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HISTORICAL MYTHOLOGIES AND MYTHICAL HISTORIES: THE EXAMPLE OF UNI (CASHIBO) ETHNOHISTORY

Erwin H. Frank¹

ABSTRACT - *Taking seriously the idea of Foucault and others of a functional compatibility between myth-making and historiography, this essay offers an 'historiographic' interpretation of a myth that was tape-recorded by the author in 1982 among the Uni (also known as Cashibo-Cacataibo), an Indian group of Eastern Peru. I find the 'truth-value' of the myth as 'history' for them to be based on the Uni's present-day cultural constitutedness and argue that, in this sense, our history and their myth are, indeed, equivalent.*

KEY WORDS: Uni (*Cashibo-Cacataibo*) Indians, Eastern Peru, History, Ethnohistory, Myth.

RESUMO - *A partir da idéia de Foucault e outros sobre a compatibilidade funcional entre a fabricação de mitos e a historiografia, o ensaio oferece uma interpretação historiográfica de um mito que foi gravado pelo autor em 1982 entre os Uni (também conhecidos como Cashibo-Cacataibo). O valor de verdade do mito como história para os Uni está baseado em como o grupo é culturalmente constituído nos dias atuais. Argumenta-se que, dessa maneira, nossa história e os mitos Uni são equivalentes.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Índios Uni (*Cashibo-Cacataibo*), Perú, História, Etnohistória, Mito.

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INTRODUCTION

Lately, the Western perception of the relationship between history and myth seems to have come full circle to its pre-18th century origins – even though not without a characteristic twist. Because, if – as Pagden (1982:194) claims – most 17th century Western thinkers really regarded non-Western mythology as a kind of imperfect historiography ‘distorted’ by its oral transmittance, nowadays many declare Western historiography the product of just *our own* particular version of mytho-praxis (Foulcault 1979, 1980; Certeau 1986; Said 1979; among others), whose prime distinction from its non-Western alternative is said to be that it makes use of written sources.²

In this new perspective, both the ‘mythical’ character of Western historiography and the ‘historiographic’ character of (many) myth reflect an ‘equivalence’ of their ‘function’ in Western or non-Western society respectively. Both ‘history’ and myth, we are told, are written or told, and re-written and re-told differently in a variety of ever changing contexts, not so much to capture the objective truth of bygone times but, rather, to ‘make sense’ of the present conditions. That is: both myth and historiography³ ‘explain’ to those who write, tell, read or listen to them how the present has

² In between these two positions lays the long ‘night’ of anthropological treatment of myth and history as two alternative and incommensurable *types of consciousness*, from evolutionary misrepresentation of myth as products of “primitive” reasoning and logic(s) to Lévi-Strauss’ famous equation of (our) history with “hot”, and mythology with “cold” societies (1966:234). As Janet Chernela rightly remarked: “The severe shortcoming inherent in this approach is that it neglects the relationship of myth and history.” (in Hill 1988:35).

³ Even though a somewhat awkward terminological distinction, I consider it absolutely indispensable for the sake of my argument to differentiate ‘history’ from ‘historiography’, following a lead from Stern (1992:6). When talking about ‘history’, I refer to the actual stream of past events while, when talking about ‘historiography’, I refer to ‘texts’ written by (professional Western) historiographers that claim to give a ‘true’ account of that stream of events. Finally, when talking about ‘historiographic myth’, I refer to a non-Western text that claims the same.

come to be what it seems to be at the moment. Ultimately, we are told, 'their' myth and 'our' historiography are but an 'instrument' designed and constantly re-designed by the people who 'remember' it, to enable them to act upon and within their presence by assuring themselves the well-foundedness of what they believe to be the case. In the absence of such an instrumentally constructed past, it is said, people could never face their presence *actively*.

Up to now, the implications of this perspective, and its fruitfulness as orientation for empirical studies in the social sciences, have been discussed theoretically and tested empirically primarily in relation to the history-side of its central functional equation⁴. In this essay, I will test its implications and fruitfulness for our anthropological task to make sense of at least *some* 'myth'⁵. To do so, I will – initially – simply 'confront' what one specific group of Amazonian Indians asured me to be the very 'truth' of their past with 'our' (latest) version of that 'truth' as exposed, for example, in the works of Lehnertz (1974); Myers (1974); Santos (s.d.), and some of my own publications (Frank 1987, 1990, 1995)⁶. That confrontation will allow us to identify certain 'facts',

⁴ Specifically in relation to the 'mythical' character of most national and some 'ethnic' histories. For example: Anderson (1983); Hobsbawm & Ranger (eds. 1983); Herzfeld (1982); Fox (1985); Hanson (1989).

⁵ I have been inspired to write this essay by many books and essays published throughout the last decade which, in one way or the other, challenge the conventional view of the relationship between history, historiography, and myth (for example: Sahlin 1985; Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Hulm 1986). The most direct stimulus came from the book edited by Hill (1988). For their surprising similarity in intention and many details I should mention the essays of Guss (1986) and Hugh-Jones (1986), even though I got to admit that I had to be reminded of both by the anonymous reviewers of *American Ethnologist*. Finally I would like to cite the works of Urton (1985), Basso & Sherzer (1990), Cipoletti et al. (1991) and Muartorio (Ed. 1994) all of which have influenced the view expressed in this essay.

⁶ Let me be clear from the start: the aim of that confrontation is *not* to 'correct' or to 'improve' one of those alternative visions, nor – least of all – to eventually show one 'superior' to the other. Its sole aim is to illustrate in which concrete sense both 'their' myth and 'our' historiography can, indeed, be considered 'functionally compatible' versions of what ever might 'actually' have happened in eastern Peru during the last four centuries or so.

'constellations' and/or 'processes' that seem to (re-) appear in both but also to highlight fundamental differences and even contradictions between them. I will then try to account for those similarities and the differences by relating what seems 'strange' or even 'erronous' about the myth *as history* to the present-day context and 'self-image' of my informants, arguing that the 'truth-value' of those details *for them* derives directly from the particularities of their actual cultural constitutedness.

AN 'HISTORIOGRAPHIC' MYTHOLOGY

The collection of myths or *Bana*⁷, part of which I am going to analyze in this article, was tape-recorded between 1980 and 1984 in *Santa Marta*, an Indian village located in the Eastern Peru. The inhabitants of this village belong to a 'tribal' group I have elsewhere called the *Uni* (meaning 'man' or 'people'), who speak one of approximately twenty languages of the Panoan linguistic family distributed within the Peruvian, Brazilian and Bolivian states. I have recently published the whole collection of myth in a bi-lingual (*Cashibo/Cacataibo*-Spanish) edition in Quito, Ecuador (Frank et al. 1990) and, therefore will include here only a rough summary of one of them. The thirteen texts included in my 1990-publication constitute, of course, only a small fraction of the *Uni*'s oral tradition⁸. However, they represent a very special part of that whole. These accounts relate to what the *Uni* themselves define as

⁷ "Word," "talk" or "story" in *Cashibo/Cacataibo*, language spoken by the *Uni*, a western Amazonian indigenous group, occupying the head waters of the *Aguaytía* and *Zungaru-Yacu* Rivers. See map.

⁸ Another important part of this tradition has been published in the Ph.D.Thesis of Dr. Lila Wistrand-Robinson (1970) on the folklore of the same people.

their *history*, using this concept in the surprisingly 'Western' sense of a series of events arranged along linear time-scale.

The totality of that 'history' can be sub-divided into three major parts or eras. The first begins with the creation of the world by *Bari* (the Sun) and ends when all animals finally acquire their shapes and habits as a consequence of a war they wage against some primordial humans over the possession of fire and the knowledge of cultivation. The prime function of all *Bana* referring to this epoch of *Uni* history seems to be a straight forward explanation of the reasons and actual 'forms' of existence of all elements, living and non-living, of any contemporary significance for this indigenous group – including their own physique. It will be of relevance to our argument that the geographic location in which *Bari* is said to have created the first human being is identified explicitly as somewhere far *outside* actual *Uni* territory on the banks of a 'Big River' (*Keoka*) which – only some years ago – was still equated clearly with the *Ucayali*, but now is considered to have been the Amazon River itself.

