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Witches and Witchcraft Among the Asháninka People: Moral, Psychological and Educational Aspects

Susana Frisancho
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5517-7597
sfrisan@pucp.edu.pe

Enrique Delgado
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP)
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0790-8030
gdelgado@pucp.edu.pe

Introduction

In recent decades, ethnological studies on witchcraft among Amazonian Indigenous peoples have acquired a specificity of their own, without being limited to the classical discourse on shamanism (Erikson 2016). However, there are few studies that address the complex phenomenon of witchcraft from a psychological perspective, and even fewer that focus on Amazonian Indigenous peoples. In this context, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze, from a psychological point of view, some of the moral conflicts arising from accusations of witchcraft among the Asháninka and Asheninka of the Peruvian Amazon.

Undoubtedly, approaching Amazonian cultures from the perspective of psychology may be a source of concern for many readers. There is certainly a risk of 'applying' to the specific reality of Amazonian Indigenous peoples' categories forged in very different cultural contexts, specifically, in 'WEIRD' contexts: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010, 61; Heine 2020, 22). There is also an individualistic tradition within psychology that approaches psychological processes without taking into account the complexity of the sociocultural factors that are related to them (Adams *et al.* 2019; Bronfenbrener 1987). For our part, we distance ourselves from such approaches and rather consider, as raised by psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990, 12) in dialogue with anthropology, that "it is man's participation in culture, and the realization of his mental powers through culture that make it impossible to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone."

Psychological research has shown that individuals view morality as pertaining to fairness and justice while they simultaneously develop cultural identities linked to shared traditions and rules aimed at organizing social groups (Turiel and Banas 2020). Cultural

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identities are shared norms constructed by individuals on the basis of the messages and ideologies they receive in their socio-cultural contexts, in order to maintain cultural traditions and organize life in common. This set of cultural rules and traditions, by nature particular and arbitrary, is often referred to as the social domain (Turiel 1983). Along with this, morality is understood as pertaining to fair and equitable treatment between people, and has to do, for example, with issues of exclusion and inclusion, people's rights, and social inequalities regarding resource allocation. Frequently, these two social domains, the moral and the social, are mutually challenged. Culture is central to moral development in general and moral reasoning in particular (Turiel and Banas 2020; Turiel 2002; 2012a; 2012b), but none of these domains is defined by the other. As we understand this complex relationship,

> [...] culture is not defined by morality, it is relevant for the ways in which individuals evaluate morally salient decisions, how moral conflicts are resolved, and how messages about social groups that bear on the application of morality in intercultural contexts are transmitted and perpetuated" (Killen *et al.* 2015, 162).

The theoretical foundations for this chapter derive mainly from developmental psychology and cultural psychology. Psychological research has shown that children and adults living in different nations around the world, in rural and urban settings, and belonging to different socioeconomic levels, are able to differentiate moral rules from social-conventional norms and traditions (see Turiel and Banas 2020, 26-28; Turiel 2012a, 20-23; Wainryb and Recchia 2014, 263-265). Contrary to views that think that there are no moral universals and that Indigenous peoples have a value system that follows a completely different trajectory than Westerners, following social domain theory we assume that, while there are cultural particulars in the contents of people's moral concerns, all human beings distinguish social conventions from issues of justice and fairness, welfare, avoidance of harm and respect for rights. Following the above, we attempt in this chapter to shed light on the cultural modes of moral reasoning and the moral conflicts of a group of men and women belonging to the Asháninka Indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon. For this purpose, we will take the subject of witchcraft as an object of analysis.

Witchcraft is a complex phenomenon that generates deep psychological and moral conflicts in people living in societies that accept its existence and have developed diverse practices to deal with it. Belief in witchcraft is a widespread reality among the Indigenous communities of the Peruvian Amazon, which are imagined by the natives as populated by magical beings, many of them dangerous and evil (Garra 2016; Santos Granero 2002; 2004). In this sense, these beliefs constitute what Wainryb and Turiel (1993, 207-209), and Wainryb (1991, 841; 2000, 33-34) have called 'factual beliefs' or 'informational assumptions,' beliefs about the world that nourish the moral reasoning of people in these sociocultural groups. As pointed out in relation to other realities in which belief in witchcraft had a dominant presence (Laskaris 2019, 2), these ideas and their associated practices should not be interpreted as psychopathological or fraudulent but rather as an

expression of personal agency in a sociocultural context with particular socio-political and religious characteristics. As Fernández (2020, 2) states, diseases due to witchcraft are one of the most important expressions of affliction in the field of conceptions of illness among Indigenous peoples.

As we have explained elsewhere (Delgado and Frisancho 2021), witchcraft accusations have occurred throughout history mainly at times of social tension, and relate to social issues such as death, disease, poverty, hunger, land dispossession, violence, and other evils. Many of the accusations of witchcraft that occur in the Asháninka people are made against children, who are therefore made victims of violent acts in order to maintain the harmony of the community (Santos Granero 2002; 2004). In our previous work, we explored, from a psychological point of view, the ways of reasoning that six adults belonging to the native Asháninka people of the Peruvian Amazon have about the belief in witchcraft and the cultural practice of eliminating (usually by burning) people considered witches. Adding new interviews with different members of the Asháninka and Asheninka people, we explore in this chapter new examples and different experiences about the relationship between culture and morality, using the practice of witchcraft as a theme that allows us to evidence the cultural and moral reasoning of the participants.

