

THE MORAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS  
OF EQUALITY AMONGST THE AMUESHA  
OF CENTRAL PERU

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“ Joy, bright spark of divinity  
Daughter of Elysium,  
Fire-inspired we tread  
Thy sanctuary.  
Thy magic power re-unites  
All that custom has divided,  
All men become brothers  
Under the sway of thy gentle wings ”.  
“ Ode to Joy ”  
Friedrich von Schiller.

Using Dumont's concepts of “encompassing” and “encompassed” ideology and analysing Amuesha (Peruvian Amazon region) cosmology, mythology, kinship and morality, the author demonstrates that the moral implications of (“symmetrical” and “asymmetrical”) love, compassion and generosity, which is expressed in both the relations between people and between them and their divinities, keep political power in check and ensures the social equality.

*Los aspectos morales y sociales de la igualdad entre los Amuesha del Perú Central.*

Usando los conceptos de ideología «incluida» e «incluyente» desarrollados por Dumont, y en base a un análisis de la cosmología, la mitología, el sistema de parentesco y de valores Amuesha (Amazonia peruana), el autor demuestra que las implicaciones morales del amor («simétrico» y «asimétrico»), la compasión y la generosidad, tanto entre los individuos como entre los seres humanos y divinos, limitan el ejercicio del poder político y garantizan la igualdad social.

*Les aspects moraux et sociaux de l'égalité parmi les Amuesha du Pérou Central.*

En utilisant des concepts développés par Dumont d'idéologie «englobante» et «englobée», et à partir d'une analyse de la cosmologie, de la mythologie, des systèmes de

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parenté et de valeurs propres aux Amuesha (Amazonie péruvienne), l'auteur démontre que les implications morales de l'amour (« symétrique » et « asymétrique »), de la compassion et de la générosité, tant entre les individus comme entre eux et les dieux, limitent l'exercice du pouvoir politique et garantissent l'égalité sociale.

When, following Durkheim, Dumont asserts that "our own society obliges us to be free" as opposed to "traditional societies, which know nothing of equality and liberty as values, which know nothing, in short, of the individual" (1970a : 8), one cannot help but feel that there is something thoroughly misleading about our Western understanding and use of the concept of equality. Though Dumont's re-examination of the Indian caste system has brought forth new and rich insights on the subject of 'hierarchy' (as opposed to 'equality'), his main thesis, which divides the universe of social configurations into *holistic* and *hierarchical* societies of the Indian type and *individualistic* and *egalitarian* societies of the Western type, leaves aside a whole range of societies which do not fall into either pigeonhole. These are precisely the societies which frequently constitute the subject matter of the Americanist anthropologist's endeavours : a type of society which, as I shall argue on the basis of my data on the Amuesha, is manifestly egalitarian in its social interaction and posit extreme importance on individual will and personal autonomy, and which, not infrequently, entertain at the same time hierarchical notions of the cosmic and social orders. Although Dumont is aware of the existence of such societies 'without hierarchy' which do not fit into his binary scheme he dismisses them in a rather light manner :

It is true for example that tribes, if they are not entirely devoid of inequalities, may have neither king nor, say, a secret society with successive grades. But that applies to relatively simple societies, with few people, and where the division of labour is little developed (Dumont 1961 : 354).

For someone who has provided us with a detailed and frequently fascinating study of the reification of the 'economic' in Western ideology (Dumont 1977) the dismissal of these societies on account of their 'little developed division of labour' is rather puzzling. In a similar vein, though in slightly more cautious language, Dumont also dismisses the existence of the notion of the 'individual' in these societies.

Here some will object that all societies recognize the individual in some fashion ; it is more probable that relatively simple societies show a lack of differentiation in this respect, which should be described and estimated with care (Dumont 1970a : 9).

I would argue against this ; for if 'relatively simple' societies, such as the Amuesha, know nothing of 'equality' as a value nor of the 'individual' as an independent category, it is because they have had no need to develop such notions : the egalitarian nature of their social interaction and moral values precludes the existence of such concepts which could have only sprang from societies ridden with social inequalities and hierarchical distinctions. One has only to think of the Athens of Plato and Aristotle which was divided into free citizens, slaves and foreigners, or of the estates of Rousseau's XVIIIth century

France, to realize that the Western concept of equality was born from a situation of actual inequality. I would argue that this situation has remained, to a large extent, unchanged : equality in Western societies is alternatively a political ideal or a political ideology that does not reflect our social structure pervaded as it is by class distinctions and hierarchical patterns of organization (the Army and the Church, but also the School, the Industry, and the Bureaucracy). Dumont is not unaware of this :

The 'problem' of social classes, or of 'social stratification' as it appears to our sociologists springs from the contradiction between the equalitarian ideal, accepted by all these scholars as by the society to which they belong, and an array of facts showing that the difference, the differentiation, tends even among us to assume a hierarchical aspect, and to become permanent or hereditary inequality, or discrimination (Dumont 1961 : 351-2).

But it is precisely the fact that he is aware of this contradiction between what Bêteille has called the 'spirit of equality' and the 'practice of equality' (1984 : 1) which still leaves open the question of what exactly is meant by an 'egalitarian' society.

Dumont's appropriation of the term 'egalitarian' to describe the individualistic societies of the Western type in opposition to the holistic and 'hierarchical' societies of the Indian type not only muddles rather than clarifies the matter, but also deprives us of an adequate terminology to characterize structures of equality such as can be found amongst the Amerindian societies of lowland South America. This is especially alarming in the face of such general statements as the following :

among the great civilizations the world has known, the holistic type of society has been overwhelmingly predominant ; indeed, it looks as if it had been the rule, the only exception being our modern civilization and its individualistic type of society (Dumont 1977 : 4).

Though Dumont attempts to tone down this remark by establishing that not "all holistic societies stress hierarchy to the same degree, nor do all individualistic societies stress equality to the same degree" (1970a : 4), it becomes apparent that in his theoretical scheme there is no place for egalitarianism but in our own Western societies<sup>1</sup>. Such a stance leads Dumont to claim, after assessing the profound changes that take place in the process of transition from the 'natural' to the 'rational' societies, that : "In a sense, the 'leap from history into freedom' has already been made, and we live in a realized Utopia" (1961 : 355).

Such an assertion, isolated from its context, could lead us to interpret Dumont's stance as one of political naïveté, if it were not for the fact that even in his earliest articles on the subject he has been extremely clear in establishing that he is dealing with the sphere of 'values' (ideology) rather than with that of 'behaviour' (social organization). In this sense one cannot but agree with Dumont in that the appearance (a term I prefer to the more evolutionist 'transition') of the individualistic-oriented Western societies brought forth a 'revolution in values' (Dumont 1961 : 356) which has had far reaching historical consequences. However, given that Dumont himself is aware of the contradiction between our egalitarian ideology — manifested in conceptions such as 'equality

of consideration', 'equality of opportunity' or 'equality before the law' — and our hierarchical patterns of social organization, we must conclude that there must exist an alternative set of values that gives meaning and justifies this hierarchical aspect of our societies.

To use Dumont's own concepts of the *encompassing* and the *encompassed* (1970b : 154 ; also 1970a : XII), I would suggest that this egalitarian ideology is the 'encompassing' ideology in Western societies, that is, the predominant ideology. However, this discourse of equality, predominant as it may appear, is counterbalanced by other 'encompassed' discourses that stress inequality and hierarchy as natural givens. One has only to reflect on the far reaching influence of the theological disquisitions of St. Thomas Aquinas which deemed hierarchy to be natural to both the social and universal orders, or, closer to us, the popularization of the Darwinian notions of 'natural selection' and the 'survival of the fittest' in order to realize the pervading power of such ideas. It is this encompassed ideology of inequality, rather than the encompassing ideology of equality, which gives expression and sustenance to the hierarchical patterns of organization of Western societies.