The second era of *Uni* ethno-history takes place in the same geographic area. The central event of this era is the sudden appearance, and no less sudden disappearance, among the *Uni* of a mythical figure called the *Inca*, distinguished by its knowledge of how to fabricate Western, industrially manufactured goods: matches, steel axes, and even guns. Finally, the third and last era begins sometime during the 19th century and has not yet come to any definite end. This last era is marked by a single very painful process that those who experienced it describe as the 'pacification of the bad-men.'⁹ In trying to confront this mythological rendering of *Uni* history with the bits and pieces known about it in occidental

⁹ I have published regarding this process in: Meyers & Volland (eds. 1990:227-251) and, lately, in Frank (1995).

historiographic tradition, I shall concentrate specifically on the second era (dominated by the *Inca*). Thus, a short summary of what my informants told me about those intermediate times is indispensable at this point.

THE INCA MYTH

One day, an *Inca* (indeed, only one of many the *Uni* knew) 'brings himself into being' within a sack or basket that hangs from the rafter of an *Uni* ancestor's communal hut. Surprisingly, the inhabitants realize immediately the transcendental importance of this auto-creation and, consequently, receive the *Inca* with all respect. But, the *Inca* finds the hut of the *Uni* somehow unfit for the creative feat he wants to realize (the fabrication of occidental goods) and decides to build a village better suited somewhere farther downstream. To get there, he turns a rafter into a steam-ship and orders everyone to embark. While most *Uni* ancestors follow the *Inca*'s order without hesitations, two elderly women are so afraid of the huge waves and rocks of the 'Big River', or, alternatively, distrustful of the *Inca*'s miraculous technology, that they invent some trivial pretext and, against the will of the *Inca* and all their compatriots, stay behind when everyone else leaves for down-stream. The husbands and sons of the two females (who – for some unknown reason – get stuck with them) find the whole episode fairly inconsequential at first, since (shortly before leaving) the *Inca* promises to come back soon and to lead them down river too.

But, for a reason unknown to us, the return of the *Inca* gets delayed and, when he finally does return, an adopted son (*Maricashenayu*¹⁰) of one of the two couples kills him 'out of

¹⁰ A nickname referring to the curved back of the Amazonian rodent (*Brow Agouti*) locally called *añuje* (*Dasyprocta variegata*).

jealousy'. When the Uni discover *Maricashenayu's* crime, they lure *Maricashenayu* on some far off dancing-ground where they kill him by pushing him into a huge fire. But, to everybody's surprise, the ancestors of the actual *Conibo* suddenly rise from the very ashes of *Maricashenayu's* bones in such numbers, that the *Uni* soon have to give up all hope of killing them all. 'Ashamed' they decide to leave the mythic space of their tribe's creation to the *Conibo* forever and, to track upriver the *Aguaytía* to where their descendants still live today.

A FIRST STEP TOWARDS AN ANALYSIS

Allow me to preface the following remarks on this myth with regards to a much too convenient determination of the *Inca's* historic identity.

It has by now been reasonably well documented that not only the *Uni*, but also many other indigenous groups of the central *montaña* of eastern Peru possess myths that detail encounters between their ancestors and some cultural heroes, called 'Incas' (Bardales 1979; Lathrap et al. 1985; also: Roe 1982, 1988; among others). Among the eastern neighbors of the *Uni*, the *Shipibo-Conibo*, those heroes are of the classic type since in the end, they hand fire over to men. On the other hand, among the *Campa* and *Amuesha*, who live to the south of the *Uni* and possibly maintained at least *some* contact with the central Andes, 'Inca'-stories clearly play with the antinomy between high mountain areas versus the lowland tropical Amazonia, hierarchical social organization (state) versus an acephalic or 'tribal' organization, and 'contracted' (i.e. political) versus kin relationships, and so forth (Santos, s.d.:285ff.). Still, even in the *Campa-Amuesha* case, an all too simple identification between the 'Incas' as described in their

myths and those historic rulers of a nearby pre-Columbian empire seems unacceptable to me.

It is, of course, not a causality that so many tribal groups of lowland eastern Peru¹¹ tell stories about mythical personalities they call 'Inca'. This is especially true, as pre-Columbian trade and other relations between these Amazonian groups and the pre-Hispanic high *Andes* to their south and west are now quite satisfactorily documented in archeological finds (Lathrap 1970; DeBoer 1981). Still, at least in the *Uni* case, I am convinced that whenever they talk about the *Inca* (and a lot of talking about him goes on among the *Uni*), they do *not* refer to some 'historic' Indian emperor of some five hundred years ago, whose existence they may or may not have come to know about, nor to some highly improbable encounter that such emperor might have had with their ancestors. As I see it, they are talking about a completely different type of people, although no less 'historic' than *Atahualpa* or *Pachacutec*.

A first hint as to their identity is offered by their localization within the mythical space as outlined by the *Bana* itself. As mentioned above, we are explicitly told that the *Uni*-land of origin where the *Inca* finally brings himself into being, is not at all a mountainous area to the south-east of the actual territory of their tribe but the middle course of the 'Big River', which the present-day *Uni* identify with the Amazon. And, in the course of the myth itself, this spacial association of the *Inca* gets steadily further removed from the *Andes*. In search of a some better village site the *Inca* and his *Uni* companions actually travel *downriver*, that is, to somewhere

¹¹ Among others: The *Uni* and the *Shipibo-Conibo*, the *Piro*, *Cashinahua* and *Amahuaca*, as well as both the *Campa* and the *Amuesha*.

far north of present day Uni territory¹². Up to now, there does not exist even the slightest bit of what a Western historian would be ready to accept as evidence, indicating that any of the forefathers of the *Uni* have ever inhabited the middle or lower reaches of the *Ucayali* in the last five hundred years or so. On the contrary, archaeological finds and historical sources from the 17th century onwards clearly indicate that the fertile alluvial plains on both sides of that river were, until quite recently, virtually monopolized by the powerful *Cocama* chiefdom, in its lower course, and the no less powerful *Conibo* in its upper reaches (Grohs 1974; Lehnertz 1974; Myers 1974). How are we to explain then the insistence of the *Uni* on having actually *originated* in the very *Ucayali/Amazon* valley?

THE UNI IN WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

There does, of course, exist a quite close relationship between *some* of the current indigenous inhabitants of the *Ucayali* Valley and the *Uni*, namely, between the *Uni* and so-called *Shipibo-Conibo*. Both the *Shipibo-Conibo* and the *Uni* speak Panoan languages which, to a certain extent, are still mutually intelligible. Still, despite this intimate *linguistic* and, most probably, also a close genetic interrelationship, the *cultures* of the two groups could hardly be more different. While the *Shipibo-Conibo* possess relatively stable and large local groups whose members exhibit a life-style that

¹² True enough, all outstanding characteristics of the mythical homelands, as described by present-day *Uni* narrators, are clearly taken from their *current* living space, and do not resemble the lower *Ucayali* or *Amazon* environment. There are, for example, huge rocks in that mythical "Big River" of the *Uni*, a feature completely unknown in the *Amazon* floodplain. Furthermore there are high mountains nearby. But all this cannot distract from the fact that the *Uni* are very explicit in placing their primordial history (from their creation as a people to the appearance/disappearance of the *Inca*) to the north-east, and not to the south or west of their actual territory.

intimately reflects the specific conditions of their riverine and flood-plain environment, the *Uni* are typical Amazonian 'backlanders' whose small local groups live a simple, semi-nomadic life in the deep interiors of the forest¹³. Both of these facts – the close linguistic relatedness, and the considerable cultural differences between *Conibo-Shipibo* and the *Uni* – are explained in a thorough reconstruction of the history of the ethnic differentiation that has taken place in eastern Peru during approximately the last three centuries.