The Asháninka are the most numerous Amazonian Indigenous people in Peru. Although various limitations at the time of data collection, together with the complexity that the term 'Indigenous' entails, make it impossible to know with certainty the exact number of their members, there are some official approximations in this regard. Thus, according to the 2017 National Census, around 117 955 people live in the Asháninka communities and, at the national level, 55 493 identify themselves as part of the Asháninka people (Ministry of Culture 2024). In the case of the Asheninka or Asháninka of Gran Pajonal, 15 281 people live in their communities and 11 people at the national level identify themselves as Asheninka (Ministry of Culture 2024). The latter is congruent with what was pointed out by our interviewees, who do not support the sharp distinction between Asháninka and Asheninka, despite the fact that the ethnographic literature has made such a distinction. Our interviewee Guillén said: "I think we are the same people because we have the same customs, the same beliefs, the few differences are in the speech, in the pronunciation." From an ethnographic point of view, Weiss (2005, 5) considers that the riverine Campa societies (Asháninkas) and Campa del Pajonal (Asheninkas) belong to two different cultural systems, although "these systems are very similar and share a large number of cultural traits." Along the same lines, Hvalkof and Veber (2005, 160) recall that ethnographic studies call the Indigenous people living in the area "Ashéninka del Pajonal," recognizing that "they do not constitute a demographic or social unit."

So many stories of witchcraft[1]

Let's begin with some stories. David,[2] a fifty-year-old Asháninka man living in Pucallpa city, Ucayali region, who currently works as elementary school teacher, narrates what he experienced with his family when he was a child:

> In those days my mother told me that my father was a very bad person. He beat my little sister, he was a *macho* man, he didn't want to have a daughter, he only wanted boys. One day, my father brought two children from a faraway place, a boy and a girl, to help with the housework. My father drank alcohol and mistreated my little sister, and this girl told us: "this man doesn't love his daughter, maybe one day something will happen to her." We did not know that the girl was a witch, we are Adventists, we do not want to accept witches, but the Bible says that witches exist. So, one day, my little sister slipped and hurt her knee. That's where the wound started, little by little liquid was coming out of her knee, it was getting worse and worse, there was a big wound and her bones could be seen. They cured it at home, they took her to the hospital and gave her antibiotics, but nothing happened, she got worse, gangrene set in, and finally she died. And that was because the girl was a witch. When my father arrived home and saw this, he was very upset. He grabbed the girl, hung her by the legs, and told her: "we are going to burn you, you have killed my daughter, we are going to kill you." And a lot of people gathered there. They beat her so many times and she didn't cry, she was quiet. One person said: "let's throw chili pepper in her eyes, if she doesn't cry or blink, it is because she is a witch." And she didn't cry, she cried a little, but she didn't really cry, because she was a witch. "Let's go burn her!" people said. Then the girl said: "don't burn me, I will tell you the truth, I killed your daughter, I am a witch." "And for what reason?" my father asked. "Because you don't love your daughter, you hit her too much. That's why I'd better take her away from you." She was a 10-year-old girl. And although she had confessed she was a witch, some of us were still in doubt.

Hulda[3] is a forty-five-year-old Asháninka woman who is originally from the Kirishari native community in Puerto Bermúdez, Pasco region, but currently lives in the Koshireni native community in Ucayali region, near milestone 36 on the Peru-Brazil border. She works as a teacher in Dulce Gloria native community, in Yurua, also a border community. She stated the following:

> I am going to tell you about an experience I had in my husband's community called Paujil, in the district of Puerto Bermúdez, one hour down the river. At that time there were many sick people, they would get sick with a simple fever or a simple diarrhea, and die. People wondered why they died so much. In the evenings an owl would come out and start screaming after 7 o'clock at night. And there was a wise man who said that there were witches in that place. People did not believe it, because they wondered how an animal could know about

1 The interviews were conducted virtually, in 2022, using Zoom, as the participants were in their communities and it was impossible to interview them in person. All interviews were conducted in Spanish by the authors of this chapter. The participants have given their explicit consent and have expressed their wish for their names to appear in this publication. This study is a continuation of a previous study already published (see Delgado and Frisancho 2021).

2 The Asháninka name for David is Jiriti. It is a colorful little bird that makes its nest under the ground and sings at dawn and dusk.

3 The Asháninka name for Hulda is Mawoetyoki. It is a worm that comes out of the earth and eats the seed of the *sapote* (*Quararibea cordata*). Hulda explains that her grandparents gave her that name because when she was born she had a lot of black hair, just like the head of that little worm. "That's why my grandparents gave me that name, like the head of that worm," she says.

> evil. The wise man was a widower, his wife had died, and he lived with his brother who was the chief of the community; his sister-in-law took care of him. Nobody knew that the chief was a sorcerer. One day the chief said to his brother: "Why are you going with my wife to hunt and fish so much? And the wise man tells him that while he is doing the paperwork for the community, he goes to look for food for his sons, the chief's nephews, because his wife has died and he was alone. Suddenly, one day the wise man felt sick, his stomach hurt, he did not want to eat, when he ate yucca, it made him sick, he could not eat at all. Everybody wondered why he got sick overnight if he worked, he had a farm, etc. And they ask him, and he says: "You know, I dream about my brother. My brother brings me food and tells me: eat this, so you can recover quickly." They asked the chief if he was a witch, but he denied everything. There was a lady who was 18 years old and who also appeared in his dreams, along with his brother. Then they asked her if she was a witch, but she denied it as well. But many people kept dying in the community and that could no longer be allowed. So, they went to find a doctor who knew witches very well. While they were going to look for this wise man who knows about witches, they told the lady that if she did not acknowledge that she was a witch, the wise man would come, and it would be worse for her. They threatened her by telling that they were going to put chili pepper in her eyes, a strong chili pepper called monkey's penis. And they did, they put that very hot chili pepper in her eyes, and she didn't even cry, it didn't burn her, nothing. That's why they said she was a witch.

