 'resurrected' by marrying her father-husband, who provides her with new life. S-G insists that for the Yanesha', this puberty ritual also symbolizes that love and its life-giving qualities prove to be stronger than death itself (ibid: 218).

Santos-Granero writes nothing about the cultural transmission that occurs during the time that the young woman is enclosed in the leaf hut. Because this was an important point emphasized by the Yanesha' women I spoke to, I will present the elements of the ritual based on their narratives, emphasizing their words related to the transferal of women's knowledge. As a newcomer to the study of Yanesha' culture, I am aware that I am only beginning to understand the profound spiritual meaning of the *ponapnora* tradition. I see that there is deep symbolism and profound cultural meaning embedded in this rite of passage, and as an onlooker it is impossible for me to have understood all aspects of this ancient ritual. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to make the general specifics of this tradition known to the rest of the world, for the benefit of the study of indigenous women's puberty rites in the Americas and also to reveal that a facet of a rich cultural heritage is in the process of being lost. Due to the destruction of the Amazonian jungle and the dismantlement of Amazonian cultures in our modern era, complex and fascinating traditions such as *ponapnora* are in the process of being lost.

4.2. Sacred Space: The Isolation of the Enclosure

The Yanesha' women in Yuncullmass told me that when a girl tells her mother that she is menstruating for the first time, members of her family then build a little hut or enclosure for the girl to spend her purification time in. Traditionally, the ideal place for *ponapnora* would be an entirely separate hut, away from the family's main dwelling. This provided a completely private place in which the girl's physical and spiritual transformation could take place. The hut was therefore seen as a sacred liminal space where the girl resides, between the worlds of childhood and womanhood. But nowadays, due to limited economic resources, lack of time or lack or attention given to the ritual, as well the girl's desire to not be completely isolated, a small enclosure within the family's main hut is usually built for the girl. Enclosed in this new little room, shielded from public view by a thick wall of palm leaves, she is attended by her mother, grandmother, or several female relatives, who bring her food and water.

The minimum length of time spent in the enclosure was traditionally at least one full lunar cycle, but many Yanesha' women recall spending two, three or four months in isolation. One woman even assured me that she spent six months in the enclosure! The longer the stay, the better it is for one's health, they all affirmed. However, the women reported that nowadays, girls are enclosed for much shorter periods of time. "The schoolteachers protest when a mother wants to keep her daughter enclosed for more than a month," said one mother in Yuncullmass. "They say she will fall behind on the lessons and not be able to pass her classes." Another mother, Valbina from Loma Linda, told me, "the girls today are much more concerned with participating in the volleyball tournaments than doing *ponapnora*. Some of them love sports and feel isolated from their friends if they miss too many games." Consequently, the length of *ponapnora* now usually one month, or several weeks until the next full moon arrives, when she emerges from the hut. The mother, sometimes resulting from a discussion with her husband and female relatives of the girl, usually decided the duration of the enclosure. Today, the daughter also has some input on

the length of her stay in the hut, but her mother (or in some cases, her aunt) is still the one in charge of all the details related to the enclosure and the subsequent community celebration.

Fasting

Inside the enclosure, the girl is required to follow strict dietary prescriptions: she cannot eat any warm foods, or salt. Her diet consists mainly of small amounts of cold manioc, and water. This ritual fasting is part of her purification, and it is not easy to bear. One woman in Yuncullmass told me, laughing, "I remember when they shut me away in the hut. I could only talk to my mother. But I was bad, very bad! I used to crawl out when I knew my parents were gone in the fields. Then I would go into our cooking area and eat manioc with salt! I was not allowed to eat that, but I would do it anyway." As she told me this story, the women around her all chuckled at her antics. When I asked them what were the benefits of fasting, the women spoke of different effects associated with strength and health. They mentioned gaining physical endurance for cultivating in the fields and resistance to various diseases. Also, they associated *ponapnora* with maintaining youthfulness, increasing longevity, as well as preserving the health of their teeth and the black color of their hair until old age. This is what Christina Bautista from Loma Linda told me about fasting during *ponapnora*:

> "When I was twelve I was locked away for five months. I was only allowed to eat cold manioc, with no salt whatsoever. Not even a little salt. It is to purify the body and make you strong so that you do not become sick from diseases. (…) Nowadays, girls are only shut in for one or two months, because their schoolteachers protest that they are missing too much of the school year. But it is important for Yanesha' women to do their *ponapnora*, because otherwise, they become old very quickly; they lose all their teeth when they are young and their hair turns white right after they have a few children. They also become lazy and sick and cannot work in the fields to feed their children. They lose their strength and cannot run up the mountains quickly. But women who have done *ponapnora* are still able to work in the fields and carry heavy loads until late in life. (…) My mother is 80 and she still farms with no problem. (…) You see all these lazy girls today, they haven't done *ponapnora* and will never be

> able to do that hard work in the field, and they won't be able to feed their children."

Judging from Christina's statements, enduring the *ponapnora* initiation is preferable to not undergoing it. She cites the health benefits related to it, the promise of longevity, and the warning of sluggishness and ill health for women who do not participate in *ponapnora.* She also affirms that there are fewer Yanesha' girls today who participate in this rite, and that not doing it will have negative impacts on them.

Medicinal Plants

Another important purification element inside the hut that women reported is regular bathing with medicinal plants, which are generally known as *epe'* in the Yanesha' language.[31] Men and women maintain complex sacred relationships with the various kinds of *epe'*, and knowledge about the plants is jealously guarded as to avoid outsiders stealing local secrets. While I did not seek to obtain any names or uses of specific plants, or identify their exact species, all the women I spoke to confirmed that having exactly the right plants during *ponapnora* is very beneficial, and this ritual bathing helps the girl transition into becoming a woman. A French anthropologist by the name of Céline Valadeau[32] showed me the photos she had taken of Yanesha' women bathing with plants. One woman would stand on the floor of the hut, her entire body enveloped head to toe in her *cushma* (long traditional robe for women), while another woman would place a steaming bowl of boiling water containing medicinal plants between her

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[31] In Spanish, *epe'* is translated as *piripiri.* This term is used to refer to the many kinds of grassy rushes of the *Juncus* genus.

