



Healers' Massacre Report

Balsapuerto, Peru

Elaborated by ICEERS Foundation
in collaboration with Preyer Huaman and Rosario de Pribyl

International Center for Ethnobotanical
Education, Research & Service

As a result of the healers' massacre occurred in the district of Balsapuerto in Yurimaguas, Loreto (see article published by ICEERS: <http://iceers.org/what-we-do/campanas/matanzaschamanes-peru/matanzas-chamanes-peru.html>) ICEERS, worried and concerned, decided to devote time and resources to go deeper in what is happening in this area of the Amazons in relation to the Shamanic culture and, particularly, to the recent death of healers and shamans. Once stated our purpose, we got in touch with Rosario de Pribyl, expert in medical anthropology and intercultural health, and, therefore, she was asked to lead the investigation. Rosario shares with us how this research has turned out:



Huallaga River's harbor

We decided to send a collaborator in order to gather first hand information to help us solve this distressing event, to make a photographic record of the place with the purpose of developing an informative video, and see the ways in which the affected communities want to be supported, specially the families of those killed. Before our special envoy, Preyer Huaman, arrived to the area to document the situation with an assistant, the information that we had regarding this was the following:

The Balsapuerto's Peruvian district is one of the six districts of the Alto Amazonas' Province, located in the Loreto Department, belonging to the Loreto Region. This is a settlement that contains more than 100 indigenous communities, most of them belonging to the Shawi's ethnic group; with a total population of more than eighteen thousand inhabitants. Balsapuerto is one of the fifteenth poorest districts throughout Peru and, along with the high index of extreme poverty, lacks basic social services, such as health and education, in addition to alarming rates of maternal and infant mortality.

The first reports were made in February 2011. Relatives of Marcelino Pizango and Mariano Apuela, healers of the Paranapuna River adjacent communities, in Balsapuerto's district, said that they were murdered after being accused of "sorcerers." The two healers' horribly mutilated corps were found within the following two months. Regional and local news media found similar cases, proving that this was not an isolated event. In April and May 2011, the Archiepiscopate of Yurimaguas reported the death of seven more healers, whose corpses have not been found, yet. At the end of August, a news story broadcasted by a Lima TV channel, recorded a witness, Solomon Napo Moreno, who confessed having participated in the murder of Mariano Apuela, this in exchange of a 5 000 soles (about \$

1700) payment offered by Augusto Torres, the Balsapuerto Mayor's brother. Solomon Napo Moreno also reported having participated in the murder of other healers.

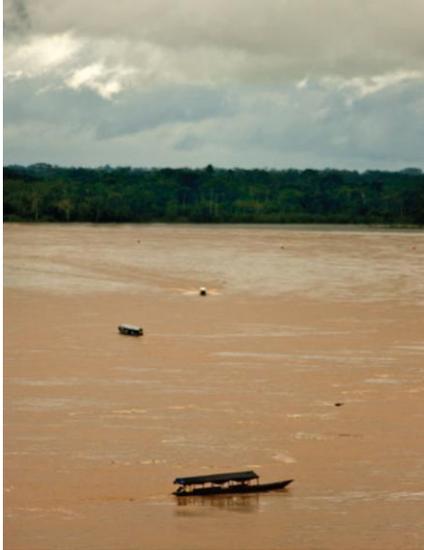
Bautista Inuma Andona, "Apu" or community leader in the Paradise Shawi area, accused the Mayor's brother. Inuma is the only healer's massacre survivor up to the present. He was attacked by strangers, who used machetes to try to kill him on a road near his home. In the struggle, he lost an arm, as well as to be badly injured and full of scars all over his body. In a testimony given to the Lima TV channel, Inuma identified the Mayor's brother as one of his attackers. The last known crime was perpetrated in early September at the Santa Rosa Community, when the healer Silverio Yume Chanchari was shot to death. According to some news media reports, the Balsapuerto's Mayor was accused of being the mastermind after those crimes. Roger Rumrill, journalist and writer, states that the town citizens blame Balsapuerto's Mayor, Alfredo Torres Rucoba, for the deaths, since he is Evangelist. According to Roger Rumrill, the mayor offered during his campaign to put an end to these traditional practices, and therefore he was the prime suspect.