As late as the 17th century, the so-called *Pampa del Sacramento*, a 150-mile stretch of rolling *hinterland* in between the eastern-most Andean mountain range (*Cordillera Azul*) and the *Ucayali* flood-plain, was still densely populated by speakers of various Pano dialects. These dialect-groups were further subdivided in innumerable local groups only slightly culturally differentiated among themselves. These people were indeed the forefathers of *both*

¹³ The remarkable environmental differences between the *Ucayali* basin and – specifically – the Western interior of the *Pampa del Sacramento* will play a central role in the argument to follow. This does not mean that I am unaware of the remarkable macro- and micro-regional variation within Amazonia at large that has recently been described, nor that I consider the striking differences between *Shipibo/Conibo* and *Uni* culture and life-style (compare, for example: Behrens 1984, Bergman 1980 and Frank 1995) to be a simple 'adaptive responses' to their respective environments. The relative 'poorness' or 'simplicity' of *Uni* culture in comparison to *all* their neighbors (for example: surprisingly crude and fragile pottery – nowadays completely replaced by either metal pots or *Shipibo-Conibo* trade wares – , lack of the canoe and fishing nets, absence of *Ayahuasca* (*Banisteriosis caapi*) centered shamanism, *masato*, and *tobacco*, etc.) is most likely the result of 300 years of systematic persecution (and concomitant 'cultural impoverishment') and not a 'response' to any specificity of their environment. Still, whoever traveled the 150 mile road between the *Puente del Aguaytia* (Western border of *Uni*-territory) and *Pucallpa*, can not but be impressed by the striking ecological difference between the *Pampa* interior and the *Ucayali*-floodplain – specifically with regards to the size and frequency of flat alluvial bottom lands which *both the Uni and the Shipibo-Conibo* regard as the only agriculturally productive environments. Whether this is seen as a consequence of cultural predilection or an ecological 'adaption', the fact is that the small size of their local group, extremely low overall density, and the highly migratory lifestyle of the *Uni* is intimately related to the infrequency with which that resource is found throughout their territory.

the actual *Shipibo-Setebo* and the *Uni*, but not of the *Conibo*¹⁴. Up to the middle of the 18th century, this undifferentiated mass of primordial *Pampa* dwellers found itself completely locked up in their back-stage living space, limited by the wall of the eastern-most Andes to the west, and by the much superior forces of the warlike *Cocama-Cocamilla* and *Conibo* chiefdoms to the north, east and south-east. The later were organized into inheritable hierarchies, and occupied city-like population centers of a thousand or more inhabitants, thus having no difficulty in effectively excluding the egalitarian *Pampa* dwellers from any access to the rich resources of the *Ucayali* river's alluvial plains. Intense internal competition over always meager resources fueled endemic war in the *Pampa*, dividing its inhabitants over and over again into extremely small, highly mobile local groups, or into small clusters of allied local groups, pitted against each other. This debilitating centrifugal dynamic was intensified by constant attacks carried out by the highly superior *Cocama* and, later, by the *Conibo* who, on a regular basis, entered the *Pampa* in search of women and 'slaves'¹⁵.

During the second half of the 17th century, this lamentable state of affairs ameliorated slightly for the *Pampeños* when the *Cocama* suddenly disappeared from the lower *Ucayali* as a result of catastrophic epidemics and a major resettlement program initiated among the survivors by some Jesuit missionaries of the *Mainas* province on the upper Amazon (Figuerola *et al.* 1986). Even though, in

¹⁴ I have treated the history of that ethnogenetic process that separated the *Shipibo* (and *Setebo*) from the *Uni* and, finally, merged the *Shipibo* culturally with the *Conibo* to the point that they are, actually, hardly separable in some detail (Frank 1990, 1991). See there for documentary evidence on which the following interpretation is based.

¹⁵ Until the 19th century, the *Cocama* and *Conibo* practice described as "slavery" in missionary documents seems to imply the simple integration of captives into *Cocama-Conibo* society. See note 17 for more details on this point.

the aftermath of these events, some *Pampeños* finally *did* succeed in occupying terrain in the middle and the lower courses of the main Western confluences of the *Ucayali*, *Conibo* dominance over all the *Ucayali* valley, up to the *Tambo*, still kept the vast majority from occupying any of the valley's rich alluvial soils, through to the first half of the 18th century. It was only in the middle of the 18th century, that the balance of power in this corner of the Amazon rainforest suddenly tilted decidedly in favor of at least *some* of the *Pampa* inhabitants as a consequence of the arrival of Franciscan missionaries from the west.

The *Pampeños* were guided by these monks down to the *Ucayali* and herded into half a dozen huge mission stations. Most of them rapidly succeeded in adapting themselves to this habitat by adopting the culture and life-style of what up to then had been their most deadly enemies, the *Conibo*¹⁶. The Franciscan fathers classified all their new converts as either '*Setebo*', to the north, or '*Shipibo*', from the *Rio Pichis* south, even though these terms seem to have identified only one or, at best, a few local sub-groups of the formerly *Pampa* Indians before the missionary's arrival.

MYTHIC 'REFLECTIONS'

As I see it, the *Uni Inca*-myth basically reconstructs the triangular constellation of inter-ethnic relationships that resulted from the historic processes I have just outlined. It declares that constellation responsible

¹⁶ The *Conibo*, of course, did everything to entice the Franciscans into their core territory on the upper *Ucayali*. When, for various logistic reasons, that turned out to be impossible, they assured themselves a share of the "gifts" that the missionaries managed to bring constantly from the Andean highlands (basically, machetes and steel axes) by treating (*Shipibo/Setebo*) mission station Indians as their allies, and visiting them regularly (see below).

for what the creators of this myth must have experienced as a situation of extreme despair.

The *Uni*-myth insists that to the north-east of their present-day territories, somewhere on the lower course of the Big River, or *Ucayali*, live the descendants of the lucky ones who followed the *Inca* downriver. Most *Uni*, nowadays, believe that, after a few days travel in his magical steamship, the *Inca*, and those people who followed him, somehow created a huge communal hut within an '*Inca-mountain*' that, as all my *Uni* informants agreed, can still be seen at the very edge of the lowermost course of the 'Big River'. Here, the *Inca*, before leaving again up river, either taught those collateral *Uni* his magic art, or, alternatively, amassed his 'good things' for them in such quantity that today their descendants are still able to exchange them with those *mestizo* traders (*regatones*) that carry those things into the *Pampa* interior.

To the east of the *Uni*, on the other hand, in the middle and upper course of the *Ucayali*, the *Conibo* are, in reality and myth, those too-numerous-to-kill-them-all descendants of the 'jealous' *Maricashenayu*. Finally, to the west of the *Conibo* we have the *Uni* themselves, that is the descendants of those people who, instead of following the *Inca* downriver, 'evacuated' the *Ucayali* valley floor, so as not to have to live among the 'descendants' of the murderer of their cultural hero. There is, of course, some bitter irony, especially in this last twist of the *Uni*'s own rendering of their tribe's history, in as far as they never seem to have had any real choice between staying in the *Ucayali* flood-plain, and retreating into the *Pampa* interior: if they had ever been given such a choice, I am sure, they would never have chosen the later.

The extreme south-Western corner of the *Pampa del Sacramento* that is the homeland of the *Uni*, is characterized by high year-out humidity, small, often rocky, unnavigable rivers that cut through an extremely rugged terrain of steep hills and extensive swamps. But, what for the *Uni* themselves constitutes clearly the prime disadvantage of their tribal territory is that only rarely is there a small spots of alluvial soils to be found, the only type of soil they consider agriculturally productive (Frank 1983). Furthermore, at least under the condition of their present day hunting technology, fish and prey seem more difficult to encounter and kill in this particular corner of the Amazon than in many other parts¹⁷. Why, then, did the *Uni* actually continue living in such an inhospitable environment for so long? Obviously, something (or someone) kept them there, and this something/someone was, of course, the 'evilness' of the *Conibo* (*Maricashenayu*).