When Dumont claims that equality as a value is unknown in traditional societies it should, therefore, be understood that he is referring to the system of ideas that revolve around the concept of equality, rather than the social enactment of such ideas. We are, however, left once more with the question of what is then an egalitarian society? Is it the one whose encompassing ideology is one of equality, but whose social system is firmly based on encompassed hierarchical notions and patterns of organization? Or could it be the one in which the abstract concept of equality is absent and which has an encompassing ideology of hierarchy, but whose social system is firmly anchored in encompassed moral imperatives which ensure equality? Dumont seems to adhere to the first possibility. On the basis of the Amuesha example I would rather support the second alternative. What is at stake here is whether we should define equality as a political ideology, a moral value or a social practice. If egalitarianism is to be defined as a political ideology or doctrine we have very little or no chance of finding egalitarian societies amongst the so called 'traditional' societies. In contrast, if we regard egalitarianism as the result of moral imperatives enacted in social interaction on a daily basis the chances are that we will find a large proportion of traditional societies which are better qualified than our own to deserve the label of 'egalitarian'.

The Amuesha constitute one such society. In spite of the fact that they lack the abstract concept of equality<sup>2</sup> and that, in fact, their encompassing ideology is one based on hierarchical paradigms, the social and power relations of these slash-and-burn agriculturalists are grounded in a value system which places great emphasis on the notion of equality, individual will and personal autonomy. This may seem contradictory, but in fact is no more contradictory than those societies in which the exaltation of equality goes hand in hand with economic exploitation and political inequalities. The Amuesha traditional political system, based on priestly leaders and ceremonial centres which were simultaneously centres of authority, is not alien to hierarchical principles. In the domain of ideology these latter principles are manifested in the paradigm of

fatherhood through which power relations of all kinds are talked of. However, the encompassed discourse of love, compassion and generosity which deems power legitimate only insofar as its holders are perceived to be generous providers and the ultimate life-givers, deprives the encompassing ideology of hierarchy of its potentiality for inequality and oppression. The Amuesha example constitutes, I shall argue, an example of equality within hierarchy<sup>3</sup>.

*The hierarchical nature of kinship terminology and the organization of the Amuesha pantheon.*

The Amuesha, as many other Amazonian societies, have a two-line prescriptive terminology of the Dravidian type as described by Dumont (1953). Thus, Ego's relatives : 1) are classified according to a five generation scheme ; 2) they are distinguished according to sex ; and 3) they are separated into two distinct categories (kin and potential affines) in Ego's generation and in the first ascending and descending generations (see Figure 1). The Amuesha kinship terminology contains within itself the seeds of hierarchical notions, and is used to give form and content to different types of hierarchical relations. Thus, in the context of the relation with the realm of the sacred, the Amuesha organize and categorize their divinities as they organize and categorize their own society, that is, by reference to their classificatory terminology. This, however, they do within certain limitations. Firstly, they only apply kin terms (as opposed to affinal ones) to their divinities. Such a distinction, which divides the social universe into 'we' and 'they' or, as Smith suggests, into 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (1983), frequently appears as a division between those who are of the same kind and those who are not (Crocker 1969 ; Overing Kaplan 1975). Secondly, they only apply those kin terms corresponding to Ego's own or the two ascending generations. The divinities are, thus, organized hierarchically into three categories.

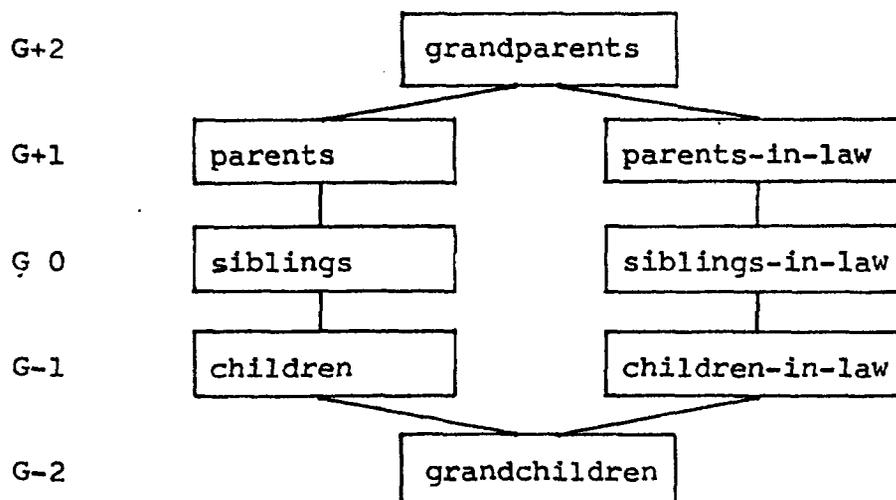
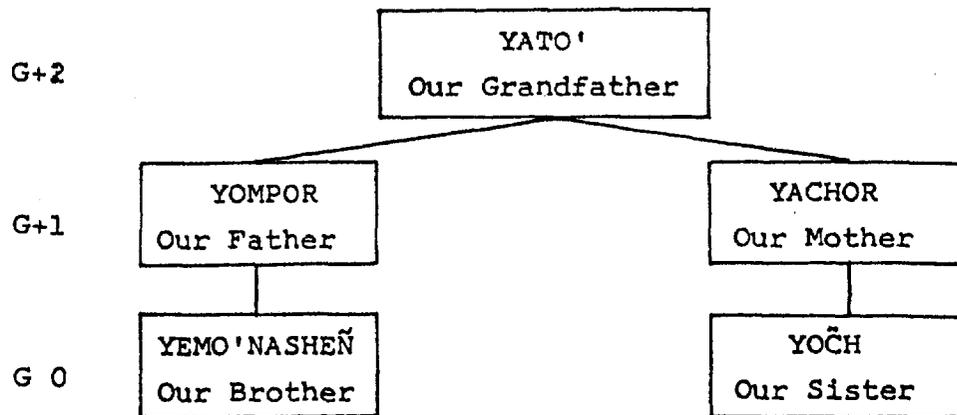


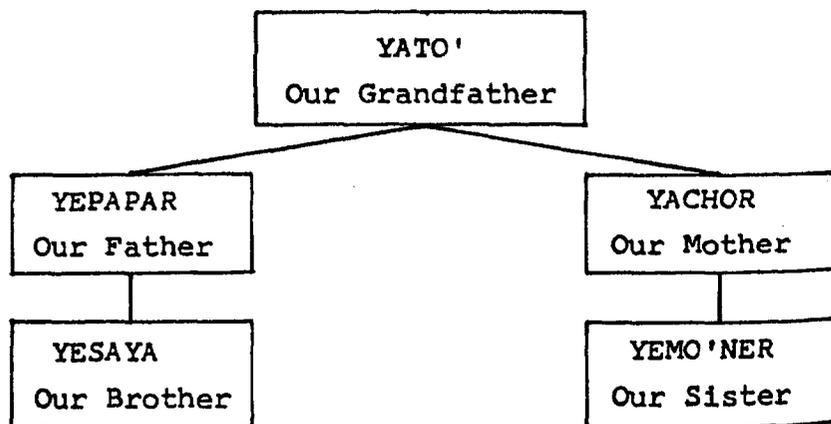
FIG. 1. — The Amuesha Dravidian-type system of kinship and marriage.

ries which in order of increasing power are : siblings, parents and grandparents. These categories are internally divided according to gender, except for the grandparental category where only male divinities are to be found (see Figure 2). In categorizing their divinities as kin rather than affines, and with kin terms corresponding to the two ascending rather than the two descending generations, the Amuesha are stressing two fundamental elements : firstly, the genealogical connection that establish the Amuesha as descendants or 'creatures' of their divinities ; and, secondly, the aspect of equality within hierarchy : the divinities are kin and, therefore, of the same kind, but simultaneously it is ascertained that they are superior to humankind.