[32] I met Céline Valadeau, a Ph.D candidate in Ethnopharmacology from Université de Toulouse, at the *Institut français d'études andines* in Lima, Peru. She showed me her collection of photographs of Amazonian medicinal plants and their uses among the Yanesha'. Valadeau is currently researching the what she calls *la bibliothèque végétale des Yaneshas* – and she is collaborating with a number of Yanesha' men and women on the publication of a book about Yanesha' natural pharmacology.

feet. The hot water vapor would rise into the standing women's dress from below, and she would breathe in and absorb the essence of the sacred plants.

When I asked the Yanesha' women what effects the plants had, they brought up different aspects of beautification related to hair, skin and body shape.[33] During *ponapnora,* some mothers would ask their daughters what they wanted to look like, and the mothers would obtain the plants with those particular qualities. While it was difficult for me to get precise details on this subject, because most of the women that I met carefully guarded their knowledge of plants, Christina Bautista spoke a little bit about her experience: "I don't exactly remember what it was like inside the hut, but I remember my mother would bathe me often with *epe'.* She used special leaves so I can have long, thick hair. And you see my hair the way it is today: long and thick and black!" As she said this, she proudly tossed her thick black braid over her shoulder. She mentioned that mothers would traditionally cut their daughters' hair very short during *ponapnora* so that it would grow back stronger. She went on to say, "There are other magical fat plants that we use to make a girl fat and healthy too, but I didn't want to be fat, so I didn't want to use those." She told me she preferred to have a slender, wiry frame, whereas other women preferred to be sturdier. When I asked around about these so-called 'magical fat plants', another woman in Loma Linda told me a bit about them:

> "The fat plants are the ones that mothers use when they want their daughter to be fat. Not really fat, but plump and strong and healthy. The daughter sometimes says, 'mother, I want to be fat!' And so there is a tree in the forest with a very fat trunk, and if you are a skinny girl and you bathe with its big leaves during *ponapnora*, you will become voluptuous and healthy. (…) You know, our ancestors used to run for hours. The women liked to be big so they had energy to run on the trails and then come back and take care of their children."

[33] The topic of Yanesha' standards of beauty among women is very fascinating and is worthy of much more research. In particular, the relationship with medicinal plants and other resources from the jungle play an important role in the beauty, health and wellness of Yanesha' women.

She cites the importance of being muscular and strong for Yanesha' women in ancient times[34], and emphasized how daughters express their wishes to their mothers concerning body shape. She emphasizes that the plants could help bestow strength upon women.

In a discussion with five women in Yuncullmass during a *ponapnora* community celebration, I asked them about how the medicinal plants work. One woman mentioned communicating with the plant to be able to activate its healing or magical properties. The women all talked about the importance of taking the fasting prescriptions seriously, seeing that the plants work in relationship with the correct fasting. They discussed that one can bathe with the best medicinal plants, but if one does not observe the exact diet that is prescribed to go along with the medicinal plant treatment, the plants will not work. They brought up various cases of plants not having the desired effect because the diet had not been adequately followed by the girl. They also brought up the cases of several girls who had been painfully thin but had later developed into plump, strong and attractive girls because of the correct combination of plants and fasting. Listening to them speak, I reflected silently that in my own country, people often consume Amazonian herbal medicines from health food stores, but remain unconcerned or unconscious of the vast indigenous knowledge that is associated with them. To what extent does this detract from the medicinal qualities of the plant? In contrast, sometimes pharmaceutical companies also play up the indigenous quality of plants in order to market its authenticity, associating their new brands of medicine with 'legendary native formulas'.[35]

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[34] It is interesting to note the differences between the Yanesha' culture and our Western culture. Yanesha' girls express wanting to be 'fat' whereas this would be unheard of in Western society, where a high number of girls seek to be as petite as possible. Being sturdy and strong is seen as masculine in Western culture, whereas it is seen as an attractive and desirable quality among the Yanesha'.

[35] This is part of the slogan associated with Lakota Herbs, a Canadian company marketing native Lakota treatments for arthritis.

Sexual Prescriptions

Several women told me that during *ponapnora,* their mothers taught them about sex. In particular, they were taught that if they had sex too soon after *ponapnora*, they would lose all the energy they had accumulated during the ritual. They were taught that there is a correlation between having sex too young and aging quickly. For example, Valbina from Loma Linda told me, "During *ponapnora,* your mother is supposed to tell you that you should wait a few years until having sex. You need to keep your energy for yourself so you can have a long life. The energy makes you stronger, and then you can continue to carry heavy things and work hard until late in life." Some women were shy to talk about this topic, while others were very open about it. It appears that sexual education is also a component of *ponapnora,* and that abstinence is taught as a way of conserving cosmic energy in Yanesha' women's culture, thus promoting health, longevity and general survival in the jungle. Future research will reveal more on this interesting topic.

4.3. Weaving Songs: *Ponapnora* and the Transmission of Cultural Art Forms

The time spent in the enclosure was also the period during which the young girl was taught to weave in the traditional Yanesha' manner. The women recalled sitting in the hut and receiving bundles of cotton brought by women in the community. A particular woman (the girl's mother or another female relative) would take on the role of teaching the *ponapnora* girl all the intricate weaving patterns, collectively known as *ormetsoc̈hno ñam̃a rrenarotatsoc̈hno* ('the names of the different types of weaving designs'). The women told me that these woven patterns held ancient and sacred significances for the Yanesha' people; some patterns symbolized the running river, others represented the marks on the jaguar's fur, others designated the rising of the sun or certain sites such as sacred mountains, etc. Each pattern had its traditional usage and when

it was worn, it was associated with a specific gender, a particular age range or marital status, and even clans, locations, activities, ancestors who had become divinities, etc. As the women pointed out some of the meanings of the designs on their bags and *cushmas*, the geometric designs came alive to me and I was astonished at the intricacy and complexity of symbols embedded in their weaving. This traditional knowledge alone could merit a full thesis. One woman pointed out that the design associated with *ponapnora* was a rhomboidal design called *huamprat*.

Figure 4. Photo of a Yanesha' Girl undergoing *Ponapnora* ritual in Loma Linda, July 2008. Her face, arms, and dress are decorated with the traditional *huamprat* design. Photo taken by author.