For Rosa Giove, doctor and co-founder of the Centro de Rehabilitación de Adicciones y de Investigación de Medicinas Tradicionales TAKIWASI (TAKIWASI Addiction Rehab and Traditional Medicine Investigation Center) located in Tarapoto (San Martín), the "healer or sorcerer" is a character that breeds fear in small communities, especially in the indigenous ones. "Among indigenous communities to kill "sorcerers" is pretty common, not to say regular; however, in a tribal context, generally, it is first evaluated and warned by the community before acting, if the healer is killed or expelled. Nonetheless, in this case, the mixed race people are the ones who are perpetrating the crimes." In the same way, she stated that the Evangelical religious groups are alleged as perpetrators: "I think it is someone's decision based on religious bigotry, fear, or revenge, at least in Balsapuerto's case, where the assassins were apparently employed by a person who professes the Evangelical faith. In San Martín, it is the Pentecostals' "Guardia Celestial" (Heavenly Guard) who attributes themselves the elimination of the "charlatanes" (tricksters), term with which they also refer to some "fake healers" in the code of ethics of the Medical College."

Some social actors, community leaders, and researchers point out that the issue is due to the old conflict between indigenous wisdom, religion, and economic and political interests; the latter ones created by pharmaceutical multinationals. Pizango Inuma, President of the Federation of the Chayawitas Native Communities (FECONACHA) states that "there are several causes behind the death of the healers: economic interests, jealousy, etc. Witchcraft is thought to be the cause of the deaths of these people, the authorities do not like healers because they have power, and their herbal remedies replace the drug stores' medicine." However, Rosa Giove does not believe that the murders are the act of transnational companies or the State, for the reason that according to her opinion, "healers do not threaten anyone, since they do not exist for the official system and are powerless within the State organizations."

So far, nobody has been convicted for these deaths; although, there is evidence that points at the possible masterminds and perpetrators of these crimes. According to replies given by police, judicial and local sources, this impunity seems to be due to both, the difficulty of the Peruvian State to reach the country's most remote areas and the apathy to the jungle issues,

without political significance in Lima. The Alto Amazonas province's prosecutor, Jorge Guzman, acknowledged to the media the slow research process, something he blamed on the "logistical shortcomings and geographic difficulties."



Huallaga River

However, an aspect that caught our attention and that is not mentioned as a high priority by local and health authorities, is the high pollution rate of the Amazon River due to the area's indiscriminate and uncontrolled mining and oil activity, as well as the high rates of villagers' undernourishment, specially children. This background situation was confirmed on interviews conducted by Preyer Huamán, when exploring the area in February 2012. Attached you will find the most important information gathered by our special correspondent.

Yurimaguas is a medium size city. There are stores and all basic needs can be satisfied. There is almost no tourism, since it is taken as a walkthrough place. It contains two small ports which serve as markets (Manuchis); here is where products arrive or depart via river, or as the only way of transportation through small boats to several areas such as Iquito's city, all this across the Huallaga river. The highways to get to Yurimaguas are in very good conditions, but from there on are only made of dirt. People are friendly and helpful at all times.



Commercial transportation and people along the Huallaga´s River, Yurimaguas

Before coming to this area, my colleague, Walter Romero, and I, tried as much as possible to contact Balsapuerto. We tried to call the number listed on the municipality website again and again, but there was no answer; consequently, we searched for people on Facebook and other means where we were able to find people who worked or lived in this area; however, we never received an answer from them (an average of 8 people). We called to hotels located in Yurimaguas, but they were unable to provide a precise reference of how to get to Balsapuerto. Instead, we got even more confused on how we should get there, since some of them advised us to go by river and others by land. Nonetheless, nothing was certain. Indeed, our trip became more uncertain as time went by. We did not know exactly what we would face, especially since this was such a sensitive matter and the authorities involved in the middle.