Historiography teaches us that, well into the 18th century, the *Uni* still constituted part and parcel of that countless number of fairly independent local groups dispersed throughout the *Pampa del Sacramento*. Most probably, they had already been bullied into that most inhospitable south-Western part of that *Pampa* that their descendants still occupy today, even though for this we do not have any direct evidence. The only thing we know for certain is that those who became the *Uni* during the last century were definitely *not* among that fortunate *Pampeño* majority that, sometime around 1750, under

¹⁷ This judgement is based on a comparison of reported prey encounter frequencies and quantitative out-put of Santa Marta *Uni* hunting and fishing, with that of the *Shipibo* (Bergman 1974, 1980), *Achuar* (Ross 1976) and other indian hunters through-out Amazonia (Frank 1989). I should add that those (many!) *Uni* who ever traveled outside their territory have no doubts about the ecological disadvantages of their homelands, - especially in comparison with those of their *Conibo-Shipibo* neighbors to the east. This does not mean that *Uni* do not 'love' their homelands. It simply means that they are keenly aware that "...there are plenty of fish in the Ucayali!"

the guidance of Franciscan monks, finally managed to leave the *Pampa* and settled on the alluvial plains of the *Ucayali* basin. As stated earlier, the people who accomplished that feat soon reorganized into tribal groups we now know as *Setebo* and *Shipibo*. But, the same process of ethno-genesis that on the one hand created the *Setebo-Shipibo* as a tribe, on the other set into motion a collateral process of ethnic transformations in the *Pampa* interior that resulted in an other 'tribal' group in Western Amazonia, until then non-existent: the '*Cashibo*'.

THE 'HISTORIOGRAPHY' OF A MYTH

The early 18th century mass-migration of people from the *Pampa* interior to the shore of the *Ucayali* and their subsequent cultural transformation (based on the *Conibo* model) into the actual *Shipibo* (plus the now supposedly extinct *Setebo*) did not alleviate much the difficult situation in which those *Pampeños* found themselves who stayed behind. On the contrary, the only recently formed *Setebo* and *Shipibo* soon felt obliged to block off the ever growing tide of new migrants from the forest interior on both sides of the *Ucayali* by using the same tactics that their former arch-enemies (and now, closest allies), the *Conibo*, had so effectively used against them. To discourage the inland people from even trying to contact the missionaries, combined forces of *Setebo*, *Shipibo*, and *Conibo* were sent annually up all navigable siderivers of the *Ucayali* to attack whatever backland people they were able to find.

But, there seems to have been one major difference between this new wave of violence of flood-plain Indians against their backland brethren and the former *Cocama-Conibo* practice. As I see it, the *Setebo-Shipibo* and *Conibo* of the 18th and 19th century did not so

much attack the backlanders to keep them from seizing a share of their rich natural resources. They basically attacked to keep those backlanders off the always insufficient supply of 'gifts' (in the form of knives, machetes, axes and other foreign goods) proportioned to them by their missionary friends.

Each year, at least one big supply expedition had to connect the Franciscan headquarter of *Ocopa* in the central *Andes*, or its most important Andean outpost in *Huánuco*, with their far-off mission stations on the middle and lower *Ucayali*. Besides cloth, books, letters and wine for the celebration of mass, these expeditions had to supply the missionaries in the field with an absolutely indispensable stock of steel-wares as, without such wares, the monks found it impossible to lure any Indians into obedience (Lehnertz 1974:295ff.). But, in that period, bringing any goods whatsoever from the heights of the Andes down into the heart of the Amazon jungle was an extraordinary task. So much so, that nearly every other year the Franciscans failed to accomplish it. This meant, of course, that the total amount of steel goods the fathers managed to import into the *Ucayali* basin were never sufficient to satisfy the insatiable demand among their proselytes. Competition was fierce and called for extraordinary measures on the part of those who wanted to maintain their 'right' of first choice.

It was in this context, that the already missionized Indians, anxious to monopolize the Franciscan goods for themselves, finally started to rely upon two complementary tactics. First, they systematically scared away any uncontacted Indians from the vicinity of the missions by means of yearly slaving-raids into the *Ucayali's* backlands. Second, they inhibited their missionary fathers from even trying to reach even more uncontacted backland groups by creating a 'black legend' that defined such groups as the worst

sort of barbarians imaginable: aggressive *cannibals*¹⁸, not restrained by any sense of morality and actually driven by no other intention than to do harm to any outsider stupid enough to enter their realm¹⁹. With this, we can now return to the interpretation of our myth.

¹⁸ One of the anonymous reviewers of an earlier version of this essay expressed his doubts as to the *Indian* origin of that legend suggesting it "equally if not more plausible to suspect that the Franciscan missionaries created the 'black legend' in part to justify slaving." Even though that possibility cannot be excluded, there does exist some documentary evidence for the point of view taken in this essay. First of all, active slave raiding and trading by Franciscan missionaries seems to have always been extremely rare. From the middle of the 18th century onwards, the Franciscans clearly stimulated *some Shipibo-Conibo* slave-raiding by their habit of 'buying' young male slaves from these Indians to 'raise' them in their convents. But, slave-trading was clearly *not* a 'business' of any economic importance, neither for the Franciscans nor for the *Shipibo-Conibo*, until well into the last half of the past century. As indicated above, until then, the latter groups (as before them the *Cocama*) seem to have simply 'integrated' those people they captured from other tribes into their own. Second, our documentary evidence suggests that, under 'normal' circumstances, the missionaries did not easily believe stories about 'cannibals' and other 'monstrous' beings that they were told by their proselytes. As I have shown elsewhere (Frank 1978), it is mostly with relation to some straightforward attack on one or some of them, that third party information on 'habitual cannibalism' of the attacking individual or group get pinned down as 'proven fact' in the missionaries' scriptures. Finally, at least one Franciscan eye-witness confirms my suspicion as to the origin of the 'black legend' of *Uni* (and other's) cannibalism. In his "Carta y Diario" of 1792 father Dueñas states that: "[The Indians of *Sarayacu*] ... son sumamente codiciosos en orden a las heramientas, y sienten mucho que los PP. reparten hachas, machetes, abalorios y otras frioleras a los que vienen a visitarlos, y se valen de varios medios para disuadir a los PP. de que hagan semejantes regalos, segun experimentamos en una ocasión, en que los PP. prevenían hachas y machetes para ir a amistarse y reducir a pueblo a varios infieles que vivían dispersos. Apenas lo supieron, se valieron de tales medios y usaron de tales ardides, que no se logró por entonces el efecto deseado." (Izaguirre 1822-29, VIII:249) The 'infidels' father Dueñas refers to in this paragraph were the *Remo* (living to the east of *Sarayacu*) and the 'medios' and 'ardiles' that the *Sarayacu* Indians used to keep the Franciscans from going there were – among others – accusations of cannibalism, later explicitly rejected by Padre Plaza, who – a few years later – *did* contact and 'reduce' the *Remo* (Frank 1987).

¹⁹ There was some hard evidence of *Uni* aggression that the *Shipibo-Conibo* could point to. Ever since learning about the 'good things of the *Inca*' the *Uni*, like anyone else in Amazonia, coveted them. Over and over, some of their bravest gathered tiny groups of men and led them on a suicidal trip, often over a hundred miles away from their communal homes, down to the lower reaches of the *Pachitea*, or even to the banks of the *Ucayali* itself. Here, they would try hard (though nearly always in vain) to contact missionaries and other river-travelers they were able to spot, begging them for 'goods of the *Inca*,' in exchange for food. When such peaceful strategies failed to produce results, these desperate groups sometimes even risked launching a surprise attack on fishing or hunting *Conibo-Shipibo*. Such desperate attacks only served to reinforce the bad reputation of the 'Cashibo cannibals' among the missionaries and other non-indian travelers in this part of Amazon. Indeed, our sources on the *Uni* before their late "pacification" in 1930, are full of sometimes page-long descriptions of their monstrous barbarity, based on their author's one or two encounters at most with half a dozen representatives of this group, in some far-off stretch of the *Pachitea* or *Ucayali* river.