Figure 5. Huamprat: A Yanesha' Weaving Design associated with *Ponapnora.* (source: Duff 1997: 417)

Figure 7. Photo of Yanesha girls gathering *shor* plants in support of the *ponapnora* community celebration. Their faces are decorated with simplified *huamprat* designs. Photo taken by the author, in Loma Linda, July 2008.

I saw that the isolation of puberty ritual was not only a time of physical transformation and spiritual purification, but also one of intense cultural learning. The enclosure was an ancient school of sorts, before the advent of Western-style schools. In the privacy of the hut, the girl would focus on learning the science of weaving, incorporating women's knowledge accumulated over generations. One grandmother in Yuncullmass told me,

> "If there is anything I remember about *ponapnora,* it's all the weaving I did. I would sometimes weave day and night to finish everything. I didn't sleep. First, I would have to transform the bundles of cotton into spools and spools of thread. My aunts would keep on coming with their bundles of cotton for me. And I would keep on going and going -- it was so I learned how to not get tired. Then I learned the patterns for men, women and children. But nowadays, our girls don't learn all these things anymore."

Again, weaving was another component linked not only to physical, but psychological endurance of long and arduous tasks. The Yanesha' girl would in fact be far from idle inside the initiation hut; she would be constantly making more and more thread for the women of her community.

The rite obliged her to embrace one of her traditional roles: in the female-male division of labor in Yanesha' communities, women were the weavers and responsible for making clothes and accessories for everyone. What she experiences during her malleable state throughout *ponapnora* will imprint her character for the rest of her life. From the women's accounts, it seems that traditionally, efforts were taken to ensure that the *ponapnora* experience was not only considered beneficial for the girl, but for the rest of the tribe as well.

While making tribal clothing was once a crucial part of Yanesha' women's culture, today traditional weaving is a disappearing art form. The indigenous woven clothes have been largely replaced by the synthetic, modern clothing that Yanesha' people bring back from the towns and cities they visit. The communities also receive large donations of used clothing from evangelical missionaries.[36] In all the communities that I visited, I observed that the Yanesha' no longer wear their traditional woven clothing, except for special occasions such as council meetings, ceremonies and celebrations. With the seemingly endless supply of ready-made clothing streaming towards them from urban centers, why would they need to continue toiling and weaving? But some women lament the loss of traditional weaving techniques. Valbina, a young mother I interviewed and spent time with in Loma Linda, told me, "I think I am one of the only mothers of my generation here who has taught my daughter how to weave. I make traditional bags and sell them, and I want her to do the same thing. Then she can know how our ancestors made those things. Even though now we wear modern clothes, we can still continue to weave and we can sell our products and earn some income with it."

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[36] As previously mentioned, I was automatically assumed to be a missionary by many Yanesha' people. I was admonished several times, upon my arrival in a community, for not bringing boxes of clothing with me. The villagers, sometimes accusingly, asked me why I did not bring boxes of children's clothes and running shoes like the other women who would sometimes visit them. I would explain that I wasn't sent by the Church and that I was doing linguistic research, and this was met with perplexity by the women, who were not used to seeing female researchers who were not also missionaries (like those of the SIL). Every time I left a community, some of the women would always kindly ask me to bring them clothes on my next visit. In the last community I visited before returning to Lima, I gave the families all of my clothes.

Many the adult Yanesha' women still know how to weave; they make bags, belts and shoulder straps with the goal of selling them. But given their remote location from urban centers, they know all too well the difficulties in accessing a public that will buy their products. So, the production of traditional woven gear is now judged for its economic viability within the modern free-market capitalist system, and is not valued and transmitted as artistic cultural heritage. In my preliminary fieldwork, I heard from the women that *ponapnora* is one of the original vehicles for transmitting weaving skills, but that sadly, these techniques are being taught on a smaller scale than before.

Ponapnora has also practically lost its role as a vehicle for song transmission. One elder woman in Loma Linda, Margarita Lopez, told me, "When I was confined, my mother used to sing to me everyday. That way, I learned some of her songs. They are really difficult to learn and they can take years to master them." Several women also mentioned that if a mother was a singer, during *ponapnora* her daughter could make the spiritual decision to also become a singer. Confinement during *ponapnora* would provide a girl with time alone to think about devoting herself to music. Not all women would make this decision, but during *ponapnora*, some would feel this calling. If singing was what she desired to undertake, the girl would ask her mother, or one of the few women she had contact with, to teach her songs. She would take the time in the hut to learn the complex and difficult sacred lyrics of one of the songs from her mother. This would also open her up to the sacred possibility of receiving songs from the gods who reside in the natural features of the landscape.

According to Smith, music is an integral part of traditional Yanesha' culture (Smith 1977: 7). Musical performance was a way to come into contact with the gods, and was not taken lightly. Acquiring musical knowledge was akin to accumulating cosmic power (ibid: 77). Songs were received during song quests during which song seekers kept long vigils and prayed to hear divine

music. The music would manifest itself through features of the natural landscape and thus be bestowed upon the seeker. For example, the seeker might hear a specific reed flute melody in the wind, or the voice of deceased loved one singing an entire song, and thus obtain the musical knowledge. 'Divinities alone have the power to create songs' (Smith 1977 : 22). The cosmic origin of this music was said to be located in the divine realm of Yompor Rreẽ, located several levels up from the earthly plane (Smith 1977: 92).

Smith writes that traditional music is known as *coshamñats* and it was performed during communal celebrations such as manioc beer feasts, that often followed rituals such as *ponapnora,* among other rituals. Songs and musical pieces accompanied by drumming and reed flutes were performed and danced to during those celebrations. During Smith's fieldwork, his informants emphasized many times the importance of the 'conservation of songs as a legacy of the past' (ibid: 179). Smith's summarizes what his informants told him, in the 1970s, about song custodianship and the disappearance of traditional singing:

> "Before the recent deterioration of traditional Amuesha life (one or two generations ago) all adult members of a settlement, male and female, knew at least one song. It was a rare person, one who suffered a great loss of face, who did not know a song. Today, this is no longer true. The successful efforts of Christian missionaries over the past twenty years have had devastating effects on the performance of COSHAMÑATS music. (…) In Huaquesho, …the adults know from two to six songs each. However, most of the young, who were raised as fundamentalist Christians never learned the music and spurn it openly today. This attitude has profoundly affected the older adults' willingness to perform and teach their songs." (Smith 1977: 180-181).