Once settled in Yurimaguas, we met the only contact that was expecting us, Attorney Vanessa Vela, who lives in the area and works in the prosecutor office. She told us she had little information on this issue and warned us that areas as Balsapuerto are very poor and that the actions of the police or the authorities are completely null, and usually they follow their own laws. We had to be very cautious, especially when investigating this kind of issues, as the authorities are in the middle of them. She was very distrustful, given the reason that there is an accusation against the Major and his family. Her recommendation was visiting the Regional Coordinator of Indigenous Villages (CORPI, as its Spanish acronym) before going elsewhere.



ONG CORPI, Yurimaguas

Here we found Professor Mamerto Maicua Pérez, who serves as CORPI's president. He explained that CORPI is formed by 9 indigenous groups: Kandoshi, Wampis Awajun, Chapra, Achuar, and Quechua from Pastaza in the Marañón Datem, and Kukama Kukamiria, Shiwilo, and Shawi in the Alto Amazonas; divided in two provinces: Marañón and Alto Amazonas. CORPI's main function is to protect the villagers' rights and natural resources, and to protect their territory, as well, as they claim being the rightful owners of this land. Professor Maicua kindly received us, but as we went through a series of questions, the attorney avoided and chose to leave the place.

The professor mentioned that CORPI has a Board of Directors and that it is formed by natives of different areas. They are chosen by a regional assembly involving 20 organizations. It has an extraordinary assembly once a year. One of their headquarters is in San Lorenzo, 8 hours by boat from Yurimaguas. In regards to our main topic; in other words, the slaughter of the healers, he states that, "First, we need to define or clarify some aspects: The Coordinator (CORPI) has the duty of receiving and defending both, the victims and defendants. We have in our hands the files of some of the relatives of these people because they approached themselves to our offices. We must take into account the difference between shamans and sorcerers. They are not the same. The Shaman heals, makes good, takes your vital signs, knows what you have, diagnoses you, has his own medicinal plants and makes you drink them, and heals and relieves you or sees if you have been harmed. On the other hand, the sorcerer is evil, as he hurts people; people start to appear dead without a reasonable cause, suddenly they just fall down. People know who they are, and they are afraid because sorcerers feel powerful, they chant, and make oaths. And exactly these kinds of people are the ones who are disappearing.

In these areas, this kind of execution is pretty usual, as this is the way in which problems are solved if a family has issues with someone due to any harm, and a member of the other

family identifies and kills him; if that is the cause, the problem is over and life comes back to normal.” We should clarify that an injury can be either a theft or witchcraft. Even such events are considered normal. He continues by stating that, "the press has come and has made the relatives of those who have been murdered, speak, and they have over spoken because they were told to squeal in order to get a sort of civil reward. Consequently, they remained silent. On the other hand, the great number of slaughters in such a short time is very strange. Usually, this happens once or twice a year, or once in a while. The unusual part is that this happens after an offering from the Balsapuerto’s current Major."

The next day, we had a very short interview since, supposedly, there were some matters pending to be solved. We asked when or at what time we could come back, as well as how to get to Balsapuerto. We are answered that they had contacted a school professor who has been a Shawi leader for many years and that he is aware of the entire situation. He advises us not to visit Balsapuerto for the time being, especially regarding the subject we were investigating, given the fact that we would require to have a permit, for instance from the coordinator herself and to look for healers who did not live in Balsapuerto, but in the nearby communities, and to find the sorcerers’ relatives who are mostly the ones who were executed; however, we were advised not to do so at this time. To go to Balsapuerto, it takes an entire day in order to reach certain point, stay overnight, and then a few more hours to actually get there. We were told that the landscape is beautiful. Besides the traveling time, up to 3 more days should be spent locating the people. The fastest connection lasts 5 hours, if a slider is taken, but the cost ranges from 1 200 to 1 500 soles.

Despite the fact that villagers are friendly, there is a lot of fraud regarding people who impersonate healers or vegan doctors, and charge really high amounts of money. We asked him about the only survivor who, based on the inquiries we did, is either in Yurimaguas or Tarapoto; he confirmed seeing him there, but not in a specific place as he is constantly moving from place to place, and it seems like he did not have a good relation with his neighbors.