Guillén is a thirty-six-year-old Asháninka man who was born in Puerto Bermudez, Oxapampa, Pasco region, and currently works as an elementary school teacher in the Ucayali region. He remembered this story:

> My dad is also a teacher. When I was a child, he took me to where he worked, which was a place where there was a lot of talk about witchcraft. He told us not to play with the other children because they could teach us about witchcraft. But how, I asked myself? If he wants to teach me, I can say no, but my dad said, "No. It's not like that, they can give you food, a drink, they pour some witchcraft on it, and you drink or eat, and you become a witch." When another child gave me something, a cookie or a fruit, I was very afraid and I asked my father if I could eat it, and he always told me not to eat it, because children and young people practiced witchcraft there. I have always lived with that fear of socializing with children, I was afraid of that, because of my father's warning. Once I didn't want a child to touch my dog, I didn't let him touch it, and suddenly it was as if something went directly into my eye, and I was in a lot of pain. They took me to the doctor, they put water in my eye with a syringe, they washed me, and the pain and itching didn't stop. Then my mother said to me: "Who did you scold, who were you playing with? Go and call him, that child has done something to you." They went to bring the child, and he began to rub my eye with his saliva, and it was as if he had put an ice cube in my eye, it began to calm the pain quickly. But it was just his hand with his saliva. I was quite surprised.

Raúl is an Asháninka activist and leader who was born in 1954, in San Pablo, a district of Puerto Bermúdez, in the province of Oxapampa, Pasco region. He told us about the death of his son, which he attributes to the power of a witch:

> My son died young, in the year 2000. He was in Pucallpa, he had a girlfriend, a pretty Shipibo girl, her father had already accepted him, he went to her house to visit, they come and go, like all lovers. My son was healthy, he did not have any vices, he studied, he was a painter and was also starting to work as an announcer, he liked to be on the radio. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink alcohol, he was a healthy boy with his sweetheart, like every young man. But, suddenly, one day his girlfriend brought her cousin to the house. Well, we

> received them all, but suddenly, that cousin also fell in love with my son and that's when the problems started between the two women and my son. I don't know if my son paid attention to the other one, we don't know really, but just in those days we were thinking of moving from Pucallpa to Yurua, where I am now. So, we talked at home and I told my son "Son, we are going to move to Yurua with your mother, with your brothers. What do you think? Do you want to go there too, or do you want to stay in the city? And he told me "I would like to get to know the place, I like nature, trees, and there is where I want to paint." "Let's go," I invited him. I remember that more or less in May or June 2000, I went with my son there, I took him to Paititi, he got to know the place and liked it; and on the trip he told me "Dad, I think I'm going to come with you to live here, here I will do my drawings and from here I will go out to sell, because this nature will inspire me." "Perfect, it's up to you," I told him. We returned to Pucallpa more or less in the middle of July, he met again with his girlfriend and there was an activity, a barbecue, near the school. Well, they went and when he came back from that barbecue, told me that at the barbecue the two women had an argument. I don't know what they have said to each other, but witnesses have heard the cousin say that "this man is not going to be for you or for me." It turns out that my son came with his girlfriend to the house and a little while later he was complaining of pain, his girlfriend left, and my son's stomach started to twist and one of my daughters told me "my brother is complaining of pain." "What's wrong with him?" "I think he has colic." "Let's see, give him this pill." But it did not work, he was in a lot of pain and was crying there. "I touched his stomach and felt a hard thing. And I say "How long have you had this?" "No, just recently. Yesterday it was a little bit like this, but today is when it hurts the most." I got scared. "Well, let's see, take another pill," but it did almost nothing. "Let's go to the hospital." I got to the emergency room and the doctor came in: "This is a very serious matter," he says. "You know what? Right now, you have to take your son to Lima, to Neoplásicas Hospital. We can't do anything else for him here." "But why?" Cancer, that is, cirrhosis. But cirrhosis, how long has he had that cirrhosis of the liver? Well, the doctor put it to me like this: "There is nothing we can do here. We are going to give him an injection for his colic, but you have to take him to Lima, I cannot treat him here." I got desperate and, really, I don't know what I did but I took him to Lima with cirrhosis. And the doctor says, "Was your son a drunkard, did he drink too much, did he smoke a lot"? "Nothing doctor, nothing, he is a healthy boy." My wife always reproached me because instead of taking him to the hospital, I would have taken him to a *sheripiari* and possibly, I think, I am absolutely sure that, maybe, my son would not have died, because his illness was not natural but the product of witchcraft. Well, December came, and my son died, and after his death his girlfriend's cousin confessed that she hired a witch to harm him so that he would not belong to her lover or to her.

It is relevant to remember that these people are contemporary adults with strong bonds and contact with their communities of origin, as well as with a permanent relationship with the Western world. All of their stories have one thing in common: witches exist; they do evil, harm people, and often kill them.

Who is the sorcerer and how does he act?