Smith cites one of the main reasons why songs were already disappearing in the 1970s: the influence of the evangelical missionaries. They saw the *coshamñats* singing and dancing as devil's work. Today, the sacred songs are even less valued than they once were, and therefore the spiritual knowledge about Yanesha' music and its connection to nature is also fading among the youth. Many mothers no longer practice their indigenous songs because evangelical missionaries

have told them they are Satanic, so the transmission of songs has become very rare, and no longer a crucial component of the *ponapnora* ritual. Some women even mentioned to me that if they could re-do their *ponapnora*, they would do it better the second time around and make sure they learned everything they were supposed to. Alas, it only happens once in a lifetime.

Women's songs were once transmitted within the boundaries of the *ponapnora* tradition. It was an extended and intensive period of time for young women to be immersed in their traditions. The sacred songs were revealed to Yanesha' by the divinities, and therefore they must be transmitted in a sacred context as well. The desire for acquisition of songs must be expressed from daughter to mother. In the past, most women would learn how to sing at least one song, but now it must be asked explicitly, and most girls no longer ask or care to learn the songs. Therefore the songs are not as widely transmitted.

Ponapnora was one of the contexts in which a song was transmitted, and therefore women's songs have been preserved over time thanks to this rite of passage. Crucial generational ties were established and propagated in this cultural process. It would mark the beginning of a Yanesha' woman's path as a singer and seeker of songs. The implications of this important step still require further study.

Smith writes that in the past, there were indigenous priests who performed rites in temples located in sacred sites. These priests carefully guarded traditional knowledge of music and ritual and ensured the transmission of it. However, the last Yanesha priest died in 1956. "With the decline of the priesthood during the past twenty years, the preservation of esoteric history now depends on the memories of non-specialized people whose interest is not always sufficient to maintain it," (Smith 1977 : 30). With the absence of priests, it is now up to community elders to transmit their musical knowledge, but most of the younger generations are not receiving it. As I elaborated in Chapter 2, many youth, including pre-pubescent girls, leave their communities at a

young age to find work or go to school, and do not participate and uphold the same social traditions, such as *ponapnora,* that were once essential parts of the Yanesha' culture.

4.4. Banishing Laziness and Averting the Eyes: Components of the *Ponapnora* Celebration

There are several important ritual elements that the community must observe when the time comes for the girl to emerge from isolation. The community is required to arrive at the celebration before sunrise, because the girl must come out of hut exactly at daybreak, on the morning following the night of a full moon. I was also told that the community members must participate in the celebration with enthusiasm, because otherwise, they may also be at risk of becoming the servants of the evil demon *Ellopa'*, and doomed to a life of sluggishness. Laziness and illness are seen as a symptoms of having succumbed to this demon. To counter this terrible fate, the community members must drink, eat, sing and dance enthusiastically.

According to one of my informants, the *ponapnora* girl must also be sure to wake up very early on the day she emerges so that "*Ellopa'* - the demon of the night - does not take her as a disciple." The girl must be sure to prepare, along with her female relatives, enough manioc beer for all the guests, which is no easy task. The process of preparing the fermented drink usually commences in the days leading up to the celebration and involves a lot of hard work on the part of the *ponapnora* girl, thus making her well-versed in making the drink, which is loved and valued by all the members of the community.

On the day she emerges from the puberty hut, the *ponapnora* girl must be constantly serving people food and manioc beer, working in the kitchen, singing with the other women, or dancing with the women in front of the crowd of onlookers. She must sing loudly in the ceremonial dances to properly honor the gods, but she can only speak in brief whispers to the women in her entourage, and not to the men. Valbina from Loma Linda emphasized that

"*Ponapnora* must not talk to anyone, and she must be sure not to laugh, because otherwise the envious spirits that live underground will hear her and steal her energy and make her sick." I was also told that the community members must participate in the celebration with enthusiasm, because otherwise, they may also be at risk of also becoming the servants of the evil *Ellopa*', and doomed to a life of laziness. They must drink, sing and dance enthusiastically.

It is also important that the girl does not come into eye contact with anyone, especially men, for fear of losing her cosmic power. One woman in Yuncullmass mentioned to me, "When the *ponapnora* girl comes out, it is important that she does not look at anyone, and that no one looks at her, because she will lose all the strength she has accumulated in the time she was inside the hut. Someone might steal her power. It happens through the eyes. You will see her when she comes out, but her head will be completely covered so she cannot look at anyone." All the women confirmed to me that the girl's head is covered so that her gaze meets as few people as possible. As one can see in the following photograph, the head of the girl completing her *ponapnora* ritual is completely covered.

Figure 8. Photo of Justina Quinchuya, a Yanesha' elder. She has a knowing look in her eyes. She is standing next to a girl who is in the process of completing her *ponapnora* ritual in Loma Linda, July 2008. Photo taken by the author.

4.5. On the Dawn of the Full Moon: Emerging from the Enclosure

The experience of attending two *ponapnora* celebrations back-to-back was a turning point in my research because I then realized that this ritual was crucial in the transmission of women's culture on many levels. This is how I described going to the *ponapnora* event in Yuncullmass in my field notes:

> Early morning, still dark. I get dressed and help the chief's wife get her two daughters ready for the journey to the ritual location. In order to get there, we walk for over an hour, up and down narrow and steep jungle paths along mountains. We come to a river, but because it is still night and the clouds are covering the full moon, I cannot see which stones to step on, so I just wade through the entire river with one of the chief's daughters on my back. I am soaked from the waist down, and sweating from the hike. (…)
>
> We finally arrive at the family's home whose daughter is going to emerge from the hut. The family lives on top of a hill, in a remote area far away from the centre of the Yuncullmass settlement. I was told that the family had sectioned off a small part of the interior of their hut with thick palm leaves, and the girl had been living in that enclosure for a little under one lunar cycle. The members of the Yuncullmass community are sitting quietly in a line about twenty meters away from the hut, waiting expectantly. I notice that most people smile and nod when see me, because I have met them and spoken with them before, but a few residents who had not yet met me look at me sternly, and I feel slightly unwelcome. I am a bit embarrassed that I am completely soaked from the river, and with sweat. A few laughing people ask me if I fell in the river, suggesting that I am not agile or that I have trouble adapting to my jungle surroundings. I explain that I could not see the stepping stones very well in the dark and just waded through the river, and they are amused.
>
> I am happy to see that the chief and his father are already there, having walked ahead of us. I tell the chief quietly that a few people were looking at me sternly and I am a little concerned about that. He assures me that I am completely welcome, but the community is not in the habit of receiving visitors and it is also very uncommon that a foreigner, especially a foreign woman traveling alone, would come to this type of event. Sensing my discomfort, he stands up in front of everyone and publicly welcomes me to the celebration. He asks that I take many pictures of the event and send them back to the community at a later time. Everyone nods in agreement, and I publicly express that I am very thankful to be able to witness and document this celebration. The people seem satisfied with my statement and I am reassured.
>
> As the sun's brilliance creeps over the hill and begins to light up the yard, the chief's father now stands up and tells the small crowd that it is time to begin. They