At the top of this hierarchy of divinities is *Yato' Yos*, the supreme divinity and ultimate creator who, as the overlord of heaven, dwells in a celestial man-



Male Ego



Female Ego

FIG. 2. — Kinship categorization of the Amuesha pantheon.

sion known by the name of *Yomporesho*. It was he who created this earth and the Amuesha at the beginning of time by blowing his divine breath into a handful of dirt (Smith 1977 : 84-5). Furthermore, his universal soul (*camuequeñets*) is conceived of as the ultimate source of life. According to the Amuesha, the self is composed by a material dimension, the body, and two non-material dimensions, the 'shadow' (*yechoyeshem*) and the 'soul' (*yecamquëñ*). The 'souls' of Amuesha men and women are conceived of as the individual manifestations of the universal soul of the creator.

The supreme divinity, as the other divinities of the grandparental category, is a *deus otiosus*. Like Amuesha grandfathers, the divinities of the *Yato*' category are old, benevolent but tired divinities who wish well for their grandchildren, but can do (or will do) little for them. The divinities in the sibling category are, on the other hand, minor divinities who were left behind after the ascension of the present solar divinity and who share this earth with the Amuesha. These minor divinities lack the power to affect humankind as a whole. Their extreme proximity constitutes a counter image of the remoteness of the grandparental divinities. Both extreme distance and extreme proximity constitute, I shall argue, a sign of the limited power of these two types of divinity with respect to current human affairs.

The divinities of the parental or *Yompor* category, on the contrary, have considerable influence on the lives of the Amuesha and on the perpetuation of the cosmos as a whole. *Yompor Ror*, the present sun, and his sister/wife *Yachor Arrorr*, the moon, are the principal divinities of this category. Their birth, at the end of the second of three eras into which the Amuesha divide their history, marked the origin of procreation, fertility and normal childbirths. *Yompor Ror*, Our Father the Sun, is the paradigmatic father of humanity. In sharing his 'vital breath' (*pa'ïoreñ*) and 'vital strength' (*po'huamenc*) with the Amuesha and all the living creatures on this earth, *Yompor Ror* continues to infuse life in the creation of the supreme divinity. Without his light and warmth, and without his divine breath the Amuesha would have nothing to hunt or to fish, nothing to sow or to harvest, and they would have to live in a cold and dark world. If the supreme divinity is the ultimate source of life, the solar divinity is the day-to-day life-giver par excellence. Thus, in the recent past most of the domestic and public rituals and prayers were addressed to him.

The paradigm of parenthood (with a strong bias in favour of fatherhood) projected upon the sacred pantheon results in a category of active and powerful divinities with respect to which the Amuesha as a whole stand as classificatory children, as subjects, or as followers. This is not gratuitous. Of the five kin categories considered by the Amuesha, the parental category appears as the active one. It is the category of those who have power and capacity, as well as knowledge and strength. Grandparents are too old, grandchildren too young; children are more vulnerable than oneself, while siblings are as vulnerable as oneself. So it is those in the category of parents who have to bear the responsibility to dispense life and to provide for both their elders and their offspring.

The divinities of the parental category are the active ones, and the Amuesha reserve the term *partsonesha*', or 'powerful ones', to describe them. The root *parets* refers to their divine or cosmic power (whose maximum expression is the

giving of light and the sharing of vital breath and strength) which is indispensable for the maintenance of the natural and cosmic orders. In brief, the Amuesha relation to the sacred is conceived of as a hierarchical relation phrased in terms of the father/child relation in which the two parties involved are seen as equal, in that they are of the same kind (i.e. kin), but different, in that the one has more power than the other.

The hierarchy of divinities is paralleled by a hierarchy of demoniacal beings whose ancestry goes straight back in time as far as the genesis of the world. According to myth, when the supreme divinity, *Yato' Yos*, created a flat earth below the earth where the divinities lived, his jealous classificatory brother, *Yosoper*, made himself lord of this new earth. *Yato' Yos* asked *Yosoper* for a handful of dirt and created a third earth. Blowing his divine breath into some mud he also made a human being. His envious brother created then ten more human beings in the same image. *Yato' Yos* cursed them and transformed them into demoniacal beings. For each animal or plant that *Yato' Yos* created, *Yosoper* would create a host of similar animals and plants which, in turn, *Yato' Yos* cursed and transformed into demons or poisonous and/or malevolent plant and animal species. The demoniacal hierarchy mirrors the godly one. At the top is *Yosoper*, who nowadays reigns in a chthonic sphere called *Concheñtso*. He is the overlord of all demoniacal beings : the *oneñeñ* fiends who are said to be his classificatory children, and the *jo'* demons, who are invisible to everybody but the most powerful shamans, and are regarded as followers of the *oneñeñ* fiends. The kinship structure of the metaphysical world is thus conceived of as consisting of a pair of brothers who through their extraordinary powers gave birth, out of their own volition, to both the life-giving divinities and the life-taking demons (see Figure 3)<sup>4</sup>.

It should be noticed that while the Amuesha refer to their divinities by kinship terms and regard themselves as the latter's creatures and followers, they abstain from applying any kinship terms to the hierarchy of demons, thus, disavowing any link of descent with them. While gods stand in the category of

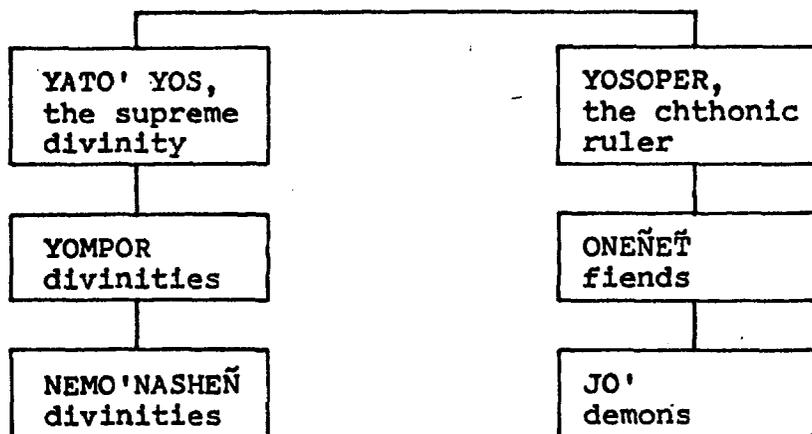


FIG. 3. — The Amuesha divine and demoniacal hierarchies.

'we', demons are incorporated into the category of 'they'. This distinction may acquire sociological relevance as when, for instance, the Amuesha claim that the white peoples are descendants of *Yosoper*.