Professor Marcos Sánchez

Our next contact was Professor Marcos Sánchez, CORPI's former-leader, professor at several communities such as Balsapuerto and Cahuapanas, and who also worked as an assessor for ONG Terranova. We requested him to talk about the slaughter because all the information received was contradicting what we knew so far. He told us that, "The traditional medicine practice is ancestral in these villages, and you will find these people in Cahuana or Balsapuerto. But we need to clarify that a healer treats simple and complex diseases by calling out spirit's or the nature. The sorcerer hides his doings, harms through ícaros (chants in the form of prayers, like whispers) that he sends to hurt others, even though he can do good with the chants, as well".

According to him, the healer's formation is essentially by following diets that he must fulfill completely. His master or himself, sees through his dreams or when they consume the vegetable ("ayahuasca," saint peter cactus, tobacco) the bolts, which are like phlegms. This indicates the diet, abstinence, and cure, as well. To Professor Sanchez, at all costs, rules must be followed, for example, two years of celibacy or two years without drinking alcohol. The sorcerer, on the other hand, does not have to follow rules; "he cannot take it, feels strong with power, falls and fails, possibly because he has the devil inside; he damages and the person collapses, so he feels more powerful". Some cannot resist this scheme, since the devil shows itself in any shape, and in six months they fail to fulfill. Usually, these are the sorcerers.

"In a weekly basis, people die in our villages; they get sick quickly and die." Sanchez says that the slaughters increased and became a problem after the Balsapuerto's town hall elections, in which the current mayor offered to "eradicate evil." However, the sorcerer's execution is almost a habit in this area: "Here, if I mess with someone or someone had an issue with a relative, hurt him or killed him, a problem begins among families or groups. Consequently, I or the relative takes justice in his hands; in other words, I murder who caused the problem and, therefore, the problem is solved. For the reason that in a certain way, the other family is aware and knows what could happen." Professor Sanchez affirms that he does not justify the slaughters nor the mayor's offering, but he stated that: "Once in a while, these sorcerers appear in the village; one or two per year, and everybody sees and knows it. People die without a logical reason, on their way back home they fade away, then a neighbor and so on. Uncommon and incurable diseases, which do not belong to the area, appear. Victims go to the medical post, but they do not know what to do. Of course, the medical post has limited resources and sometimes there are not even doctors in there. In these cases, the victim's family eliminates them, kill the affected."

How do you know who is a sorcerer? Because "the shaman (good) sees the guilty one during his sessions; these shamans will take your pulse and know what you have. Many times campaigns were organized by former mayors; in some sort of speak to. The major, along with some people got together to detect these sorcerers. Everyone, from the biggest to the smallest was there, a Master was brought, and he checked them all. And from there you can tell who he was. The shaman takes your arm, checks your pulse, and knows if someone is sick or has been a victim of witchcraft. This is how the sorcerers were detected and asked to leave". Sanchez explains: "If in the village there is a snake and bites the people then you must kill it. That is how it is. You kill him and the problem is over."

Sanchez affirms that he has checked the files received from CORPI regarding the massacres. It is also CORPI's function to support and help the "sorcerers' relatives: "There we assist them all, either sorcerer or shaman, and their relatives, and we ensure their rights." He assures that according to what they have observed and verified based on information collected by other villagers, the people murdered were undoubtedly sorcerers. "That was the offering of the Mayor. Now then, in your opinion, if his offering was weird, why he was not accused or why he even won the elections? I am not justifying him, but that is how things work here." Professor Sánchez also assures having talked to Cecilia Pizango, Marcelino Pizango's daughter, who was taken as a sorcerer, but shown himself as a healer in front of the press since he was attacked and lost an arm in one of the assaults. According to Sánchez, she acknowledged that her father was involved in witchcraft: "he was in that dark stuff," and the reason why she spoke with the press was that the journalists asked her to talk, that she would receive money, and that she had to report the incident. We asked him to get us in touch with her, and he said that he would do everything possible. We were under the impression that they were expecting money in exchange of making the contact. Still, all the information made us go back at the beginning; we had to rethink how to proceed. In fact, we were very surprised.