all call out, in unison, "*Chanene paponapnorave*!" – which means "Come out, ponapnora!" Nothing seems to be happening right away, but soon there is some stirring within the hut. The men call out loudly, "*Huomchatamuenyepa Ponapnorave*!" ("Come say hello to us, Ponapnora!"). I hear a loud cracking sound inside the family's hut, as well as wood and palm leaves being thrown around. Some women are speaking excitedly inside the hut and I understand that they have just successfully broken down the walls of the inner puberty hut. Soon, a group of women consisting of a dozen teenage girls and several older women, emerge from the hut in a long line, holding hands. They are all wearing long traditional robes made out of hand woven cotton, colored by natural dyes. Some of them have intricate designs painted on their faces. They circle around the entire hut, walking slowly. The second girl in line is the *ponapnora*, and her head is covered with a cloth so she can only look down at her toes, and not meet anyone's gaze. Her limbs are paler than those of her companions, because she has not seen any direct sunlight for a month. Her arms have been painted with a blue plant dye called *yeñ,* in a beautiful traditional pattern reserved for the *ponapnora* ritual.

The girl and her team of attendants enter the hut again, and soon come out carrying plastic plates piled high with food for everyone. I am not sure where they got the disposable plastic plates, but it could not have been very easy, what with the remote location of this community and its minimal resources. Nevertheless, the girls use the plastic plates and forks to serve large chunks of roasted meat and cooked manioc roots to all the members of the community. Two types of *co'nes* (a fermented manioc root drink, very popular in the Amazon) are also served in large buckets. All the community members, young and old, take turns drinking from the bucket, using the same cup. The first bucket is filled with tasty and light *co'nes*, and its contents disappear quickly. The *ponapnora* girl brings out another bucket with stronger *co'nes,* and all the men express their approval of its quality and strength. It too is quickly gulped down.

When everyone finishes the meal, the female attendants take away all the plates and then whisk the *ponapnora* girl away up the mountain - it is time to go harvest manioc. A young girl runs over to me, grabs me by the hand and says that I am a woman, so I must go cultivate with the other women too. I gleefully run up the mountain with the girl and catch up with the group of women, who are speaking sternly to the *ponapnora* girl, telling her to walk faster and not to be lazy. She has not moved very much in a month, and I wonder if she is actually weak from sitting down so much in the same place. I watch her thin limbs as we make our way up the mountain. Is she weak? Will she make it? Or has she become really strong? Is her new spiritual strength propelling her forward?

We arrive in the manioc fields, located on the steep slope of a mountain, and the view of jungle valley below is truly majestic. The mountain air is fresh and sweet and the jungle sounds and smells rise from below us. The women remove their traditional robes, hang them neatly on branches, and start chopping the manioc trees down with big machetes, dressed in their second-hand t-shirts and sweatpants. I notice in ironic bewilderment that one of them has a *J'aime*

> *Montréal* shirt on! How did that shirt makes its way to this remote part of Peru? One of the women shows me how to find the manioc roots, then she hands me a machete and I get to work too, striking the soil and revealing manioc roots. They tell the *ponapnora* girl to work faster, and as she silently fills up her basket with manioc roots, the women begin conversing, laughing and making jokes."

It was at this point in the day that I had the opportunity to ask the older women about their past *ponapnora* experiences, and they told me about all the components I outlined in the above sections. I also asked them about why so few girls undergo *ponapnora* these days. One woman stopped chopping for a minute to say, "Most girls today are too afraid to do *ponapnora*. They are afraid of being inside the hut, away from their friends for so long. Most of them love to play volleyball and they hate missing a month of sports. So now, some girls don't say anything to anyone when they have their periods for the first time. They don't tell their mothers and they hide their periods for a long time, and never do *ponapnora*." A few other women laugh about that.

Another woman embarked on a sadder part of the discussion. "After elementary school, many girls go to the city to go to school and to find work as nannies and housekeepers when they are 11 or 12 years old, so they are not in the jungle anymore when they get their first period. In fact, the family only finds out that a girl is a woman when she comes back from the city with a baby. By then, it is too late to do *ponapnora*!" The women do not laugh as much at this thought, because they are all acquainted with the harsh reality of their young daughters having to leave the indigenous communities to go find work elsewhere, because cash barely flows through their communities, where there are few job opportunities. The girls often intend to save money and to go to high school in the city, but they usually come back to their jungle community with one or several city children born out of wedlock. The migration patterns in and out of the Yanesha' communities by children and young adults (as described in Chapter 2) are important contributing

factors to the loss of local traditions, such as the *ponapnora* puberty ritual, and also contribute to the erosion of their indigenous culture and language.

The women go on to discuss that *ponapnora* is going 'out of style' in most Yanesha' communities, because some people see it as an old custom that is no longer a necessary part of modern life. But the women in this community, Yuncullmass, insist that it is crucial for the health and well-being of a Yanesha' woman who lives in the jungle. She learns patience and can withstand hardship easily. She becomes strong, hardy and can endure pain. Her hair and teeth do not fall out, and the woman does not become ill.