*The paradigm of fatherhood as an idiom for hierarchical relations.*

The father/child relation in the domestic sphere and the relation between the Amuesha and their deities in the sacred one constitute the two extremes of a continuum of hierarchical relationships which are modelled upon the paradigm of fatherhood. In the intralocal sphere the outstanding power relation is that between a shaman (*pa'llerr*) and the members of the local settlement for whom he performs his ritual activities, as well as that between him and his apprentices. In the interlocal sphere, on the other hand, the outstanding power relation is that between the Amuesha traditional priests (*cornesha'*) and his followers. In both cases the superordinate party of the relationship is addressed as *nompör*, or 'my father', while the subordinate party is addressed either as *neyochresha'* ('my distant classificatory son') or *posñenesha'* ('my distant classificatory daughter'). In the context of hierarchical social relations these latter kinship terms are used to indicate the male or female 'followers' or 'disciples' of a powerful individual (a shaman, a priest, or a man with local prestige). In the context of the hierarchical relations between this and the metaphysical world(s) the term has both the connotations of 'creatures' (children) and 'followers'. Thus, it is said that the Amuesha people are the classificatory children or followers of *Yato' Yos*, the supreme divinity, and *Yompör Rör*, the solar divinity, while the white people are the children or followers of *Yosoper*, the demoniacal ruler of Amuesha tradition.

The *cornesha'* — the Amuesha politico-religious leaders of the past — were referred to by his male followers as *nompör*, and by his female followers as *nepapar*, both terms meaning 'my actual or classificatory father'. Accordingly, the wife of and acting *cornesha'* was referred to by both female and male followers as *nachör*, 'my actual or classificatory mother'. Such correspondence in the language of power allows us to establish that kinship amongst the Amuesha constitutes an idiom for political authority and, in particular, that the relationship between a leader and his followers is phrased and understood as if it were a relationship between a father and his actual or classificatory children. This still holds true in the field of contemporary political relations. Thus, the Amuesha refer to their political organization, the Congress of Amuesha Native Communities, as 'our father'. As a man told me in 1977: "After several epidemics struck our land, and our last priests died, we were left behind like poor little orphans, without a father to guide us and protect us. But nowadays we have our Congress". This conception has also been extrapolated to the wider context of national politics, and not infrequently the Amuesha will refer to the Peruvian government in terms of 'our father'.

Although the mother/child bond is one of the most enduring in Amuesha society, the Amuesha seem to have chosen the paradigm of fatherhood to express the capacity for creation and life-giving. Like the Barasana, the

Amuesha seem to claim that while women ensure the reproduction of people, it is men who ensure the reproduction of society and the cosmos (Hugh-Jones 1979 : 10). Thus, although the Amuesha constantly stress the complementarity of the sexes in production (economic activities) and reproduction (child rearing), they have privileged the paradigm of fatherhood over that of motherhood as the model for the ideological representation of power and authority. This patriarchal bias is reflected in their pantheon. While in the parental category of divinities most of its members appear in pairs of married siblings, the female divinities are not endowed with as much power as their male counterparts. Thus, for instance, *Yachor Arrorr*, Our Mother the Moon, is given no credit in Amuesha mythology as a life-giver. This is all the more relevant since she is the sister/wife of *Yompor Ror*, the life-giver par excellence. While *Yompor Ror* may be considered the paradigmatic 'father' of the Amuesha, there is no similar female deity that could be seen as a paradigmatic 'mother'. This inequality between the sexes, indorsed by the encompassing ideology of hierarchy is, however, disavowed by the values of the encompassed ideology of equality (and by social practice) as we shall see later on when dealing with the issue of gender.

The Amuesha have endowed their major male divinities with those features which they attribute to human fathers (only that in their case these features are potentiated to the highest level) : that of being life-givers and providers. Concomitantly, the holders of power — whether traditional priests, shamans or men with local political influence — are always expected to display those characteristics which are demanded from fathers. Hence, they are not only expected to be life-givers, but also generous providers with respect to their followers.

#### *The Amuesha priest/temple complex.*

Of all the above hierarchical relations the most relevant to my discussion is that between the Amuesha priests and their followers<sup>5</sup>. The *cornesha*' were politico-religious leaders whose moral and political influence radiated from their ceremonial centres over a variable number of Amuesha local settlements and even beyond the boundaries of Amuesha society. Through a personal quest for a divine revelation in the form of a *coshamñats* sacred song or a speech the prospective *cornesha*' gradually established a reputation for religiosity and consecration to the divinities. When a consensus was reached as to his piety and the veracity of his revelations, and he had managed to generate a political and religious following, the prospective priest invited his followers to build a temple where they could praise the divinities. The building of the temple (*puerahua*) by his followers was both a public statement of their political allegiance and a public recognition of his status as a priest. These temples with a circular plan, conical roof and two or three stories were almost invariably built in the interstices of the Amuesha social space. Some were established at sites with mythico-religious significance, while others were built at sites where the prospective priest had had a divine revelation : either through a dream, through the hearing of a song or speech, or through the sight of a divine portent.

The Amuesha ceremonial centres were not residential sites. Only the offi-

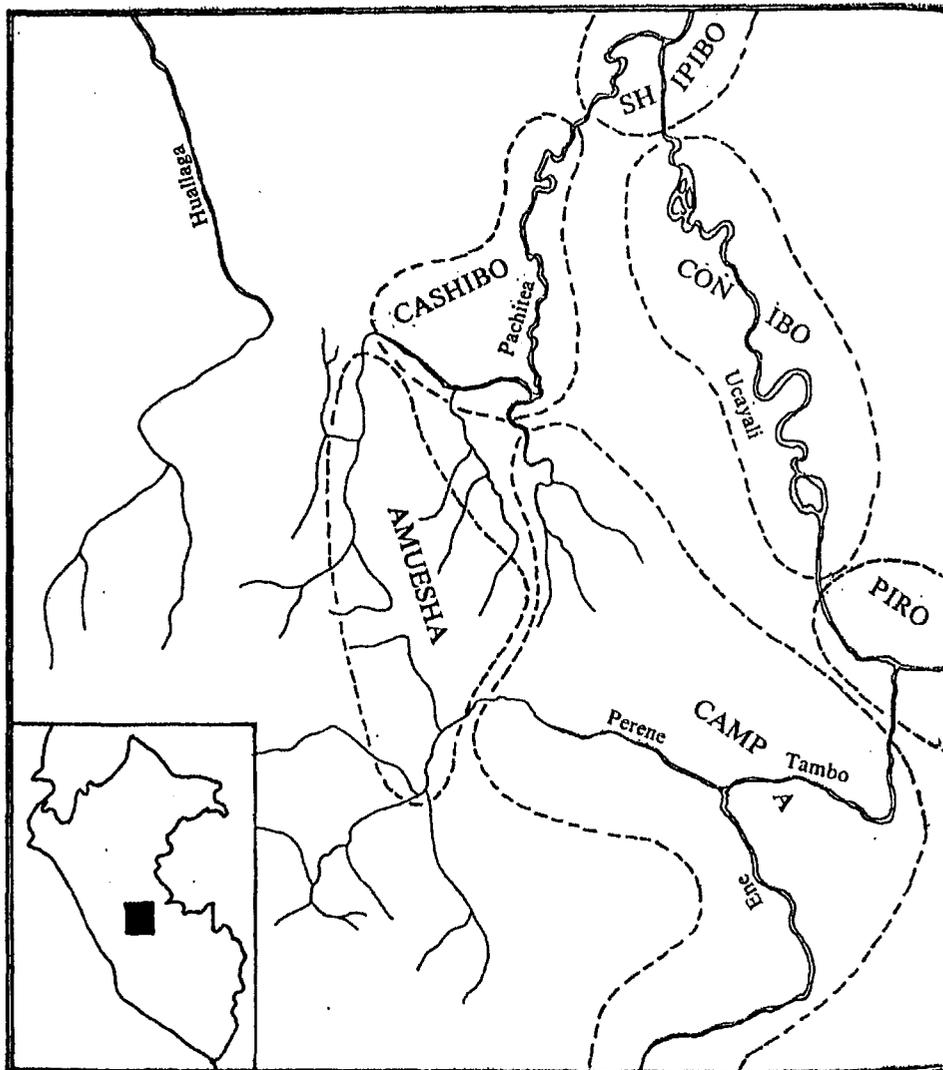
ciating priest and his closest relatives and disciples lived permanently there. Whenever the local priest would organize a ceremonial gathering (*orreñtsopo*) he would summon his followers from neighbouring and distant local settlements. Some would come some days in advance to help in all the tasks required for the organization of such large festivities : clearing, cultivation and harvesting of gardens, hunting and fishing expeditions, preparation of food and manioc beer, and repairing of the centre's buildings. The local priest and his wife organized and led the work teams of men and women respectively.