The witch, called *matsinti* or *matsi* in the Asháninka language, is, according to David, the person who does evil and changes people's health. For him, witchcraft (or sorcery) is a set of knowledge, practices, and techniques that a person performs to change the state of health of other people. The witch can be a man or a woman. To perform well as a *matsinti*, the person has to undergo many dietary restrictions and drink the liquid from the plants. For the Asháninka people, there are good and bad plants. "They are like

doctors, there are good doctors and bad doctors," said David. And then explains: "Doing evil is learned quickly, with diet and plants in a week you are already a witch, it's fast. It is not like being a healer, which takes time." Raul explained further about the opposing forces of good and evil that exist in the Asháninka's understanding of the world:

> In every culture there is good and evil, this is a cosmic conflict, let's say. Both the good represented by Pawa, and the evil represented by Kamari, are invisible, they are mysterious forces, nobody has seen Pawa and nobody has seen Kamari… So, this is health, this is death, and there are plants that cure and plants that kill, that is our cosmovision. Just as there are birds that represent good, there are also birds that represent evil. So, in healing, on one side there is the *sheripiari*, he is the doctor, and on the other side there is the *matsi* which means the sorcerer or the one who does harm.

For the Asháninka people, there are several different ways to do evil and provoke harm to people. David explains that witchcraft can be mild or severe. Mild witchcraft is when the witch does evil to a person and makes their head or their eyes hurt, or gives them a stomach ache or pain in their knees. It can lead to death but very slowly. These are the cases that are brought to the healer, the shaman or *sherepiari*, who has powers and knowledge to extract that evil from the person's body by different techniques. For example, they may use tobacco or vaporization. Severe witchcraft occurs when the witch adds something into people's drink, e.g., puts some poison in their *masato*.[4] In such cases, the person may be dead in a couple of days. David kept explaining:

> Sometimes the witch picks up the soil from where you have stepped and sticks the poison there, and so from a distance you feel a stinging sensation in the sole of the foot. And there remains a small hole and if you do not realize it, it advances and advances, it gets bigger and bigger, goes to your knees, and then to your stomach, until you die. Other types of witchcraft are more spiritual, the connector is the owl.

An explanation of the owl's role in witchcraft according to the Asháninka is described in Delgado and Frisancho (2021, 7).

For the Asháninka, sorcerers always have a special power, something that sets them apart from other humans. They are human beings like any other, but (given their condition as witches) they now possess unique characteristics. For example, they can tolerate blows and physical harm without crying, or even have much greater muscular strength than other people. David recounts the latter in relation to a witch who hurt his grandfather:

> My grandfather got sick, so we took him to vaporize. Bone came out of his body, cassava peel came out, fish bone came out. The woman who did the vaporization told us that this was witch's damage. We took him to the healer, the one who takes ayahuasca and divines; "there is a girl" he said, and we brought her, but she denied, witches always deny, but when people threaten them with death, they always tell the truth. What to do now? She said: "we are going to go under the pallet, and I am going to take out all the damage that I buried." We went, and right where the grandfather is lying on his bed, it's like a figure drawn in

4 *Masato* is a fermented beverage made from yucca, a tuber also known as cassava or manioc.

> the ground, and she asked for a mango stick so she could dig. That part of the soil is hard, very hard, people wanted to give her a machete to dig but she didn't want to, because she said that with a machete the patient will get cut and will die. So with the mango stick she dug, the soil seemed extremely soft, as if it was sand, and where he was affected there was the buried bone, fish, rags, cassava peel, all sorts of things... all the evil she had done. But the soil was very hard, really very hard, only she could get it out, nobody else could, don't know how she could dig so easily. Maybe the devil helped her to make the soil soft.

In this story, we can see what Santos-Granero (2002; 2004) has pointed out: that in the Asháninka belief system, witches, whether children or adults, are under the influence of Kamari, an evil being that has distorted their human nature and given them magical powers and a greater tolerance for pain and death. For the Asháninkas, one way to test the condition of a witch is to observe the powers that the person has and subject her to torture: if she has more strength than normal, or if she can withstand blows without crying, or if she can tolerate chili in the eyes without tearing up, then she is a witch. These are irrefutable proofs in the eyes of many Asháninka.

On frequent occasions, the sorcerer confesses after being punished or even tortured. This seems to generate conflicts and remorse in some people, but not in all. Given the nature attributed to the witch, who is often stripped of his human condition (see Delgado and Frisancho 2021, 10-11), many people think that the end justifies the means, i.e., that it is acceptable to torture the witch if this will bring his confession, which in turn will open the door to a final solution to the problem, either by killing the witch or banishing him to live outside the community. Guillén points to this when he explains that:

> Many times the witch confesses and says: yes, I did it because he was a bad person, he was mean to me, selfish, he didn't want to give me anything. But of course, witches confess after they are punished.

As mentioned above, the use of punishment, usually severe physical punishment (e.g., by whipping the body or putting abrasive and irritating substances in the eyes), as a method of obtaining a confession from an alleged witch is viewed ambivalently. Some of the participants in our interviews showed concern about this practice, aware of the dangers of putting pressure on people who, being innocent, might confess in order to avoid torture. Others, however, showed no remorse or concern for this custom.