When the baskets of manioc were full, we continued the discussion as we descended the mountain. I was told to start getting ready for something I was not expecting: the ritual attacks with the chalanka (*shor)* plant. Here is what I wrote in my field notes:

> The women declare it is time to go find some prickly plants in the jungle. They put on their robes again and we climb down the mountain into the valley to locate the plants. They are spiny, thorny, leafy shrubs are known as *chalanka* in Spanish (or *shor* in Yanesha') and they explain to me that they playfully attack one another with the huge thorny plants, which stops laziness from setting in. "Good for the joints!" says one woman; "It prevents arthritis and it hurts delightfully (*duele rico)*!" says another. "We need the plants to defend ourselves from the men!" says a third, and they all laugh. I begin to understand that there will be a kind of battle game between women and men unfolding shortly, and I am curious yet slightly afraid because the thorns on the plants are so big. We arm ourselves with bunches of these painful plants and head back to the hut. Already my hands are hurting and bleeding from the thorns.
>
> We approach the hut, and we see that men are waiting quietly in the yard with their own chalanka plants. I notice that the *ponapnora* girl scurries off and hides in the hut – I assume it is because she cannot be looked at or touched by men. There is relative silence as the women arrive in the yard, and the two gender groups survey each other. Suddenly, almost out of nowhere, the gleeful game erupts and all the women and men begin attacking each other with the *chalanka*. Boys and girls start chasing each other in mad circles. Two women gang up on an older man and stuff large amounts of prickly leaves down his shirt as he screams and laughs. Two young boys chase an older woman and rub *chalanka* leaves on her legs while she swats them away joyously.

> Soon two teenage boys are chasing me and attacking me with their chalanka plants. I discover how painful the thorns are when they are rubbed onto my neck and fight back viciously. The whole community thinks it's hilarious that I am being attacked but defending myself so fiercely. After about 20 minutes, the game comes to an end. Everyone is covered in giant red welts, but they are smiling and laughing and saying how it was such a good battle. My skin starts swelling up in an allergic reaction to the prickly *chalanka* thorns leaves, and I begin to lament my fate silently. Maybe to survive in this type of environment, one has to adopt a self-punishing attitude, and either become very accepting of pain, or free from attachment to comfort. My hands, arms, neck and face are throbbing and I want to throw myself in the river.

Shortly after the attack of the thorns, the *coshamñats* musical performance began. Men grabbed their drums and began to beat them, creating hypnotic rhythms as they sang, walking around the yard in circles. The women held hands and ran around them in a long line, creating their own specific patterns on the ground, while singing the traditionally appropriate female accompaniment to the songs. I noticed that only the oldest women knew how to sing the songs, and the younger ones feebly imitated them. The *ponapnora* girl alternated between singing and dancing with the women, and serving buckets of the fermented manioc drink to those who were taking a break from dancing. All morning and all afternoon the singing, dancing and drinking continued. The men also played their reed flutes and the beautiful traditional melodies and harmonies of the flutes washed over me. The women allowed me to dance with them and I enjoyed the whirling movement of the line as we ran around the yard barefoot. I attempted to sing with them in their language, letting my voice blend in with theirs. The *ponapnora* girl tirelessly participated in every single song and dance, and always did what people asked of her, avoiding their gaze at all times. By late afternoon, many people were drunk from all the co'nes, and the *ponapnora* girl looks like she is about to collapse after so much running around. The community celebration in Yuncullmass was a success.

I also attended a similar *ponapnora* ceremony and celebration in Loma Linda, the day after the one in Yuncullmass. It was in Loma Linda that I heard the Mellañoʈeñreɕh song being performed, led by Yanesha' elder Justina Quinchuya, with help from Margarita Lopez and Christina Bautista. The beauty and tonal complexity of the song had a very strong impact on me and I began seeking out the song lyrics the very next day. I present the lyrics of Mellañoʈeñreɕh in section 4.7.

4.6. Parallels with Other Puberty Rituals & Ethnographic Analysis

The Yanesha' *ponapnora* ritual resembles the puberty/marriage ritual that was recorded as a common occurrence among Inca nobility during the Inca Empire. In Andean civilizations, women's lives were closely tied to lunar cycles, and the moon (known in the Quechua language as the life-giving goddess *Quilla)* was seen as the mother of all the Incas and the wife of the sun. Similarly, men identified with the sun (the supreme divinity *Inti*). Waisbord (1989) writes that after a girl's first menstruation, in preparation for marriage, she must be locked up in a special stone house, in the company of several nuns. During her seclusion, she must not see a single other soul, *Inti* or *Quilla*. For one full lunar cycle (28 days), she must not eat warm foods, no salt or pepper, and must only eat a little maize and drink cold water. After this rigorous fast and penitence, she emerges, pale and thin, from the house on the dawn of the full moon. She is then led, with a ceremonial procession, to the source of the Coricancha River, where the Temple of the Solar Gold is located. She must then plunge naked into the sacred stone bath, an event observed by several members of the nobility. When she emerges, she puts on a white and red tunic, and the husband receives her with loving tenderness, and they are married (Waisbard 1989: 130-131).

There are several elements that resemble the *ponapnora* Yanesha' rite: a period in darkness symbolic of death, restraint from warm foods and salt, emerging on the dawn of the full moon,

and then symbolic resurrection by marriage to a loving man, who is equated with the sun. However, it must be said that women in Inca society were seen as very powerful beings (Waisbord 1989: 125-147), and the father-child relationship did not seem to characterize most hierarchical relations, as it does in Yanesha' society. Whether the Yanesha' obtained this practice from an Andean civilization, or vice versa, is unknown at the moment.

The Ticuna are another Amazonian people in Peru who are also known to have a women's puberty ritual known as *Pelazon* (which means 'removing hair' in Spanish). It has many similar elements to *ponapnora.* According to SIL linguist Louise Bentley Tanner (1955: 24-25) when a young Ticuna girl comes of age, she is placed in seclusion on a palm-bark floor, constructed across the overhead beams of a house. She stays there for six months, while her family prepares her 'coming-out' celebration. Huge quantities of meat are smoked and many vats of manioc beer are prepared. At the celebration, hundreds of Ticuna guests arrive and everyone is dressed in traditional clothes for the event. Women retrieve the enclosed girl and pull out all the hair around her face, paint her whole body black, and dress her in a special feather outfit along with a headdress that covers her eyes. Then the Ticuna girl must start marching around the house for a full 24 hours, after which the older women of the community hold her down firmly, strip her clothes away and pull out all the hair from her head. She usually passes out from the pain, but when she is fully bald, they revive her, dress her in a new costume and welcome her into the realm of Ticuna womanhood.