Evidently, the *Bana* about the *Inca* tries to account for the very 'real' difficulty the *Uni* faced during at least the last 250 years to relate themselves somehow to the very source of those magical metal tools, that started to trickle down into their territories from the 18th century onwards. The *Uni* had no idea whatsoever as to where these magical wares came from, nor how they could possibly have been fabricated. They had to believe them to be created by some magical force, and the *Inca*-figure of our myth is the very incarnation of that belief.

As we have seen, *Uni* ethno-historiography (or *Uni* mythology, if one prefers) places the source of those 'good things of the *Inca*', quite correctly, to the northeast of their home-territory, that is, somewhere on the lower *Ucayali* where, indeed, *Sarayacu*, the center of the Franciscan missions in the *Ucayali* basin since the middle of the 18th century, was actually situated. Furthermore, it identifies, accurately the 'evilness' of their eastern neighbors, the *Conibo*, as the prime barrier between themselves and this far-off magical source of the highly valued riches. Such evilness, mythologically symbolized in the very act of killing the *Inca*, in the real-life of pre-pacification *Uni* society documented itself primarily in those innumerable war parties that the *Conibo* (and *Shipibo*) sent into the *Pampa*-interior in search of *Uni* communal huts. Whenever they spotted such a hut in the jungle, they attacked it in early morning hours, burned it to the ground, killed all its male inhabitants, and carried away women and children. Thus, it was indeed the monstrous 'evilness' of the *Conibo* that actually 'shamed away' the *Uni* ancestors from the *Ucayali* floodplain.

But here then, in their far-off retreat, up in the headwaters of the *Aguaytía* and *Zungaru-Yacu* rivers where even the dreadful *Shipibo-Conibo* had difficulties following them, the *Uni*'s growing hunger for Western goods had not the slightest chance of ever becoming satisfied – just as if the very source of those goods had

indeed been somehow 'killed' by the *Conibo*. Fortunately, the myth does not simply leave the *Uni* at that²⁰.

THE *UNI*, THE *NO* AND THE *SHIPIBO*

Following the perspective sketched above, it was, indeed, 'white people' (basically, the Franciscan missionaries, but also some 18th and 19th-century travellers and the few early *mestizo* colonists arriving in the *Ucayali* valley in the first decades of the 19th century) that the pre-contact *Uni* had in mind when talking about *Incas*. But, who then are the 'people of the *Inca*', those lucky collateral relatives of the present day *Uni*, who followed those white magician(s) down river in his magically created steamship?

At first glance, it seems undeniable that they are but a mythical representation of the actual *Setebo-Shipibo*. Did not the *Shipibo* actually leave their *Uni* brethren behind in the early 18th century, when they migrated onto the *Ucayali* plain? Did not the Franciscan monks (*Incas*) establish themselves among them after they arrived in the *Ucayali* basin? Unfortunately, such identification is easily shown to be much too convenient. It is true, of course, that the *Shipibo* are indeed not so distant lateral relatives of the *Uni*. There can be no doubt either that they *really* 'went down-river' with their *Inca*-missionaries, even if only down the Western confluent of the *Ucayali* draining the *Pampa*. Furthermore, they really stayed with their missionary-*Incas* in that down-river mission of *Sarayacu* where they enjoyed first-hand access to all those plentiful 'good things'. Still, as I see it, there also exist strong arguments against such an identification. The most

²⁰ The irony of this *Uni* hunger for axes, machetes and (later) guns was that the very superior power of their enemies, equipped with those items, made these things especially appealing to them. For a discussion of a similar condition in the southern Pacific see Thomas (1991).

important of these is that any *Setebo-Shipibo* simply never seem to have existed in *Uni* ethno-sociology.

The one described above is, of course, not the only *Uni*-myth containing references to non-*Uni* neighbors living somewhere outside of the *Pampa del Sacramento*. In general, the *Uni* used to refer to those neighbors by the term *No*, meaning foreigner(s) or enemy(s). It is only in some very rare occasions that those *No* get identified more specifically as either *Conibo* or *Campa*. I strongly suspect that both these names have only very recently been introduced among the *Uni*, who, most probably, borrowed them from the social nomenclature actually in use among their *mestizo* neighbors. But, if these terms should really have existed already in their pre-contact system of *Uni* ethno-classification, they were most probably used to differentiate quite grossly between the *Campa-Amuesha* to the south, on one hand, and the totality of Indian inhabitants of the *Ucayali* Valley on the other²¹. Within those two types of 'enemies' (*nobu*), I am quite certain, that the *Uni* never dared or cared to differentiate any further.

The 'evil' *Conibo* of our myth, then, are in fact, not only those Indians inhabitants of the upper *Ucayali* that anthropologists actually recognized (and that recognize themselves) under that name, but they represent in fact *all* actual Indian inhabitants of the *Ucayali* flood-plain – the *Conibo* as much as the actual *Shipibo* and the now extinct(?) *Setebo*. They represent, indeed, all of those dreadful eastern *No*, who, for centuries, used to hunt the *Uni* like beasts, forcing them, until quite recently, to hide themselves in the most inhospitable corner of the *Pampa del Sacramento*. But again: Who, then, are the 'people of the *Inca*'? Or, to be more precise: Why did the *Uni* feel the need to

²¹ The quite remarkable differences that set these two types of people at the very edges of the *Uni*-world off from one another, might even be taken as a strong argument in favor of this hypothesis.

'invent' a whole tribe without any historiographic equivalent in their mythic version of their own tribal history?

THE LOGIC OF AN INVENTED RELATIONSHIP

Having shown, up to now, that the prime theme of the *Inca*-myth under investigation is the tragic incapacity of the pre-pacification *Uni* to relate themselves somehow to the source of those highly-praised 'things of the *Inca*', I will now argue that the 'explanation' of that incapacity is not the only, nor probably even the most important message that this myth conveys to any *Uni* listener. Much more important, it seems to me, is the way that incapacity gets constructed within the myth, and the meaning of that construction for the *Uni* presence and future.

In the myth, the *Inca* dies at the hand of *Maricashenayu*. But, not all *Uni* are actually convinced that he is really dead. Does not the continuing flow of Western goods prove that he is still carrying on his magical deeds somewhere? At least some *Uni* do in fact insist that he, or maybe some other *Inca* like him, still lives hidden within that mysterious *Inca*-mountain somewhere on the lower course of the Amazon. But even if he does not, one thing is certain for all *Uni*: the 'good things of the *Inca*' keep pouring into the *Pampa* and they have to be magically created somewhere, somehow and by somebody.

Surprisingly, the majority of the *Uni* I spoke with had no difficulty in pointing out who exactly, among all the different types of *No*, they have lately learned to differentiate in their changing world, *are* (most probably) those lucky 'descendants' of their collateral ancestors they call 'the people of the *Inca*'. "It's the *Gringos*," I was often told, those missionaries of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, for example, and all those engineers, politicians and other 'white' people within the administration of modern Peru, as much as all

owners of heavy machinery (cars, tractors, airplanes, etc.), who sometimes come into contact with the *Uni*.

Such curious doubling of roles, that white people have to play in *Uni* thought²² (as *Incas* and 'people of the *Inca*' at the same time) can, of course, not be simply dismissed as some insignificant incongruency. It urgently calls for explanation. As I see it, the *prime* problem facing the *Uni* until 1930 was not at all the 'nature' of those mysterious goods that much too rarely trickled down into their villages from their far-off centers of distribution in the lower *Ucayali* valley. Nor was it the 'true' nature of their mythical producers (the *Incas*). Their basic problem was, instead, much more practical. The *Uni* could simply never figure out just *how to relate* to those white owners of such highly desirable goods they knew roamed the lower *Ucayali*. And it is exactly this problem that their *Inca*-myth takes care of.