Amongst the Amuesha the language of authority is moderate, and although they have a term for 'orders' in the Western sense (*yecheñets*), more often than not these orders were phrased as 'invitations' (*menqueñets*) or the 'giving of permission' (*llesens*). This moderation of the language of authority by which summons appear as invitations, orders as the granting of permission to do something, and one and the other are expressed in a beseeching manner should not lead us to believe, as Clastres suggests, that the Amuesha politico-religious leaders lacked power and authority. What is at stake here is, again, the need to redefine those Western concepts which we use as contrastive models when analyzing non-Western societies. Thus, for instance, it may be said that the power of the Amuesha priests was economic in nature insofar as their life-giving mystical powers and ritual techniques were essential constitutive elements of the productive and reproductive processes of Amuesha society. In effect, through their mystical knowledge and ceremonial practices the Amuesha priests ensured the continuing dispensation of vital breath (*pa'toreñ*) and strength (*po'huamenc*) on the part of the divinities and, hence, the fertility and health of the land, the animals, plants and human beings. Their economic power based on the personal ownership of what I have called the 'mystical means of reproduction' (Santos 1986b) was qualitatively different from economic power in our societies based on the private ownership of the material means of production. This, however, does not make their power less 'economic' than power in our societies.

As to the political authority of the *cornesha*', this was expressed more in terms of moral authority than through actual political commands. The Amuesha priests were peace-makers and, as models of exemplary moral behaviour, they acted as arbiters in any conflict that might arise amongst their followers. Political allegiance was expressed through the regular attendance to the ceremonial gatherings they organized. For this reason, any given individual was expected to attend the celebrations of only one ceremonial centre over a period of time, unless they visited other centres led by their own priestly leader in a formal visiting expedition. Political allegiance was also expressed through the gifts cum tribute owed to the Amuesha priests by their followers. These gifts, which were voluntary and were not stipulated in any formal way, consisted of textiles, dried game meat or fish, ornaments, and coca leaves. Gifts were immediately redistributed by the local priest during the large celebrations held at the ceremonial centre.

The maximum expression of a priest's political authority was the appointment of temporary war leaders (*açllaraña*) in cases of war against neighbouring ethnic groups. According to oral tradition, the Amuesha priests never partici-

pated themselves in war expeditions, their role being confined to praying for the success of the expedition. This is in consonance with their role as moral authorities whose influence was frequently extended over portions of neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Campa and the Conibo. If we would talk in terms of 'social functions' we would have to conclude that the social function of the Amuesha priests was that of generating a moral space of a higher order which transcended the conflicting interests of both local settlements and ethnic groups. Through the ceremonial gatherings held at the Amuesha temples people from different local settlements as well as from different ethnic groups which would otherwise been isolated from each other came into contact, thus, creating social



MAP 1 : The Amerindian societies of the Central Montaña, XVIII century.

networks that extended far beyond the boundaries of Amuesha society to include most of the ethnic groups of the Central Montaña (see Map 1).

*Love and hierarchy.*

This issue of love and compassion is central to Amuesha moral and philosophical concerns. It is the discourse of love that constitutes the link between the encompassing ideology of hierarchy and the encompassed ideology of equality. The Amuesha conceive of two types of love. *Muereñets* is a primordial type of love, a principle of life and a moving cause. It was this kind of love that moved the supreme divinity to create this earth and its living beings. Genesis, as the giving of life, is thought of by the Amuesha as a primordial act of love. Similarly, it is thought that the Amuesha shall achieve salvation and a state of eternal life through a final act of love (*muereñets*) on the part of the divinities. Genesis and the achievement of immortality result from the same act of love.

*Morrenteñets*, on the other hand, is a historical type of love. The Amuesha claim that this feeling appeared with the acquisition of the knowledge of the *coshamñats* sacred music which, as we shall see, marked the end of a pre-social era characterized by feuding and murder. With the acquisition of the sacred music the Amuesha entered into friendly social relations and became as a 'big family' (*yamo'tsesha*). Thus, if *muereñets* is a love ingrained in the divine which is seen as the ultimate source of biological life, *morrenteñets* is a love ingrained in human affairs which is regarded as the ultimate source of social life.

There is, however, a further difference between these two kinds of love. While *muereñets* is an asymmetrical, unilateral love which only the superordinate party of any given relationship may feel for the subordinate party, *morrenteñets* is a symmetrical, bilateral love eminently entertained in egalitarian relations, though it may also apply to hierarchical ones. The feeling of *morrenteñets* is ideologically tied up with the mythical origin of the *coshamñats* celebration, which entails an alternating display of generosity involving all the households of any given settlement. For this reason, *morrenteñets* can be regarded as the feeling of mutual love that characterizes relations of ongoing reciprocal generosity. *Morrenteñets* applies to the mutual feeling of love and esteem between husband and wife, between actual or classificatory siblings, between a series of institutionalized 'friends' or 'ritual partners' and, to a lesser extent, between actual siblings-in-law.

In contrast, the term *muereñets* only applies in the context of hierarchical relations. If the term *morrenteñets* entails a relation between two individuals or parties in which both appear as loving/loved ones, the term *muereñets* entails an asymmetrical relation in which the superordinate party appears as the 'loving one' while the subordinate party appears as the 'loved one'. *Muereñets* is the love/compassion that the divinities feel for their creatures, or that the master of an animal species feels for the Amuesha hunter who wants to hunt one of his animals. It is also the love that the divinities or lesser spirits feel for the individual Amuesha who embarks on a song quest — whether a shaman or a priest.

Furthermore, *muereñets* is the feeling entertained by priests towards their followers as a whole, or by a shaman towards his disciples. Finally, *muereñets* is the love that parents feel for their actual or classificatory children. In brief, all the hierarchical relations that are phrased in the idiom of fatherhood and that I have described above are characterized by the love/compassion (*muereñets*) that the superordinate partner of the relation (the loving one) feels for the subordinate one (the loved one).

Associated with this feeling of asymmetrical love is the term *amueraña*. This latter term contains the same dimensions of 'love' and 'compassion' as the term *muereñets*, but in addition it incorporates the aspect of 'generosity', 'care' and 'solicitude'. Hence, the term *amueraña* refers to the quality of 'loving generosity'. As the term *muereñets*, the adjective *amueraña* may only be applied to the superordinate party of a hierarchical relation: the higher divinities and lesser spirits, the traditional priests, the local shamans and parents. I have already said that the father/child relationship constitutes the matrix for the ideological representation of hierarchical relations. In the light of the discussion of the terms with which the Amuesha qualify their hierarchical relations, I shall now add the essence of fatherhood and, therefore, of power is the attitude of loving generosity which is ultimately manifested in the giving of life to, and the continuous providing for those who stand with respect to the powerful as their creatures or their classificatory children.