So, we went back to Professor Maicua Pérez, CORPI's director, searching for news in regards to the relatives of those people who have been murdered. He said that CORPI has the files of some of the relatives, since they had to go through the coordinator in order to make the reports, anyways. We asked if we could contact some of the relatives, and we were told that we would have to go and search for them, as they no longer live in the same village. Besides, it is unlikely for them to speak. He added that the prosecution itself, along with some attorneys, went to investigate the reports spread by the press. He mentioned that their lives were in danger, and they were warned not to go back without a previous notice. Then, the attorneys got in touch with the coordinator, so that we could speak on their behalf from here since they were unable to leave Yurimaguas. "We told them we did not want to take the responsibility, and they were already warned. The attorneys returned and as of today they do not want to go back."

He said we could go to Balsapuerto and visit all the villages. Nonetheless, he advised us not to keep on investigating. Disappointed and even more concerned, we looked for alternative informants. So, that is how we found Loic Le Guisquit, a 40-year-old French citizen, who has lived in an inn in Yurimaguas for several years and knows the area very well. He lives here and bought a piece of land, around 6.2 miles away from the city, in order to build an inn in the future. He thinks that all this issue is related to politics in the area, the fight against land and cattle possession. He points out the shaman as a well known figure by the population, and who has interference, and is respected. In addition, his word is very valuable. Nevertheless, **the community's most serious problem, nowadays, is the one of the land ownership**; "currently along the issue of the properties, a person or the oil company shows up, unexpectedly, and becomes the land owner. They come here with paperwork and land registrations, which by the way the communities do not even have, despite the fact that they have lived in those places for generations." When we asked him for the fastest way to get to Balsapuerto, he said that there are two possible ways to get there: walking or rafting. A motorcar has to be taken in Yurimaguas up to the end, that is New Arica, a trip that takes about 45 minutes. From there, it is necessary to walk for a

couple of days. The first day people have to walk for around 5 hours to get to a small community, and take some rest in order to continue with the next day's 8-hour walk.



The harbor and “El Vado” market

He assures knowing a Shawi who can guide us and make the contacts. Via raft, the trip takes a day and a half; on the other hand, via slider, it only takes 6 hours, and the price ranges from 150 to 700 soles (between 50 and 250 USD).

We decided not to go to Balsapuerto due to the lack of budget, lack of available time, and the bad weather conditions at that time. The rainy and flood's season goes from January to March, and we had been warned to get back to Tarapoto, where the airport is located, one day before just in case we found a problem in our way back to the airport, in order not to lose the flight. If we would have stayed, we would have found further information, as there was a possibility to visit and talk to a well known shaman of the area who claimed having information about the dead shamans.



Clever Luis Inuma showing the ayahuasca's plant

This shaman lives in Santa Marta, a community located in Yurimaguas' outskirts. His name is Clever Luis Inuma. He welcomes us to his home's door and speaks Shawi with Professor Marcos Sánchez. It looked like they knew each other. In Shawi, he tells him why we are there. The shaman gets back to us speaking perfect Spanish, requests us to address him as Lucho, and ask us to sit down in chairs almost at ground level. He is a 5.5 feet tall man and is about 36 years old. He lets us know that he is from Balsapuerto and that he is a veggie doctor, who took an 18-month diet hitting his chest with his open hand while saying "in the name of God;" then he stood up, from a little bit taller chair than the ones we were seated on in order to brotherly shake hands with us. He mentioned that he strictly followed the diet, but that three months are more than enough to harm and evil controls you: "they feel powerful, since people are afraid of them." According to him, sorcerers hurt, use tobacco, talk to the devil, and send the "ícaros" from far away. It goes through like a noisy bird, but there is actually no bird; it falls down into the roof and from there into your bed, and then the person gets sick. "I do not harm, I spiritually lift up the patient; all this in God's name."

There are "easy" sorcerers, but some others are strong, and do wrong to the people after their sessions. "But I am strong – hits his chest again – and all this is in God's name, I knock them down." We asked him what plants he uses. So he mentioned the "piripiri," which he states is drunk in order to throw evil away and to know who the causative was; "it is faced, it is healed." "I cut the "ayahuasca" into 60 small pieces and the "chacruna" into 70, then they are boiled, and I drink it to see visions." He states that everything is brought from his mother's orchard, where there are some huge trees, but he already sowed in the back of the house. So, he showed us his plants, which are still small, and we took advantage to take the first pictures.