The one who can counteract the strength of Kamari and confront the evil caused by the sorcerer is the shaman, called *sherepiari*. Raul explained the power of the shaman, the *sherepiari* who can cure, in relation to the taking of ayahuasca.[5] He stated:

> The *sheripiari*, let's say it this way, is like the priest who has a relationship with the divinity in his visions, he sees the sick person and heals him, and says that it is the damage of Kamari. He consults the ayahuasca and says, "this patient that I have here, what does he have?" then he says, "yes, he has such a disease or such an illness, and his cure is such and such," that is, he receives the instructions. He asks, "is this one hurt by the Kamari, is it because someone

5 Ayahuasca is a brew made from the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* (*chacruna*) shrub along with the stalks of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* (ayahuasca). It is a psychoactive brew used by Indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin as ceremonial spiritual medicine for ritual and therapeutic purposes.

> hurt him, the witch or whoever, or is it a natural disease?" So, taking ayahuasca is like a way of using the ultrasound to know what the patient has, once he knows that, then he prescribes the medicines. That is why I said at some point, ayahuasca is not to be taken at any time or by any person, there must be a spiritual preparation to participate in an ayahuasca session.

It is important to point out that a clear difference is made in the Asháninka world between natural diseases and those that come from witchcraft, as was seen in the story of the death of Raúl's son. The *sherepiari* has the power to cure illnesses that come from bewitchment, and must be sufficiently aware to be able to recognize the limits of his knowledge and refer the case to another specialist when the illness has a different origin. Similarly, an illness caused by witchcraft cannot be cured if treated by a Western doctor. As Raul explains:

> The *sheripiaris* know, they can tell if that disease you have is to go to the hospital or not. They tell you: "Do you know what? This is for the hospital, so go to the doctor," and when it is not for the doctor, they say: "no, this is for such a thing, you better come here to see me."

In the same vein, Magaly, a sixty-two-year-old Asháninka woman who is a nurse, tells the following:

> Once, I talked to the chief of the community, I told him "Look, I am here because this person is sick, when they told me that so-and-so is sick I came, I took my bag of medicines to attend to that patient." And do you know what they told me? "It is not necessary for you to have come, it is nothing, go away, miss. This gentleman is not sick, they have done witchcraft to him, the *sherepiari* is coming." And really, the *sherepiari* came and grabbed him, he has his special *piri piri*, he chewed it and started spitting it all over his face and the man was cured.

As can be seen, for our interviewees, the world is ordered in such a way that good and evil can be identified with some clarity. There are evil beings, but there are also those who have the power to confront these evil forces. However, people are aware, to varying degrees, of the possibility of failing to recognize who is a witch and who is not, and show concern about the methods they use for this recognition. A much more detailed elaboration, including reasoning about justice and their arguments that they are not being unjust in identifying and punishing witches, can be read in Delgado and Frisancho (2021).

Witchcraft, social control, and intergroup relations

The Asháninka have hypotheses about the reasons that lead a witch to act by hurting people. These hypotheses are of different types. A frequent one is to understand the sorcerer's actions as a reaction to other Asháninka's behaviors that the sorcerer considers unfair and that have annoyed him or her, i.e., as a reaction to anti-normative behavior.

For instance, when asked about the reasons why a witch hurts another person, David elaborates:

> The sorcerer hurts someone out of hatred. For example, if the person has eaten something and has not invited the witch, the witch gets annoyed. So, the witch picks up a bone and introduces it into the person's body, and if not treated by a healer, the person dies. The

> sorcerer can make you choke on your food. For us, the Asháninka people, there is a place where the bones are deposited, it's not like that we throw bones here or there, we don't throw them on the ground because they can be found by a bad person: "Ahhhh, he has eaten and I didn't eat, he didn't invite me." So, with a little bone the witch can hurt a person's body.

Ethnographic literature on the Asháninka highlights the role of practices such as witchcraft as a means of social control, with the *sherepiari* (i.e., the Asháninka shaman) being in charge of identifying witches (*matsi* or *matsinti*) (Rojas 1994, 238; 2014, 264). Being accused of practicing witchcraft carries various consequences, from social rejection, banishment or death in the most severe cases. Hence, the possibility of being accused of being a witch favors social conformity with the norms. Among these, sharing the products of hunting, fishing, or cultivation are particularly important. A word of caution: in no way do we diminish the complexity of the motivations related to witchcraft, which is well documented in the ethnographic literature as well as in the statements of our interviewees. Rather, what we will do in this section is to highlight one element among others, i.e., the relationship of witchcraft practices or accusations to conformity to norms regarding sharing.

Normative behavior can be understood as the rules and standards that are valued and accepted by members of a cultural group, and that guide and/or constrain their behavior. In other words, they are rules that are necessary in order to fit into a particular group. Santos and Barclay (2005, xixx) allude to an Arawak ethical code, which includes peoples such as the Asháninka, Ashéninka, Yanesha, Matisgenga, Nomatsiguenga and Yine, that underpins the various mechanisms of social inclusion and stresses the obligation to share as well as to defend and support each other:

> If you are hungry, I will share with you my hunting and fishing and the fruits of my farm, because you are Campa,[6] and the Campas must love each other with true friendship [...] If you are attacked by an enemy I will expose my life to defend you, because you are Campa [...] If the Camagari[7] (the Devil) makes you die, your children will be mine, because you are Campa (Ordinaire 1988, 91-92, as cited in Santos and Barclay 2005, xxix).

Hvalkof and Veber (2015, 127) also emphasize that "Ashéninka social coexistence requires compliance with the moral imperative that commands all those who have some food to distribute and share it with others." As the authors point out, it is not simply a matter of reciprocity, but of the constitution of a community based on care and interest for the other.