Even today, true interchange is hardly imaginable among the *Uni* without at least *some* type of kin-relationship already pre-existing between the interchangers. For them, interchange-relations and kin-relations are indeed only two sides of the same coin; the last one depends on, as much as it 'produces' the first, and vice versa. Marriage, for example, the very paradigm of interchange in *Uni* thought, only realizes or actualizes a pre-existing family relation of

²² There is an intriguing parallel to that *Uni* doubling of white people into a distinct mythical personalities in the *Watunna* cycle of myth of the Makiritare, recorded by Marc de Civrieux and translated into english by Guss (1980). In Makiritare myth, Spanish conquistador appear as two contradictory personalities, "one luminous, the other dark, incarnations of two antagonistic characters", *Iaranavi* and *Fañuru*, who - in Guss' interpretation - correspond to a "Golden" and a "Black Legend of the Conquest" respectively. (Ibid, p.5-6) But, the difference between *Makiritare* doubling of white people into two antagonistic mythical heroes and the *Uni*'s mythical conception is no less striking. Among the *Uni*, white men figure as - at the same time - *Inca*-hero and as 'lost kin'. The only parallel to this last image of the white man I was able to spot in amazonian indigenous myth is the *Barasana* conceptualization of the white people as (initially) just another linguistically distinct *Vaupés* (indian) group that "... later turned from potential affines into real enemies." (Hugh-Jones 1988:144).

bride and groom: that of cross-cousins²³. By contracting marriages, members of an enemy group are immediately transformed from total strangers (*No*) into close kin. But note that, even here, the affinity 'created' by marriage is, in *Uni* thought, only the 'revival' of an always already pre-existent kin relationship. In fact, the classificatory nature of their kinship terminology still renders it virtually impossible for them, to imagine any truly human being *not* being either an agnatic/cognatic or affinal kin.

Thus, by identifying the white-men as *Incas* (that is the producers of occidental goods) and 'people of the *Inca*' at the same time, those strange monopolists of steel-axes, knives, machetes, nails, etc. were not only implicitly claimed as members of 'true humanity' by the *Uni* (which is in itself a remarkable conclusion), but were claimed as *close collateral relatives*, in fact, the 'closest' type of relatives the *Uni* have in this world. Thus, by the very way that they 'reconstructed' their supposedly historic relation with the 'people of the *Inca*' in this myth, what the *Uni* seem to have assured themselves is the well-foundedness of what must have been their most pressing hope for the future: if ever one or some of those 'white' owner of the so-much longed for *Inca*-goods should manage to overcome the 'evilness' of the *Conibo* and somehow make into the *Uni* homelands he or they would be greet as *kin*, and, as such, would have to grant the *Uni* unlimited access to all their wondrous possessions.

In the rest of this essay I will now argue that the *Uni* did, indeed, *urgently need* this very hope, just to make sense of (or better: to explain away) what must have been the strangest puzzle posed by their historic experience with the products of occidental culture, a puzzle,

²³ Curiously, the *Inca* never *marries* a *Uni* woman. But then, he did not want to "interchange" with the *Uni* anyway. He wanted to give his good things freely, as *Bari* gave freely without ever getting anything back. His "good things" therefore are among the *Uni* what Weiner (1985) has called "unalienable wealth".

that severely shook the very image they had and still have of themselves.

SUPREMACY AND POVERTY

The *Uni*, like so many other cultural groups, believe themselves to be the only 'true' people. This does not mean that they somehow doubt the biological identity of all human kind. On the contrary, all *Uni* share a mono-genetic creed. For them, all members of the human species descended from the very first man who, as related in their origin-myth, was created by *Bari*. The *Uni*, then, believe themselves to be 'uniquely' human in a very specific *cultural* sense. Their self-referential term '*Uni*' indeed refers to a group of people (among which any *Uni* speaker includes him or herself) that is differentiated from the rest of humanity by the fact that its members *still* live as all 'true' humans *should* do.

The way true humans 'should' live was taught to the first human being by *Bari* himself, who also equipped him with whatever is indispensable in today's *Uni* (material) culture. Furthermore, *Bari* also taught the first man all the ritual practices and behavioral traditions that the *Uni* still observe. And, most importantly, *Bari* then obliged the first human being to transmit anything he had gotten and learned 'truthfully' – that is, exactly the way it had been taught to him – to all his descendants (Frank & Hess 1988).

The *Uni* way of life, then, is how *Bari* had originally meant *all* human kind to live for ever, as, to *Uni* eyes, it is the way most perfectly adapted to human 'nature' and needs. Also, to the *Uni*, their *material culture* is by far the most functional for its specific tasks imaginable, as *Bari*, of course, designed only the very best for its people. How, then, has it come about that most of the people the *Uni*

know live life-styles completely different from theirs? The *Uni* answer to this question is a 'devolution-theory' of non-*Uni* cultural history.

In the beginning, *Uni* believe, all humankind knew the teachings of *Bari* and, therefore, lived exactly like the *Uni* still do today. But then, there were some that 'simply got it wrong', either because their fathers did not transmit *Bari*'s knowledge correctly to them, or because they 'started thinking only of women'. In either case, *Bari*'s knowledge was replaced by *lies* that started to be transmit to the next generations. But, not all people got it wrong to the same degree, of course. In fact, there exists a clear gradient or scale of 'falsehood' in *Uni* eyes, running from themselves to people like the *Cacataibo* who, even though they still know a lot, cannot remember any more, how to speak *Cashibo/Cacataibo* 'correctly',²⁴ to the *Conibo*, whose linguistic confusion is even more marked and who practice some truly 'ridiculous' customs (like female initiations and matrilocal residence). And, finally, there are the *mestizos* and 'gringos' of *Puerto Inca*, *Pucallpa* and elsewhere, whose ignorance confuses the *Uni* so much that they sometimes try to trace the last bits and pieces of *Bari*'s truth in their (Christian) lore.

This scale of differences among the various types of human beings the *Uni* know is in no way morally neutral. To know what's *morally right* (and aesthetically pleasing) is a central part of what *Bari* taught his first man. Lack of knowledge in any field is therefore equivalent to the loss of human 'worth'. Thus, stranger and enemy are *necessarily* synonymous in *Uni* discourse. To them, 'strange' behavior betrays a lack of restraints by proper moral education and knowledge which is, in fact, the only restraint that

²⁴ *Cacataibo* is a regional dialect in the *Cashibo/Cacataibo* language that, from the point of view of other dialects within this language, is characterized by a 'confusion' of sounds.

keeps people from becoming uncontrolled and uncontrollable on the basis of pure desire²⁵.

From the *Uni* point of view, then, the social world, is constituted in the following way: in its very center are those selected few who, by pure luck, stem from a long line of knowledgeable, truth-loving and responsible ancestors who transmitted *Bari's* teachings to their descendants *without any changes*. Therefore, they live quiet and peacefully, behave properly and rationally and know how to produce goods that are not only functional but also aesthetically pleasing. But already right on the fringe of those selected few (and most *Uni* indeed believe that this fringe is to be found still within their home-community), there live others whose ancestors, by design or bad fortune, have already 'changed' *Bari's* truth in significant ways and, therefore, constantly prove their lack of knowledge by behaving in a morally unacceptable manner. Further off still, in *Uni*-communities not considered his own by an *Uni* informant, there are people who, even though they do still get something right, are so debased and degraded by false knowledge that virtually anything might be expected from them²⁶. Beyond these, finally, there are still others who, on the base of their complete lack of any 'truth,' live a truly monstrous existence, at once ridiculous and frightening to any true *Uni*.

MORAL WORTH AND THE 'GOOD THINGS OF THE INCA'

Now, it was exactly this type of world-view (and the 'ethnocentric' personality type it constituted) that, from the 18th

²⁵ The similarity of this view with the puritanical image of 'Wild Men' is indeed surprising (Herbert 1991).