The Ticuna example also has many elements resembling *ponapnora,* such as the enclosure, the feast, and the girl's tasks promote the endurance of hardships. Unfortunately Bentley Tanner did not record anything about cultural transmission occurring during the girl's isolation. Further research in Amazonian puberty rites is required to compare *ponapnora* with other rituals. Aikhenvald mentions that female initiation rites are very common in many

communities throughout the Amazon (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1999: 7), much more common that puberty rites for boys. There is a lack of documentation in this area and future research will reveal more similarities and differences among these rites of passage.

Women's menstruation traditions involving hard work, endurance and purification are common among aboriginal peoples as well. For example, Host[37] writes about the *Kinaalda* puberty ceremony that Navajo girls in the United States undergo. They perform strenuous work with the goal of banishing laziness, and are taught by elder women what are their roles as Navajo women, thereby ensuring cultural transmission. *Kinaalda* also involves running a marathon in which the pubescent girl learns that the longer she runs, the longer she lives a life of health and beauty. Host also mentions the Yurok women's ancient coming-of-age ritual, in which the pubescent girl would spend a period of five to ten days in isolation. This time was reserved for fasting, dreaming and daily baths in a sacred pond. Gottlieb and Buckley (*Blood Magic* 1988) also present a series of articles that discuss menstruation rites around the world, and how they serve to empower women, not disempower them. The authors show that Western male researchers were burdened by the concept of 'menstrual taboo' when analyzing indigenous rites of passage. This concept is sometimes projected onto cultures where such taboos are absent. It is therefore important to focus on women's narratives in order to understand the multiple facets that characterize their experiences. The authors emphasize the complex, multidimensional layers of meaning and symbolism in rites of passage, and the possibility of interpreting them in many different ways.

Ethnographic Analysis

[37] See article on 'Female Initiation Rites' from the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies: http://www.shamanism.dk/Artikel - Blessed by the moon.htm

The Yanesha' women's narratives about their *ponapnora* experiences contribute important new material to the literature on Yanesha' women's culture in the context of Amazonian puberty rites. They also provide new perspectives in our understanding of comparative women's health and spirituality. It is interesting to note that Santos-Granero's analysis (1991: 212-218) places the emphasis on describing the relationship between *ponapnora* and marriage. The women who told me about their experiences mentioned nothing about marriage following their rite of passage. I am led to believe that *ponapnora* is no longer tied to marriage, and therefore it has gone through a major shift in social function among the Yanesha'. The circumstances of reaching puberty no longer seem to lead directly to marriage in Yanesha' society.

While Santos-Granero described the *ponapnora* experience as a type of symbolic death for the girl, the Yanesha' women I spoke to described their experience as a strengthening one, not as one resembling death. Santos-Granero writes that the *ponapnora* girl becomes a woman upon emerging when she is given renewing 'life-force' by her awaiting husband. But the Yanesha' women's discourse implies that the girls' newfound strength and endurance *comes from within*, through a combination of fasting and purification with medicinal plants (and in a more traditional context, learning how to weave and sing). It is possible that, seeing as many of his informants were probably men, Santos-Granero's analysis could reflect a traditional male view of the *ponapnora* ritual, one that emphasizes the man's perceived role as the 'renewer'. Did Yanesha' women of the past also view them as 'renewers'? Seeing as marriage is no longer a key component of the ritual, the women's discourse now suggest a very different reality. This raises several other questions: do women still obtain 'life force' or 'cosmic power' from men through other means, and is this a necessary component in Yanesha' society? How have marriage

relationships among the Yanesha' changed over the 20th century? Further study will reveal more on these topics.

Processes of disintegration brought by the outside world are affecting the Yanesha culture, and this is 'especially profound in the realm of religion, ritual, and music' (Smith 1977 : 7). The *ponapnora* ritual once was a key feature in cultural transmission among Yanesha' women. It was involved in preserving art forms such as weaving techniques and the conservation of linguistic heritage in sacred songs, but over time it has practically lost this role. The loss of a ritual like *ponapnora* plays a role in the erosion of Yanesha' linguistic traditions, and therefore in the erosion of the culture and the loss of language. Recording data linked to this ritual will at the very least conserve precious cultural knowledge about this rite of passage, and can be used by future generations to learn more about their ancestors.

4.7. The *Mellañoɬeñreɕh* Song: Lyrics and Analysis of a Women's Sacred Song

As mentioned in section 4.5, I heard the *Mellañoɬeñreɕh* women's song being performed at the *ponapnora* ritual in Loma Linda. As part of the celebration, I was watching the dancing and singing unfold, when suddenly I was struck by an intense desire to dance and sing also. I asked the women if I was allowed to do this, and after consulting amongst themselves, one of them brought me a *cushma* to wear and said that I should dance. The older women began gleefully dragging me out into the yard to dance with them, holding hands and running in swirling patterns all over the yard. At one point, Justina Quinchuya began singing *Mellañoɬeñreɕh* and I had a completely sublime experience hearing this song. I began to investigate the lyrics and meaning of the song the following day and it proved to be a challenging yet fascinating experience to obtain the words and a translation of this song.

The song is imbued with power and ancient symbolism, and women were at first reluctant to teach me the lyrics of the song. The first person I interviewed about it was Christina Bautista, and she agreed to record the song. After the first 4 verses, she abruptly stopped, saying that she forgot the rest of the song. I had the distinct feeling she did not want me to learn very much of the song. As mentioned in section 4.3, for the Yanesha, acquiring musical knowledge is akin to accumulating cosmic power (Smith 1977: 77), and so it is possible that it is normal that the song custodian is reluctant to reveal knowledge very quickly. She advised me to consult Justina Quinchuya, who had initiated the song, and I realized that Justina is probably considered the keeper of the *Mellañoɬeñreɕh* song in that region.

Upon going to Justina's house and speaking with her, she told me to come back later because she needed to think about it before agreeing to record the song. When I returned, her daughter explained to me that the *Mellañoɬeñreɕh* song is very sacred and that it should not be used for the wrong purposes. I explained that it would be for cultural conservation and the more I spoke about valuing and preserving musical heritage, the more she began opening up. She agreed to record as many verses as she could remember, and I ended up with a total of 8 verses. Justina told me that the original song contains 15 verses but she could not recall past the 8th verse.