The divinities brought the Amuesha into existence and continue to dispense life to them. Traditional priests ensure the conditions of existence of the Amuesha through their mystical knowledge and their mastery of the ceremonial techniques of life-giving. Shamans mystically protect both their apprentices and the members of their local settlements from the metaphysical perils that continuously threaten their lives. Furthermore, they use their ritual knowledge to heal (*a'crrateñets*), an act which is phrased by the Amuesha as 'the giving of life to the afflicted'. Finally, actual and classificatory parents have the duties of sheltering, protecting and providing for their actual or classificatory children, and their relationship is one characterized by institutionalized generosity in which parents (actual or classificatory) are constantly giving to their children.

This discourse of love, though firmly rooted in hierarchical notions, provides simultaneously the moral imperatives that hinder the development of inequality. By establishing that the holders of power should be loving and generous providers, who should give more, and more essential things, than they receive from their followers, the Amuesha set limits to their power and provide the moral framework to ensure equality within hierarchy. This is achieved ideologically by representing the powerful ones as the 'loving ones' and as 'the ones who serve', while the less powerful are seen as the 'loved ones' and 'the ones who are served'. This process could be defined as one of inversion of hierarchy by which the powerful appear as (and are expected to be) 'servants' of the less powerful. The Amuesha social hierarchy resulting from an unequal distribution of mystical powers and capacities is counteracted by the moral hierarchy which establishes that the less powerful should be served by the powerful. In the fluctuation of these two ideological representations of power relations lies the egalitarian reality of Amuesha society. The powerful and the less powerful can not

exist without each other ; their symbiotic relationship places them on an equal footing vis-à-vis each other without denying the hierarchical ordering of the relationship.

This symbiotic relationship between the powerful and the less powerful finds its maximum (and most beautiful) expression in the act of offering manioc beer to the divinities. This act, which assumes the form of what Mauss defined as a 'communion sacrifice' (1964 : 12), can be broken down in three stages. In the first stage the acting priest blows his breath upon the consecrated beer which is left to rest for one whole night in the upper floor of the temple (reserved only for the priest and for sexually uninitiated boys), or outdoors in an altar-like structure. The act of blowing one's breath over manioc beer, food or coca leaves known by the term *a'mteñets* is a ritual act meant to share with the divinities that which they shared with the Amuesha *in illo tempore* (the divinities being the ultimate creators of everything the Amuesha consume). In the second stage the divinities deprive the consecrated manioc beer of its vital strength and breath and incorporate it unto themselves : an act known by the term *a'mchecheñets*. The consecrated manioc beer is referred to at this stage as *Yompor Po'rrartsor*, Our Father's Food, both because it was *Yompor Ror*, Our Father the Sun, who created and gave manioc to the Amuesha, and because he feeds on the consecrated beer. In the last stage, the divinities (and particularly *Yompor Ror*) infuse their divine vital breath and strength into the consecrated manioc beer — an act known by the term *a'toreñets* — which in turn is consumed by the acting priest and his followers. At this stage the consecrated beer is referred to as *Yompor Pa'moñes*, Our Father's Tears, in an oblique reference to the attitude of the present solar divinity who 'suffers out of love' (*a'mue-rochterra*) for his human mortal creatures and their afflictions. The act of offering manioc beer to the divinities is one of the manifestations of the symbiotic relationship between the powerful (in this case the divinities) and the less powerful (in this case the worshippers). Through this act humanity feeds the divinities and is, in turn, fed by the latter. This conception of the mutual dependence between the powerful and the less powerful is still very much a central feature of contemporary Amuesha politics. As one man put it to me when outlining the political strategy of the discontented followers of a renowned political leader : "If we do not attend the meeting he has summoned : what can he do to us ?, what is he going to do without us ?"

#### *The social aspects of equality.*

Up until now I have presented the features of the Amuesha encompassing ideology of hierarchy and those encompassed egalitarian values that undermine and keep in check the former's potentiality for inequality. I would now like to dwell on the egalitarian practice in Amuesha society. To start with it should be pointed out that until very recently there was no scarcity of land or forest resources, and that the notion of property over natural resources was unknown to the Amuesha ; this latter feature has, to a large extent, been maintained even under the present conditions of accelerated social change. Property was only

recognized or claimed over the fruits of one's own labour : the produce of one's gardening, hunting or fishing activities, and the objects made by oneself (houses, weapons, ornaments, textiles, baskets, etc.) or acquired through barter or purchase. Given that every Amuesha woman and man possesses to a larger or lesser extent the knowledge of all the activities corresponding to their gender, there is in Amuesha society an 'equality of opportunity' which has only been very recently challenged by the appearance of such specializations as nurses and bilingual teachers who receive a fixed salary from the Peruvian government and have, therefore, a larger purchasing power and the possibility of transferring their material wealth.

The inequalities that may spring from differential degrees of expertise in the carrying out of productive activities are neutralized by the existence of a kinship system through which everybody is related to everybody else, and a kinship morality based on the principles of unrestricted generosity and generalized reciprocity. Thus, if for some reason a man and his wife have not cleared a new garden and in the following year they do not have enough staples to satisfy their family's needs, they may resort to their respective parents or siblings (actual or classificatory) to supply them with what they need. Similarly, there is a constant redistribution of game, fish and manioc beer between the households of closely related men and women which prevents the accumulation of surplus resources, and ensures that everybody will have access to essential resources in spite of the hazards of productive activities (i.e. bad luck in hunting or fishing expeditions, floods that may wipe out whole gardens, etc.).

The generosity imposed by kinship morality is not only exercised within the boundaries of the extended kindreds of which most Amuesha settlements are comprised, but is extended to any Amuesha visitor on account of the ideological conception that deems all the Amuesha as a 'big family'. As I shall deal in more detail with this conception further on, I shall now refer only to its practical implications. The Amuesha are very fond of travelling. The ongoing inter-marriages between different local settlements create large networks of people related to each other through affinal or kin ties. A travelling Amuesha is always certain to find someone to whom she or he is related in one such way. Their hosts have the moral obligation to provide shelter and nourishment to them for whatever length of time they stay in their house. Normally, however, if visitors expect to stay for a long period amongst their hosts they will rapidly incorporate themselves (though in an informal manner) into the productive activities of the household.

Visiting is also an important feature of everyday life within any given local settlement. Women and men, by themselves or in family groups, constantly visit their relatives and friends. Their hosts have to provide the visitors with whatever is handy : manioc beer, meat or fish, or just plain boiled manioc. Whatever is offered is for them to consume on the spot, or to take with them once the visit is finished. This constant visiting, which reaches its height at times of football tournaments, school festivities or church gatherings at the village centre, ensures a permanent redistribution of resources which allows no possibility of accumulation. This is so much so that most of the attempts at establishing shops which I have witnessed have failed because of the demands

made from the shop owners by their close relatives. The principle of generosity, deeply ingrained in Amuesha ideology, combined with the obligations of reciprocity act as social levellers that hinder the development of inequalities based on economic differences.