We asked him about the dead sorcerers and the mayor. He replied back by saying that he knows the mayor, that he spreads the word. He said that is going to tell us something, and asks us to sit in the same dark room.

“I went to Balsapuerto and found my mother bedridden. I realized she was sick, so I asked her what had happened to her. She said that all of a sudden she started to feel bad, her legs felt heavy just as if there were some bricks tied to them.” I said “mom, I am going to heal you.” He prepared the vegetables and found out she had been a victim of witchcraft. “Mom, someone made witchcraft to you. So she answered: Who could that person be? What could I do to something or someone, not me son?”

“I kept drinking the vegetables during three days, and then I saw that my mom’s neighbor was the one who had hurt her. He caused her to stumble with a cassava stick. I took her out; and then I cured her and asked my mom to go away for a while “because I am going to kill that miserable bastard by myself. How could he hurt you?” “I went to the market and bought a machete; I sat down and started to sharpen it. It looked like that sorcerer had already realized about my presence. When my mom was better, he intercepted my mom face to face, and said: aunty, it was just a little joke.” “To which she replies: how could it be a joke, you almost kill me. Why did you do that to me? What have I done to you?” He answered it was because she has some chicks which she sells once in a while, as well as she sells small fruits and peanut, and that he was not able to sell. She replied: “that is because I go out to the road and offer them, but you do not do that; you remain within your house resting.” At that moment, I saw him talking to my mom and started scampering him with my machete. I do not know how, but he ran into the thickets, jumped, and got to a motorcar which he rode away. I somehow saw him, he got on a boat, and cursing and showing my machete, I ask him to come back by saying: “You miserable bastard, this is your passport to hell, come back here because I will make you free.” The sorcerer escaped.

Professor Marco Sánchez asked the shaman, Clever Luis Inuma, for the sorcerer’s name, and he said that his name is Bautista. Then, we asked him for the last name, and he said “Inuma;” Bautista Inuma. We told him it was one of the survivor’s names that appeared on the mass media, that he was hidden on secrecy and had lost one of his arms. He laughs and says that recently someone had attacked him with a machete near “El Paraíso” or “Santa Rosa,” for harming people. The Professor affirmed by saying he was maimed. The Shaman added: “This miserable will be killed at any time.”

That same night we were part of one of his sessions. We were delayed because of the mud, so we had to walk since our vehicle could not advance after certain point. There was no power on the area. Everything was pitching dark. We barely arrived. At the Shaman’s house electricity was generated by an engine, we sat in the living room. In a nearby doorless room we could see a woman around 55 years old lying in a bed. She was annoyed and unable to pick her stuff; she was accompanied by her husband. Apparently, she was blind. The Shaman and a 30-year-old man got inside and spoke Shawi to them. They greet us and it seems they prefer to stay in the room instead of coming to the living room. Suddenly, the engine dies due to lack of gasoline; a complete darkness surrounds the house. With a little candle, the old couple was helped to be seated in the living room. Moonlight rays were filtered by some small holes.

During the ceremony, the shaman stood up twice to throw up. He started cursing someone, insulted the person, and then he said to the man next to him: “This miserable bastard took your wife's sight away, but she will be healed.” The apprentice approached us and told us that the session was over and the cost was 500 soles. We explained him again that we did not have money, we were there to document the slaughter case, and that this was our way of contributing, since we were committed to provide accurate information. After the apprentice’s persistence for payment, the professor said, enough, there is no problem. We asked the Shaman to excuse us, so he walked us to the exit and showed regret after seeing the dark road outside, then he said go with peace.



Clever Luis Inuma’s Ayahuasca’s ceremony, Yurimaguas

Professor Sanchez talked about Balsapuerto’s development, previously ruled by Hispanic speakers, by colonists, since the timber age. Nowadays, the situation has changed due to the fact that state education has become available. In the past, most villagers barely finished their primary school. They were under the leash of Hispanic speakers, that “here no one knew about money, and that even until now in some places we can see it; this is why some etnas do not allow immigrants.” Colonists had the villagers under their spell, like pawns. They took over their lands, which belonged to their ancestors, from son to son during hundreds of years, seeding, harvesting. That is the reason why entities like CORPI appeared in order to “ensure the rights of the villagers, even if they are shamans or sorcerers.” Then, he tells us that this kind of things happen even if a chicken was stolen; however, now it is worse, since in the middle of everything else, for instance, the ITALIAN-PERUVIAN ONG is providing loans to the villagers, so they can buy cattle. “Who would have imagined finding cows or bulls in here? They do not even know how to take care of them, and the worst part is that they often escape to the other farms, and troubles arise or it could be merely envy between villagers.”