²⁶ The most significant type of people included in this group are, for most *Uni*, their own parents-in-law.

century onwards, had to come to terms with the fact that at least some non-*Uni* (in fact the most unknowledgeable and therefore also the most implausible, dangerous and morally degraded people they had ever come into contact with) undoubtedly possessed the capacity to somehow produce goods, the *Uni* could not but accept as far 'superior' to anything they themselves were able to make. This must have been a truly catastrophic experience for these people, which – as their *Inca*-myth proves most tellingly – they simply could and did not accept.

As we saw above, from the *Uni* point of view, *Bari* had 'his' people equipped not only with the functional best, but also with the aesthetically most pleasing material culture imaginable. The knowledge of how to produce such in any sense optimal material culture had then been transmitted without any change, right down (and only) to his present day 'true people.' But, then, even though aesthetical most pleasing, *Uni* stone-axes clearly broke much more easily than their steel equivalents and cutting a tree with them undoubtedly took much more time and effort. Worse still, the *Uni* had not the slightest idea as to how and of what kind of material these beautiful instruments were actually made.

Now, to produce anything valuable, 'knowledge' is needed in *Uni* imagination, and to produce something really good, effective and aesthetically pleasing, it must in fact be 'true' knowledge; that is, unchanged non-corrupted divine knowledge, a type of knowledge that – for the *Uni* – only they themselves still possess. How could it be possible, then, that just the most ugly, stupid and morally degraded of all people known in their world (those white *Inca*-monks) were able to produce the beautiful 'things of the *Inca*' that the only truly knowledgeable people on the face of the earth (the *Uni*) had actually no means to copy? Did that not necessarily mean that not only the forefathers of all *No*, but also the very own lineal forefathers of the *Uni* had somehow 'lost' – at least part – of *Bari*'s primordial

teachings? And, if so, did that not necessarily imply that the only 'true' human beings still left on the face of the earth were, after all, not that 'truly' human anymore as they themselves claimed?

No, this could, of course, not be true for the *Uni*, as it would have meant the destruction of their self-respect, based exactly in their self-image as the only, still truly 'cultured' people in this world. Therefore, the *Uni* *had to* 'invent' for themselves a (mythic) history to explain to themselves (or: explain away) a fact that threatened all they knew and considered certain about their world. At the same time they *needed* that 'history' to justified their hopes, that the miserable dilemma they found themselves in during the last centuries might somehow get 'corrected' in the (near) future. As I see it, the result of that *double necessity* is our *Inca*-'myth'.

THE FUNCTIONAL COMPATIBILITY OF HISTORIOGRAPHY AND MYTH AGAIN

Is there something to be learned in all this as to the nature of and ontological relation between 'history' and (at least some) 'myth'? I think so. Quite obviously, the *Uni*'s *Inca*-'myth' is *not* a satisfactory account of their 'history' *for us*²⁷. In fact, it's the very difference of their 'story' from what *we* believe to be their 'true history' which permits (and even obliges) us to classify that story as 'myth', no matter how close their story comes to ours. But still, this 'myth' *does* tell 'the past', at least *for the Uni* who swear that anything recorded there was in fact experienced by their ancestors and is, therefore, 'true'. As I tried to show in this essay, the

²⁷ Most actors mentioned probably never 'really' existed, while historiographically well documented actors, with important roles in 'our' version of *Uni* history (*Shipibo*, Franciscans), either do not appear at all in this 'myth' or show up in more than one disguise, etc.

enormous 'truth-value' of the *Inca-story for the Uni* derives from the fact that it offers a perfectly acceptable, even a necessary²⁸ 'sense' of their present condition to a people culturally constituted in *Uni* ways, – the very history they 'need'. But, if we are to believe the authorities cited in the introduction to this essay, *this* holds equally true for *our* historiography (even when it treats 'their' history), and we are now ready to indicate more precisely why and how.

Undoubtedly, 'our' historiography as such has certain 'peculiarities' (as have *Uni* 'myth', in comparison to those of other people). Historiography is, for example, much more 'careful' than any 'myth' we know with places, names, and dates. But, this should not come as a surprise, as we have made it part of our very definition of 'history' (in distinction to 'myth' and historical romance, for example) that any place, name or date mentioned in a story pretending to tell 'history' *must* have been 'encountered' (and must be re-encounterable) in a very peculiar sort of 'evidence', most *Uni* have never ever heard about: written documents²⁹. But, in the end, neither *Uni* 'myth' nor our 'historiography' are but a simply list of places, names, and dates (true or false, documented or not). Instead, both their 'myth' and 'our' historiography tell *stories* in which people, place-names, time-scales, and other 'elements' appear interconnected by hypothetical 'causes', 'motives' and (fatal/felicitous) casualties in a way that has to make 'sense' (to their

²⁸ 'Necessary', here, does not mean, that the *Inca*-myth, such as told, is the *only possible* text about their history, that 'makes sense' to people culturally constituted in *Uni*-ways. It is just the only one they have made up.

²⁹ But note that our preoccupation with places, names and dates, 'verifiable' in documents, does not imply that our historiography is more prone to 'facts'. As I tried to show in this essay, the *Uni* are at least as preoccupied with the factualness of their "history" (as re-told in their 'myth') as we use to be. Only that what counts as 'fact' (and when and why it counts as such) is defined differently in their society and culture.

respective audiences) for the stories to be considered 'true', independent of the quantity of pure 'facts' they might contain.

Let me try to illustrate this important point with reference to one other specific piece, not of *Uni* mythology, but of 'our' historiography of (at least in part) 'their' history: the monumental "Historia de las Misiones Franciscanas y Narración de los Progresos de la Geografía en el Oriente del Perú", published in the second decade of this century by the Franciscan monk, missionary and historiographer Bernardino Izaguirre.

Even though the 14 volumes (!) of that 'Historia' are replete with word-for-word (but not 'unedited'!) copies of many, if not most of the documents Izaguirre used in its composition, re-reading his *opus magnum* **today**, one gets immediately struck by its profoundly 'mythical' character³⁰. What 'causes' that impression are, for example, the 'saintly disinterestedness' of Izaguirre's heroes and the timeless and undifferentiated 'savagery' ('geographic' and human) they supposedly encountered and acted upon, but – most of all – the complete disconnectedness of the Franciscan endeavors, as recounted by Izaguirre, from the imperialist projects of first Spain and then Peru, the United States, England and Portugal/Brazil in the Amazon.

But, note that none of these 'causes' of (at least my) uneasiness with Izaguirre's version of eastern Peruvian past as 'true' history refers to any 'new' documentary evidence. In fact, our present-day documentary evidence about eastern Peruvian history, from the 17th to the 20th century, is still basically the same that Izaguirre already knew

³⁰ As described by Izaguirre, this was the 'history' of a three hundred year long heroic struggle realized by some outstanding personalities (Franciscan missionaries) who – never out of personal interest but for God's glory and the heathen's salvation – dedicated their lives to the task of carrying the light of (Roman Catholic) 'truth' into the dark night of savagery.

and (mostly) cited. So, if certain much younger re-formulations of eastern Peruvian 'history', for example, Lehnertz (1974) or Santos (s.d.) do 'sound' (at least to me) much closer to 'historic truth' than Izaguirre's, this curious effect can clearly *not* be attributed to any recent 'progress' in our knowledge of 'the sources'. Instead, it is a consequence of the fact that Izaguirre's interpretation or 'reading' of the very same documents that present-day authors still use simply does not 'square' any more with what I and many others 'know' to be true of people in general and the 'nature' of social interaction in what ever times and places.

But, what kind of 'knowledge' is that? First of all, it is a knowledge completely independent of what we recognize as 'facts of history'. In fact, it defines for us (as it does for the *Uni*) what *are* 'facts of history', and which of them are able to 'prove' the 'truth' of any story that claims to recount 'the (our) past'. As we saw, it is this kind of knowledge that makes the stories of their elders 'trustworthy' to the *Uni*; a knowledge that 'resides' in them and us as the culturally constituted personalities that we are, product of the totality of their and our *experiences* of themselves/ourselves and the 'world' we both live in. It's a knowledge so evidently 'true' to them and us that we, as they, can not but project it back in time or, to be more correct, project it over any account pretending to re-count the past and select among those accounts precisely that, which we (and they) need, as the culturally constituted historic personalities that we (and they) are.