The economic egalitarianism guaranteed by constant redistribution and the impossibility of accumulation is reinforced by the conviction that nobody is entitled to control the economic activities of anybody else. Thus, in the productive domain the nuclear family stands as the main decision and work unit. Though close relatives may help each other in the clearing or cultivation of gardens or may jointly organize a hunting or fishing trip, each nuclear family is supposed to be an autonomous and almost self-sufficient unit. This is true even in the case of recently married men who, due to the demands of bride service, live with their in-laws. The nuclear family is the locus of all productive decisions : whether to clear or not a new garden, where to clear it, what to grow and in which proportions, when to go for a hunting or fishing expedition, or how much manioc beer should be prepared. Nobody outside this unit has any power over its productive decisions : not even a father-in-law over a son-in-law while the latter is fulfilling his bride service period. Even when several nuclear families related to each other by kin or affinal ties reside together in the same house each of them will have its own garden and, frequently, its own hearth.

The only instance in which the organization of productive activities would be in the hands of someone outside the boundaries of the nuclear family unit was that corresponding to the preparation of large ceremonial festivities. In these occasions the followers of a priest, led by the latter, would work in co-ordination to fulfil the large-scale tasks demanded by the organization of a *coshamñats* celebration. This collective work under the guidance of an acting priest and his wife resulted in larger gardens and the production of larger garden surpluses. Control over these surpluses might have been transformed into economic power of the Western type if it were not for two important elements. Firstly, work in the gardens of a ceremonial centre was a voluntary act. Acting priests invited their followers to work in the centre's gardens and worked with them elbow to elbow. Secondly, the act of working in the centre's gardens endowed those who had worked on them with the right to a share of their produce. This is in line with the conception that one is only owner of the produce of one's own labour. It is for this reason that I have made a point of talking about the 'centre's gardens' rather than the 'priest's gardens'. And it is also for this reason that any member of a priest's following visiting the ceremonial centre had the right to harvest from the centre's gardens throughout their stay. If the Amuesha priests controlled larger gardens this did not mean that they had a larger surplus to accumulate, but that, in fact, they had more to give away.

Undoubtedly the possibility of making larger displays of generosity enhanced the prestige of the Amuesha priests and, eventually, their authority. However, the prestige derived from these surpluses could have not been transformed into coercive authority, for, in contrast with our own societies, the Amuesha were not dependent on the powerful for their subsistence. The self-sufficiency of the Amuesha domestic units together with the abundant availability of natural

resources combined to hinder the development of control over economic processes on the part of the Amuesha politico-religious leaders. They could neither interfere with the productive decisions of their followers, nor could they command the latter's labour for their own profit.

This latter feature which has been stressed among others by Overing Kaplan (1975) for the Piaroa is a widespread feature of lowland South American societies. Amongst the Amuesha the impossibility of controlling or commanding the labour of others is associated with a strong emphasis on personal autonomy. Not only do the Amuesha not give orders to anybody with respect to what they should or should not do, but they even avoid impinging upon an individual's autonomy through giving unasked for advice. Thus, if an individual says that she or he is able to do something, no matter how outrageous, dangerous or impracticable it may sound, nobody will attempt to hinder them in pursuing their aim<sup>6</sup>. Even the socialization of children is carried out following this principle of respect for personal autonomy and is based on children's natural curiosity and initiative as the first step of the learning process, rather than leaving the initiative (and authority) in the teacher's hands.

*Equality, hierarchy and the issue of gender.*

As the superior status of the Amuesha traditional priests does not entail their control over economic processes or the labour of their followers, so the patriarchal bias of Amuesha society does not entail the control of men over women. In both cases the encompassing ideology of hierarchy is not only neutralized by encompassed egalitarian values, but is disavowed by egalitarian social practices. Women in Amuesha society make their own decisions about whom to have an affair with, whom to marry, or when to divorce. Domestic decisions in the domain of the nuclear family are made jointly by husband and wife. Because of the sharp division of labour along gender lines, men and women are completely dependent on each other. This does not mean that they are incapable (physically or otherwise) to perform the tasks characteristic of the opposite sex : I know of women who know how to hunt, and of men who know how to spin cotton. What is relevant here is the ideological conception that establishes that the female and male productive activities are equally necessary and interdependent for the survival and reproduction of the family unit.

For this reason, marriage amongst the Amuesha is considered as the ideal status, and the married couple is regarded as the ideal unit and source of all wealth. Adult men or women who insist on remaining unmarried are, therefore, regarded if not with contempt, at least with mockery. In fact, real adulthood can only be achieved through marriage, the building of a house, the clearing of a garden and the rearing of children. Bachelors, spinsters and sterile couples are somehow regarded as less than adults, and they are frequently the object of ridicule (even if in other respects they have achieved a prestigious status through the possession of special knowledge). Divorced women and men seldom live by themselves and seek to join the households of their close relatives in order to make up for the loss of a partner to whom they were not only

linked by ties of affection, but by the sharing of an economic enterprise. Neither can a man run a household without the aid of a woman (preferably a wife), nor can a woman run a household without the collaboration of a man (preferably a husband). This conception is backed by both mythical and daily life discourse.

The emphasis on the married couple as the main productive unit is such that divorced individuals incorporated into the households of their relatives are constantly pressurized to remarry, for they are seen as an extra burden to the members of the household of the opposite sex. In effect, although an extra man in a household represents one more hunter and thus more game meat, it also represents more work for the adult female members of the household who have to harvest and carry heavier loads of garden produce, cook more food and make more manioc beer. Conversely the addition of a woman in a household represents one more hand for agricultural tasks, but also a burden for the adult male members of the household who have to dedicate more time to hunting or fishing activities and, eventually, to the clearing of new gardens. By contrast, the incorporation of a new couple into a household, say, a wife's married younger brother, is welcomed, for this means the possibility of a balanced pooling of resources.

Finally, although a woman may nag her husband to go out hunting, or a man may complain to his wife about not having prepared manioc beer, neither can order the other to go hunting or prepare beer. Furthermore, as with the Piro of the Urubamba river (see Pete Gow on Occasional Seminar on Lowland South America ; London School of Economics, 27-28 June 1986) the relationship between wife and husband can be seen as an exchange of services by which wives control the produce of their husband's productive activities, while husbands have control over the produce of their wives' productive activities. Thus, the game or fish brought in by an Amuesha man is redistributed by his wife amongst their relatives, while the manioc beer prepared by an Amuesha woman is disposed of by her husband, who invites whomever he wants amongst the members of the local settlement to celebrate with him. The equal value placed upon the produce of female and male productive activities, as well as their complementarity, has its concrete manifestation in what the Amuesha regard as the perfect meal : boiled manioc (the female contribution) accompanied by meat or fish (the male contribution). The Amuesha say : "When there is no meat or fish, boiled manioc does not go through" (*Cuando no hay mitayo o pescado la yuca no pasa*). But when men are alone far deep into the forest during a hunting expedition with nothing to eat but meat, they say : "Meat alone, without manioc to go with it, is worth nothing" (*Mitayo nomás sin su yuquita no vale nada*). As meat is worth nothing without manioc, and manioc is worth nothing without meat, so is a man worthless without a wife and a woman worthless without a husband : such is the egalitarian nature of the economy of the sexes in Amuesha society.

The *coshamñats* celebration.

The Amuesha practice of equality finds its maximum expression in the *coshamñats* celebration. According to myth, a woman whose husband had been murdered traveled to *sanerr*, the land of the 'murdered ones', in order to see her dead husband. From the 'murdered ones' she and her children acquired the knowledge of the *coshamñats* celebration. They learnt the lyrics of several *coshamñats* sacred songs, and how to make the reed panpipes which are the *coshamñats* musical instruments par excellence. They also learnt from them how to prepare manioc beer which, together with coca leaves, is in Amuesha society indispensable for the carrying out of any ritual activity. Once back on this earth the woman prepared manioc beer and invited her neighbours to celebrate with her. The woman and her children played, sang and danced to the four styles of *coshamñats* music. Even the murderers of her husband were invited to join in.