We just kept on asking about the Mayor and the dead sorcerers. And we were told it is really normal; the bizarre part is that they are so many in such a short period of time, traditionally it should be in a prolonged lapse, but is a fact that there is a mafia from the

mayor's brother. He has a band of crooks and this is proven by one of the victims who were first kidnapped by a bunch of people in cop's disguises. He was followed, captured, and taken away. He states that this has not been seen before and it is obviously because of a legal issue with the possession of properties. They justified this by saying that this is only done to shamans or sorcerers. He also explained how the press has discredited their culture and the people who live here. He affirmed that the places where the oil companies work "everything is ruined, the river is sick, fish are smaller and dead, deformed; there is no life, you no longer see animals. It is difficult to find a little deer around this place; if you can find it you will be amazed, since it would not be a deer, but a skinny and deformed animal."

He points out that until recent times there were issues with the oil companies and they rose against them. "We are peaceful, but if they mess with our people, we react. First, we requested a study to be performed before something is done, and effectively there was oil, gas, and a new novelty, copper was found. So engineers came from everywhere, but in our assembly we said NO. The directors gathered and we were offered apartments in Lima, but we did not accept. What we did ask were title deeds." Lastly he said, "Our culture, traditions, dance, food, are lost because the shamans are dying and there is no way of saving that information. The information is gone, there are no policies for preserving this and they do not understand our culture." He also shared that he used to work for the ONG Terra Nova. He was in charge of coordinating and that also was an assessor for development projects, one example is the creation of medicinal soaps using different plants from the area, and that this was an interesting experience. Now, they are urgently looking for a way of securing their lands "since the properties have belonged to us since ancient times." He recommended that we search for the Shawi medical-biologist Rafael Chanchari, resident of Tarapoto, who has found a cure for AIDS.

Without a doubt, Preyer Huamán and Rosario de Pribyl's findings allow to realize the complexity that it represents living in "El Alto Amazonas," and specifically the complexity in which the facts of the sorcerers and vegetarians' murders is framed in Balsapuerto. On one side it is obvious that the state's policies do not reach Balsapuerto. The population lives with insufficient public health services and without cultural adequacy. The suffering level and issues among the villagers has increased due to the lack of efficient sanitary coverage in the area.



Children in Yurimaguas

The structural disadvantage situation that Balsapuerto suffers is actually considered as fertile ground for the imposition of opportunistic and populist policies like the ones supposedly offered by the Balsapuerto's mayor, which pretend to eradicate "evil" from the villages. Within this context, "evil" is represented by "sorcerers" instead of the real causes of the poor situation which the village is found within. In that sense, health and education fields as well as the villagers' rights protection, against oil transnational companies, do not represent a priority to be taken into consideration within the policies.

On the other hand, the aggressive transnational companies' policies of buying and appropriation of properties that pretend to exploit the natural resources destabilizes the area's political life and peace. Properties regulation is still an ongoing issue. Villages do not find it necessary to privatize or get titles, since their land has been inherited by generations.

Another factor worth to mention within this problematic situation is the one related to the expansion of the called mystical or psychedelic tourism in the villages. Now, if the growth of this informal industry leads, on one hand, to gain the necessary income for the villagers, it may simultaneously involve a sort of exogenous cultural change that breaks into the village, bringing new conflicts among villages, which dispute the customers, and also for the people themselves who use these services.

We believe that all the data provided in this work by Preyer Huamán and Rosario de Pribyl highlight the urgency of starting a new debate on how to improve living and health conditions of traditional villages with this kind of shamanic practices, plus preserving their cultural heritage.



Elaborated by ICEERS Foundation

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