These normative aspects, which are indissociable from censorship when they are not complied with, are evidenced in the statements made by some of our informants. As seen in David's testimony above, the statements point to the dimension of sharing food resources. For instance, Hulda explained that:

6 The Asháninka people are also known as Campa, although this name is currently derogatory.
7 Kamari. The word *Camagari* that appears in the original has been retained.

> Once we made a witch confess by putting a monkey's penis chili[8] in her eyes and hitting her with a huge donkey bone. At the end she confessed that she was a witch and said that she had done harm because everyone ate without inviting her.

Similarly, Guillén stated that:

> Many times the people [who had done harm through witchcraft] confessed: Yes, I did it, because he was mean to me, he is a bad person, he treated me like that [...] To be mean is, for example, when the family goes to the mountain, brings a *mitayo*,[9] hunts an animal and does not share. So, by not giving to the other family, or to the neighbors, if only they eat, that is being mean.

In these cases, the censure of in-group members who manifest anti-normative attributes is related to what has been proposed by social identity theory and its revisions. From this perspective, it is proposed that we tend to manifest more favorable judgments towards in-group members (Scandroglio, López, and San José 2008). However, endo-group favoritism tends to be reversed when a member of the endo-group manifests anti-normative attributes, in which cases the judgment is particularly severe (Marques and Páez 1996). In these cases, "the greater harshness with respect to the endo-group member who violates the norm is due to the fact that he/she contributes to a negative social identity for the group. It is then a matter of protecting the norms that provide a positive character to the category with which the subject identifies" (Zubieta and Fernández Liporace 2005, 44). In the case of what was expressed by our interviewees, we are indeed facing an unfavorable judgment for behaviors that express anti-normative attributes. However, this 'black sheep effect' responds to the protection of norms that favor collective functioning (sharing food) although the endo/exo-group dynamics and the search for a positive social identity are not evident in relation to it. Rather, we find that intergroup (in this case, interethnic) relations regarding witchcraft are influenced by an additional contextual aspect.

In Amazonian cities, such as Pucallpa, different Indigenous peoples currently coexist. The urban context and the increased articulation with the market have transformed the structure of needs of Indigenous people (Espinosa 2007; Rojas 1994). In many cases, traditional shamanic practices or ayahuasca rituals have been commodified (Frisancho and Delgado 2017, 296; Dobkin de Ríos 2005, 204). In this context, witchcraft practices associated with 'competition in the shamanism market' can also be identified.

Guillén narrates the case of a shaman from his village who, in the city of Pucallpa, cured various illnesses without charging much, which led to an imbalance in the market for shamanic services. In Pucallpa, these services were offered mainly by members of the Shibibo-Konibo people who, in addition to charging a fee, did so at very high rates. For this reason, our informant narrates, the Asháninka shaman was the victim of a spell that

8 *Capsicum baccatum*. Popularly named after the genital organ of the Amazonian male primates.

9 According to Alberto Chirif's Amazonian dictionary (2016), *mitayo* is a term that designates both bush animals and prey. To go to *mitayo* means to go hunting.

left him ill. The shaman recovered but stopped offering his services. When he asked him why, Guillén says that the shaman replied:

> Here the people are very mean. Here the witches and shamans are mean because they have seen that many people come to my house to be cured and they are envious of that because they were no longer going to them, I was taking away their clients. So as a warning to stop me they made me sick so I wouldn't get involved with their clients.

For Indigenous peoples, sharing possessions is expected, so being selfish and eating without inviting others is seen as anti-normative. Witchcraft would be a reaction against this anti-normative behavior. However, there is also the belief that the witch is an inherently evil person, who is going to do evil anyway, inflicting harm for no reason. For example, Auristela,[10] a forty seven year old Asháninka woman from the native community of Alto Aruya, Ucayali, who currently works as an early childhood education teacher, stated that:

> There was this woman who was a witch, and she always did evil but it was not known why. If she was invited to eat she didn't like it, if she wasn't invited she didn't like it either, she always did evil for whatever reason.

It is necessary to point out that, as might be expected, different people have different explanations for making sense of the reasons that lead someone to commit acts of witchcraft. These results allow us to better understand the cultural values and social norms and traditions that are relevant to moral functioning within cultural groups.

Justice for witchcraft victims and concerns about going against one's principles

A deep concern for fairness is common to many Asháninka people. As in any human group, among the Asháninka there are different perspectives on justice, and different degrees of concern about how to obtain it. Raul shares with us his tribulations about justice in relation to the death of his son:

> So, back to the topic, in the Asháninka world justice can be applied as the Bible says, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But, well, I have read the Bible a lot and I am sure that God's command is "do not kill." But, how do we then remedy that? I mean, I feel that someone killed my son, but if I go to the police or the prosecutor and say "I denounce this lady because she has done witchcraft to my son," do you think they are going to do justice?

There is sadness in this story. On the one hand, as can be read in the story of his son's death narrated in previous paragraphs, he regrets having taken his son to the hospital instead of the *sherepiari*. He has to constantly listen to his wife's complaints about this and is burdened with the doubt of whether his son could have been saved if he had taken him to the right place. On the other hand, he also regrets that he has not obtained justice and that the Western world, the police, and the prosecutor's office are not prepared to deal with cases where the victim has died from witchcraft practices.