This is the sense, than, in which I consider 'our' historiography and *Uni* 'myth' *functionally* equivalent. Both are reconstructions of a past as 'needed' by those who tell them, listen to them and believe them 'true'. If *Uni* 'history' seems a 'myth' to us, our 'history' is but a 'lie' to them, and both of these evaluations are plainly 'correct', from the point of view of the specific culturally constituted social personalities that we and they *are*.

True enough, neither we nor the *Uni* recognize 'histories that make sense' as *true* 'only' because of that. The *Uni*, as much as we ourselves, demand 'further 'evidence'', culturally recognized as such. In the *Uni* case this 'additional evidence' is the very *word* (literally!) of their ancestors, as remembered by their elders, and not just 'any' elder, but the one most 'close' (in terms of residence and patrilineal descent) of any particular *Uni*. In our case, the additional 'evidence' demanded are 'documents' purporting places, names, and dates. But, contrary to our schoolmaster's wisdom, it is *not* any amount of 'documentary evidence' on which the truth-value of our 'history' depends, but – again – the cultural constitution of our social selves.

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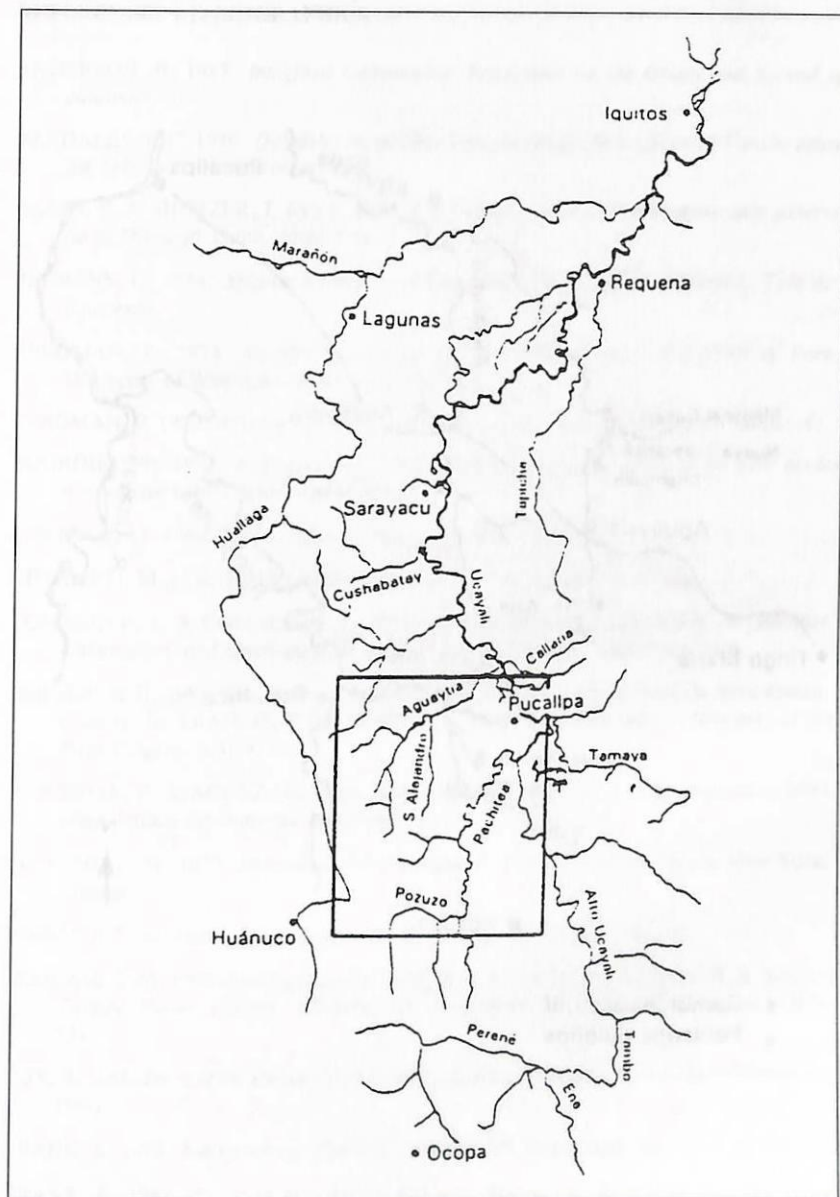


Figure 1 - Localization of *Uni* territory in Central Peru.

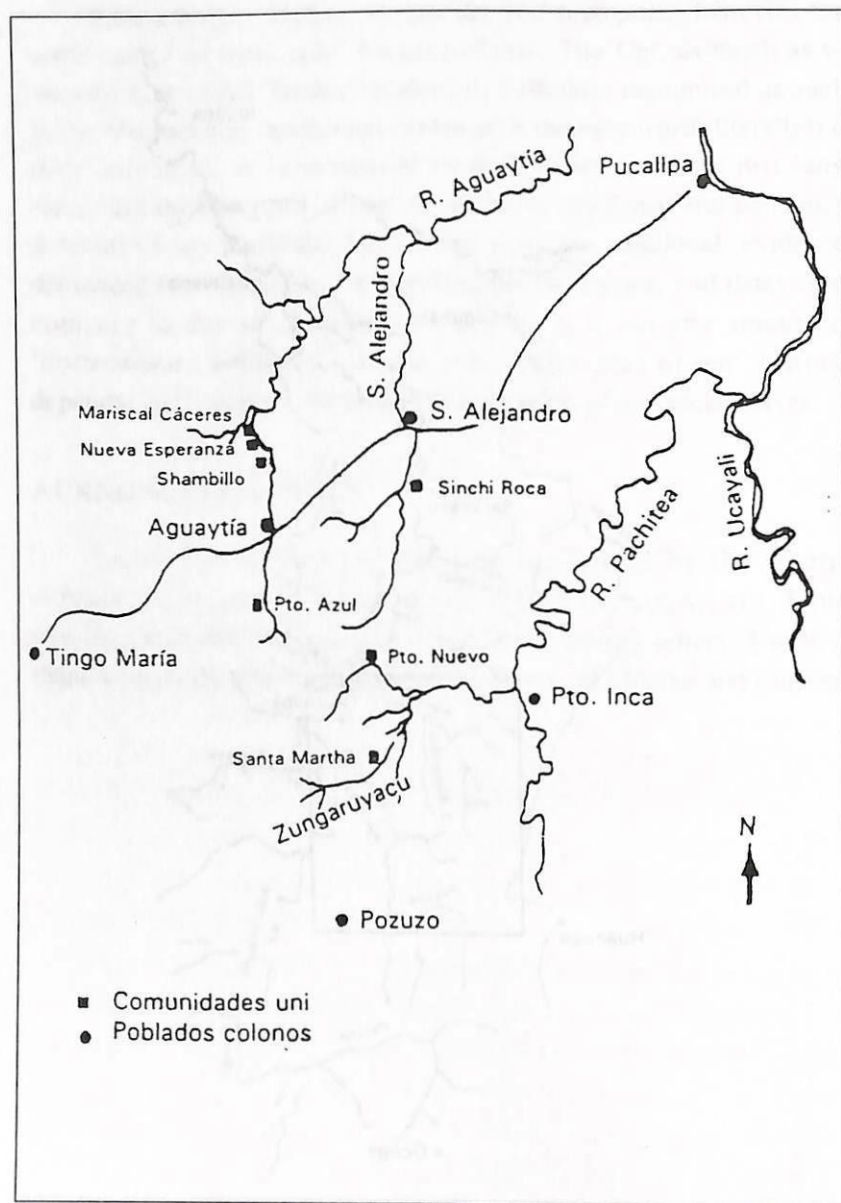


Figure 2 - Localization of native Uni communities.

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