Transcribing the and translating the song from the recordings proved to be even more difficult. I consulted with five different people and ended up with five translations that converged and diverged on many different levels. In the end, it was a retired Yanesha' teacher named Carlos Huancho from the community of Santo Domingo who helped me reconstruct and put together the following translation. A natural linguist and translator who has been documenting Yanesha' myths for many years, Huancho was able to explain to me that many Yanesha' words contain multiple meanings and can be interpreted in different ways. He also said that some words are archaic and elusive, while other terms sound garbled or like different or related words when they are sung. These factors make transcription almost impossible at times, and it is worsened by

the fact that most of the elders, those who know the ancient songs the best, do not know how to write, and cannot write down the songs themselves, or suggest the correct orthography. Despite all these challenges, with the Huancho's generous help I was able to piece together this interpretation of the lyrics of *Mellañoẽñreẅh:*

Table 11: ***Mellañoẽñreẅh*** **Lyrics.**

verse	**Lyrics in Yanesha'**	**Literal Translation**	**Explanatory Translation**
1	Oten cheña yepaparya	It has been said that our father is there.	We have heard the spirit of the mountain tell us that god exists.
	Yocshamecha' puentañoya	We sing, he is in his sky.	We honor god, who is the master of the skies.
2	Yeya yeya yeya yeya (bis)	*Musical accompaniment*	*Voices of angels?*
3	Yepapar partsesha' (bis)	Our father, the one who has power	God is the most powerful
	Yepaparña partsesha'	Our father, he is the one who has power	God, he is the most powerful
4	Amahuantsoch sotoche'	Until when will you tell us, from up high,	We wait until your eventual return.
	Socshame'tampsapueraño	'you must sing together?	From the sky, you told us to honor you all at once.

	Yepapar ña partsesha'	Our father, he has the power.	Our Father, the most powerful.
	Ayeyaa aeyaa Ayeyaa aeya	*Musical accompaniment*	
5	Yepapar ña partsesha'	Our father, he has the power.	God is the most powerful.
	Yepapar partsesha' puentaño (bis)	Our father, who has the power, is in his sky.	God, the most powerful, is master of the sky.
6	Poñoch pesayche'ña	The truth is, the one over there might be your brother,	It is true that your brother is far away and we are not sure who he is.
	Nesaya cornesha	My brother is the chief	You, my brother, are the chief.
	Corneshapnorya	I am the wife of the chief.	I am your wife
	partseshapnorya (bis)	I am the wife of the powerful one.	I am the wife of he who has power.
(6)	Ayeya ayeya ayeya ayeyaa aaayeyaa aaeya (bis)	*Musical accompaniment*.	
7.	Oche' etsothuerra yepapar	Now, in this place, he has arrived, our father.	God has just arrived but we cannot see him.
	Ayeyaa ayeya ayeyaa ayeya	*musical accompaniment*	
	Ahuot etsothuerra yepapar	Already, in this place,	God is now among us

	Ahuot etsothuerra yepapar	Already, in this place, our father has arrived	God is now among us
	Ayeya ayeya ayeya aayeya (bis)	*musical accompaniment*	
8.	Yahuotñacho poterro	Now, it is certain, he is in front of us.	We agree that God is among us.
	Poterroña nesaya	He is before us, my brother.	My brother is before us.
	Amach muetsoñ ñenaye	Not in silence	We will not receive God in silence on Earth, his temple. We will sing.
	Yepyapuerrñañe yepapaña poprahuo	We receive our father himself in his temple	
	Ayeya ayeya ayeya ayeya	musical accompaniment	

While analysis of the song lyrics is preliminary at this time, because I am not a Yanesha' language expert, it is clear that the song is meant to be sung by a woman, and that she is calling out and honoring the higher powers of a celestial being. She alternates between calling him her brother (verses 6 and 8) and her father (verses 3, 4, 5, 7, 8). The deity is clearly also her husband, since she declares that she is his wife (verse 6). In this song the deity-husband lives in the sky above the earthly plane, and the singer is awaiting his return, beckoning him with song. The vocal ritual is the primary way to beckon and celebrate the return of the deity. She emphasizes the greatness and (cosmic) power associated with this higher being (verses 1, 3, 4, 5) and allies herself with his power by stating that she is married to him.

The song has a curious resemblance to the theory put forth by Santos-Granero in Section 4.1. The woman singing the song appears to be the child-wife or sister-wife of the father-husband deity, which exemplifies the concept of 'paternal love' that was discussed previously. This song was performed at a *ponapnora* celebration and it sounds like it could be one of the remnants of the traditional association of the *ponapnora* ritual with marriage. Further research in this domain will reveal more about women's songs and their ties to past traditions.

CONCLUSION

Fieldwork among the Yanesha' people revealed a very fascinating culture that is on the fringes of two worlds, the Andes and the Amazon. The spatio-linguistic context of the southcentral Andean Amazon and the position of the Yanesha' language within the Arawak language family places Yanesha' at the forefront of grammatical contact with many different linguistic groups, in the past and present. More in-depth analysis of the language needs to be made to clarify its internal position within the Arawak family. Many factors are currently leading to the erosion of the Yanesha' culture and language, including acculturation, child migration and the employment mobility.

The *ponapnora* female puberty ritual plays an interesting role in cultural transmission among Yanesha' women, and in the preservation of Yanesha' linguistic heritage, but this tradition is also being lost. The gradual disappearance of *ponapnora* is a microcosm of the larger-scale disappearance of Yanesha' culture in our modern era. Future research will reveal more about women's culture and the role of rites shaping the history of their traditions and knowledge. I would like to document other Amazonian women's initiation rituals in the future, in order to compare them with *ponapnora.*

I am also very interested in pursuing future research among the Yanesha' to examine the impacts of multi-national corporations on their territories. In particular, I would like to study the effects of these corporations on the Yanesha' language, to see the ways in which companies are contributing (or not) to language loss in the region.

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Online Resources

- *El Instituto del Bien Comun* Website : An excellent organization protecting the rights of Amazonian communities, with a large library of resources : http://www.ibcperu.org/

- My blog, *Stories from South America*, contains stories and letters related to my fieldwork. http://story-offerings.blogspot.com/

- Annette Host & Jonathan Horwitz's *Scandianvian Center for Shamanic Studies* as a section on Female Initiation Rites. Their website is http://www.shamanism.dk/