In many cases, revenge occurs. The victim's relatives take justice into their own hands. But many Asháninka are aware that enormous injustices can be committed in

10 The Asháninka name for Auristela is Nasankaneki Inchateaki, which means 'my heart is a rose.'

these acts of revenge.[11] Moreover, people position themselves differently in the face of revenge, valuing this practice from different points of view. About this, Raul said:

> So, cultural justice for the Asháninka is that revenge can only be applied to those who are conscious, that is, to those who morally say "I am not interested in the commandments." Only then you can take revenge, which I cannot do.

It is interesting to note that Raul is questioning his ability to do something that may be socially expected in his community. In fact, although there have been important transformations throughout history, revenge is a behavior that is quite frequent among many Amazonian Indigenous peoples (Romio 2021; Pozo-Buleje 2017; García Serrano 2017; Garra 2016; González Saavedra 2015). But Raul has concerns regarding this response.

Kohlberg (1984) and Piaget (1984) demonstrated that human beings move from understanding morality as a compulsory obedience to norms considered inviolable and socially determined to a more mature moral understanding that takes into account how law and principles of justice are interrelated. This means understanding the validity of principles as independent of both the authority of the social group and one's own identification or affective ties to one's own group. Blasi (1984; 1988; 1993; 1995; Blasi and Glodis 1995) adds moral identity to the equation, which is the area of general identity built around the individual's moral ideals. In other words, in addition to the ability to reason morally, there are differences among individuals in the degree and manner in which morality is integrated into their identity, generating the desire to live in a way that is consistent with their sense of self. The construction of moral identity is a complex process with changes throughout development (Krettenauer and Hertz 2015; Krettenauer 2013).

It is important to emphasize that Raul's rejection of revenge, as well as his recognition of his inability to carry it out, is a sign of the variability of moral stances found among Asháninka individuals.

Can the sorcerer be redeemed? Ideas about redemption and how to solve the problem of witchcraft

There is no consensus among the Asháninka regarding the witch's possibility of redemption, which is understood here as the capacity of turning away from evil and morally improving oneself. For some of them, like Benigno and Hulda, the witch can change his or her behavior and become a better person. They maintain a more benign and flexible theory of human nature, in which a profound transformation of behavior and motivation for living is possible. From their point of view, it is still possible to appeal to the sorcerer's capacity for reason to make him aware of the evil of his actions, he is a human being and can be persuaded and led to reason about his own actions. Because of this, he should not be killed. On the other hand, Guillén and David hold the opposite position: For them the witch will never change, it is impossible for him to become a good person. As they see it, the witch does not care

11 See Delgado and Frisancho (2021) for an account of Asháninka opinions on this issue.

if the person is good or bad, he simply does harm because he is possessed by an evil spirit that pushes him to do evil. He cannot help it, his human nature has been transformed and sometimes even lost and the person can no longer reason or feel. David recalls that the witch child who killed his little sister was being pressured by dark forces, as she told his father that she had killed her because "behind me they demand that I take her away from you." Because of this, the most atrocious punishments are tolerated and even encouraged, as they are considered appropriate and just to end the scourge of witchcraft.

With an intermediate position, Aursitela says that there are two types of witches, those who can transform themselves into better people, and those who cannot. The first can change when the harm they do is explained to them and they understand it and do their part to change. The latter are intrinsically evil and cannot redeem themselves.

People construct meanings that allow them to explain, interpret and weigh their relationships with others and with reality as they perceive it. From this perspective, which has its historical roots in the work of Kelly (1966), people construct interpretative models of the environment that fulfill functions similar to scientific theories, as they allow them to explain and predict events. It is assumed that the meanings that people give to their representation of the world have an individual organization that dialogues with the social, both in their origin and formation, as well as in their use (Catalán 2010; 2016). Beliefs and subjective theories are hypotheses generated by people based on their daily experiences to make sense of their environment and to act in it, as they have a regulatory role and guide the behavior of individuals (Catalán 2010).

As can be seen, this variability contradicts the essentialist idea that in the Indigenous world there is only one way of thinking, shared by all members of a group. On the contrary, as in any human group, people in Indigenous communities may develop their own opinions, moral perspectives, and points of view. In any group where people have different ideas, debate arises when trying to analyze social problems and propose solutions. The case of witchcraft is no exception. A shared concern is what to do when a person has been identified with certainty as a witch.

One way out of the problem of witchcraft is to send the witch, usually with his or her family, to live outside the community. Many Asháninka think, according to Guillén, that the witch will no longer be able to harm anyone if living alone and isolated. In any case, interviewees are very aware that this does not solve the problem, it only moves it to another location and creates a problem for somebody else.

Expelling community members who represent a danger to the people (for one reason or another) is a common practice among Amazonian Indigenous peoples (see as an example Teixeira-Pinto 2004).[12] David explains it this way:

12 Teixeira-Pinto (2004) tells the story of a family, belonging to the Arara Indigenous people of Brazil, forced into isolation on the top of a mountain as a result of accusations of witchcraft.

> We have to defend ourselves, the witch is bad, he is a bad person. Many want to kill him but others don't agree. And when we don't agree then we take him out of the community, we send him to another place. We know that it is not the solution but at least we kick him out, and there in the other place they will know what to do with him.

It is interesting that David recounts this by nonverbally showing his ambivalence to this practice. He agrees that it is beneficial for the community to get rid of the problem, but he knows it is transferred to another human group, which is not necessarily fair or right. This generates tension in David, who is somehow caught between the two poles of this conflict. During the interview, it was very difficult for him to take a position on this problem.

Finally: Witchcraft and its possibilities for moral education

Moral development entails several implications for educational practice (Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg 1989). This is no different in an Amazonian Indigenous context. In this sense, the complexity of witchcraft as a cultural experience and the moral connotations of the subject offer extraordinary opportunities for moral discussion and for fostering moral reasoning, recognition, moral identity, and a deeper understanding of the other. Witchcraft produces diverse conflicts and emotions, people reason about the rightness or wrongness of practicing it, analyze the reasons that lead the witch to do harm, critically judge the way communities deal with witchcraft, weigh the justice of punishments, and question their own cultural practices when these are considered unfair. As agentive beings, people who experience witchcraft on a daily basis in their communities morally reason and systematically question the aspects of justice involved in the cultural practices that attempt to deal with it. And they value the spaces they can have to collectively discuss these issues and ask for opportunities to critically analyze them and discern what is fair and right, always within their particular worldview and cultural frameworks.

Benigno, who is an elementary school teacher in Ucayali, states that witchcraft should be taught in school and that teaching about this topic is not an apology for witchcraft, just as teaching about terrorism is not an apology for terrorism.[13] He argues that it is necessary to teach about witchcraft so that children can defend themselves from witches and not turn into witches. His reasoning clarifies the need that he sees for children to better understand witchcraft, a practice he considers dangerous and endemic.

In the same vein, Guillén also expressed his need and desire to be trained to deal with these complex issues in the classroom. He points out that bullying practices occur in his school, and that many times these are rooted in the belief that a particular boy or girl is a witch. He explains:

13 Benigno draws a parallel with Peruvian Law No. 30610, the Terrorism Apology Law, which punishes with up to 15 years of imprisonment any statement that exalts, glorifies or justifies terrorism. This law generated undesired effects in that school teachers were afraid to address the subject in their classes, for fear of being convicted of apology, since the law makes special mention of teachers who address the subject of terrorism in their classes.

> There was a boy who came all battered, all beaten up, because he was a witch. The children told me: "teacher, don't punish him because he is a witch." And there is exclusion in the work groups, in the activities, by the children themselves. If the teacher believes that the child is a witch and does not want to get in trouble, he collaborates with the exclusion and allows the bullying to continue. But if the teacher is neutral, he includes the child, allows him to participate in the activities, and makes the students see that he is a classmate, a brother, a friend.

Guillén's statements show that a teacher can make a difference with respect to bullying practices when a child is accused of being a witch. If the teacher believes the child is a witch and does not want to get involved due to fear or other reasons, he or she contributes to the exclusion that the child experiences in the classroom. It is important to understand that the belief in witchcraft is a belief strongly rooted in Asháninka culture. Therefore, and for the sake of the recognition to which Indigenous peoples are entitled and deserve, it is essential to take these issues seriously and include them in the school to promote discussions to better understand them and solve the problems, moral and otherwise, that arise from them. Moral development is a process crossed by the cultural particularities of each society that at the same time has characteristics of universality. It is a complex, and long-term process, and requires significant experiences to emerge in the course of a person's overall development (Kohlberg 1984; Kohlberg and Mayer 1972; Krettenauer 2013; Krettenauer and Hertz 2015). Being aware of this, due to his experience as a school teacher, Guillén regrets that neither the Ministry of Education nor any other intermediate educational office has given him any guidelines to work on the subject of witchcraft in the classroom.

As can be seen, Guillén does not agree with the traditional practice of violently punishing the person accused of being a witch, who in many cases is a child. In this vein, Turiel (2002; 2003; 2008) has shown that fundamental disagreements occur within cultures, that resistance and subversion are part of everyday life in most cultures, and that they are an integral part of the development process.

We can conclude this chapter, which we consider novel as it is one of the few studies on witchcraft among Amazonian Indigenous peoples carried out from the perspective of developmental psychology and cultural psychology, with the following ideas: first, we have shown the existence of different opinions and ways of reasoning about witchcraft among the members of the Asháninka people we have interviewed. This shows the variability of beliefs and points of view existing among members of the same indigenous people, a variability that responds to processes of cognitive and affective development that all human beings go through. In this way, cultures cannot be considered as 'homogeneous monoliths' or an independent variable that homogenizes people and annuls their subjectivity, but as scenarios of debate and contradiction, in which a plurality of voices are found, the ones with the most power being the ones that are most easily heard. This has been amply corroborated by other empirical research (Turiel 2012a; 2012b; Waynrib 2006; Helwig 2006; Nucci and Turiel 2000). As Waynrib states (2006, 214), "the view of cultures as speaking in a collective, shared, voice is inconsistent with

evidence pointing to the plurality of concerns of persons within cultures, to the conflicts and disagreements among persons within cultures, and to the multiple interpretations and critical judgments that persons make about their culture's norms and practices."

Along with this, this chapter also shows the possibilities of dialogue between particulars and universals in general, and specifically in relation to witchcraft. People belonging to the same indigenous people may disagree about the meaning of traditional cultural practices, and in fact negotiate these meanings and construct their own views of reality. Last but not least, in this chapter we have also picked up on the need, explicitly stated by interviewees, for education to incorporate complex and controversial topics such as witchcraft in its curricular proposals, and to provide opportunities for teachers to discuss and critically analyze these topics from both an ethical and cultural perspective. This is an explicit request from several of the interviewees, who are faced with conflictive and morally complex situations that they need to address and resolve during their teaching practice.

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