According to the Amuesha, the acquisition of the knowledge of the *coshamñats* celebration marked the end of a pre-social era characterized by the existence of endogamous, territorially bound descent groups (*acheñemrey*) in constant war to each other. This era, characterized by incestuous marriages, feuding and murder (i.e. an era of non-exchange or negative exchange), was followed by an era of generalized exchange and harmonious social relations in which the Amuesha became as a 'big family' (*yamo'tsesha*). The Amuesha term *amo'isteñets* describes the action by which an individual establishes harmonious or friendly relations with a previously unrelated party, or with someone with whom he had quarrelled and with whom he was not in speaking terms. The verbal root *amo'ts* indicates a social relation between any two parties, and has the connotation of harmony. Thus, the term *yamo'tsesha* may be rendered as 'the group of people with whom we have harmonious social relations'. *Yamo'tsesha* is an Ego-centred term with varying degrees of inclusiveness according to the context in which it is used. Its range of meaning goes from *namo'ts*, which can be loosely translated as 'my close relatives', to *yamo'ts*, which might be rendered as 'all those who are Amuesha'. In this latter sense the term superimposes a kinship dimension to an ethnic one and, thus, by using it all the Amuesha are conceived of as constituting a 'big family'.

Through the constant exchange of invitations and counter-invitations entailed by the *coshamñats* celebration the Amuesha enact the ideal of *yamo'tsesha*, i.e. the Amuesha as a 'big family'. The introduction of the *coshamñats* celebration marked the advent of an era of social order characterized by constant displays of generosity and ruled by the obligation of generalized reciprocity. The different households within a local settlement take turns in inviting close and distant relatives from within or without the settlement to share with them their manioc beer and their food, and to rejoice in the performance of *coshamñats* music. These gatherings generally (but not necessarily) take place on nights of a full moon. Guests arrive in the afternoon, and at dusk start playing their instruments, singing and dancing to *coshamñats* music. The celebration may last one or more nights and days according to the amount of manioc beer avail-

able. Guests have the moral obligation of staying until the beer is finished. In spite of the mass conversion into Adventism and Evangelism the *coshamñats* celebration has not disappeared.

According to the Amuesha, *coshamñats* songs always have sacred origins. After the original stealing of the *coshamñats* music from the land of the 'murdered ones', the divinities have revealed to the Amuesha (and especially to their priests) many more *coshamñats* songs. In fact it is only through a successful 'acoustical' quest that an apprentice might acquire the status of priest. Through these acoustical quests and through the actual *coshamñats* celebrations the Amuesha attempt to re-establish the communication with their divinities; a communication which was lost at the beginning of the present era with the ascension of *Yompor Ror*, the solar divinity, and the Amuesha's failure to follow him and achieve immortality. Through the quest for, or the singing of a *coshamñats* song the Amuesha seek a re-union with their divinities; for this reason, the *coshamñats* celebration is eminently a religious act. The act of celebrating with *coshamñats* music is known by the term *coshameteñets*, which the Amuesha render as 'to praise Our Father and rejoice through the singing and dancing of *coshamñats* sacred songs'. It is said that when the Amuesha celebrate with *coshamñats* music the divinities rejoice and with them the participants. Through the joy generated by the *coshamñats* celebration the Amuesha become one with each other, and one with the divinity. This brings to mind the opening verses of Schillers 'Ode of Joy' under the inspiration of which I began this paper. The Amuesha ideology and practice of equality come together in the *coshamñats* celebration. Through the *coshamñats* celebration the Amuesha not only enact the principles of generosity and reciprocity that rule their social life, but establish their brotherhood through the joyful performance of *coshamñats* music and their common quest for salvation and immortality.

#### *Illegitimate power.*

The preceding discussion on the Amuesha spirit and practice of equality may appear to some as an 'idealized' view of a bygone era on the informants' part, or as 'romanticized' account of the latter's social system on the part of the anthropologist. This may well be true<sup>7</sup>. However, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, the Amuesha are not only conscious of the potentiality for inequality and oppression contained within their hierarchical conception of power relations, but frequently comment upon present and past instances of abusive power and coercion. The Amuesha know that their social order based on the ideal of *yamo'tsesha* cannot be taken for granted, and that it can be undermined by excessive greediness or an uncontrolled will to power.

Greediness expressed as an unchecked desire for the accumulation of material resources is regarded by the Amuesha as an irrational and foolish act that renders power illegitimate. This contempt for accumulation is manifested both in their myths as in their social actions. The myth of *Opanesha*' narrates how this powerful *mellañoñeñ* spirit attempted to take with him all the game animals from the valley of Oxapampa downriver to the Palcazu valley. *Yompor Ror*,

the solar divinity, found *Opanesha'* while on his way to *Cheporo* from where he planned to ascend to heaven. When he found out what *Opanesha'* was trying to do he lectured him on the importance of not being greedy, and finally cursed him. Simply through the power of his words he transformed *Opanesha'* into a half-wit condemned to remain forever in this mortal earth. Greediness on this earth is also condemned by the Amuesha. Thus, when *Jeñari*, a renowned and powerful shaman, began to demand excessive gifts for his healing séances his reputation floundered and in a matter of a few years his clientele dwindled. Greedy leaders are firstly criticized and finally abandoned. Greediness is seen as an anti-social attitude which frequently results in mutual witchcraft accusations, and which in mythical discourse is regarded as bringing ruin and death upon the greedy one and, eventually, the loss of the possibility of immortality.

Power is also rendered illegitimate when it is seen as curtailing personal autonomy whether in the domains of authority, labour or sex. In one of the central narratives of Amuesha mythology, *Enc*, a semi-divine figure who is endowed with all the prerogatives of the Amuesha traditional priests and is portrayed as a kind of 'super-priest', is condemned for his *political absolutism* (the arbitrary elimination or designation of leaders), for his *economic exploitation* (undue command upon the labour of his followers without reciprocating it with continuous displays of generosity), and for his *policing of sexuality* (the imposition of a supernatural test of faithfulness upon Amuesha wives) (Santos 1986a : 323-8). Power abuse is possible, and the Amuesha are not only aware of it, but also conscious of the forms it may assume.

Hence, for instance, in connection with the above myth the myth-teller referred to the abuses of *Senyacshopañ*, James 'the bearded' (*Santiago 'el barbudo'*), a well-known Amuesha priest who ran a ceremonial centre in the area of Metraro — the Amuesha's centre of the world. I have met one of *Senyacshopañ's* sons : an elderly man in his seventies. This suggests that *Senyacshopañ's* temple was fully functioning sometime at the beginning of this century. According to my informant, *Senyacshopañ* had been an inspired priest. He had had many divine revelations in the form of sacred songs — some of which have been incorporated into the permanent repertoire of *Coshamñats* songs. *Senyacshopañ* presided over a large temple and had a numerous following. According to my informant, *Senyacshopañ* was appointed by *Yompor Santo*, a mythical messianic divinity<sup>8</sup>, as the custodian of Amuesha tradition. *Senyacshopañ* claimed that the divinity had ordered him to keep watch over the Amuesha, and make sure that they would continue to praise the divinities through the performance of *coshamñats* music.

When the Peruvian Corporation Company, owned by the British holders of bonds issued by the Peruvian government, established a coffee plantation close to Metraro, one of its managers appointed *Senyacshopañ* as *capitán* (captain) of his people. This move was aimed at utilizing *Senyacshopañ's* traditional prestige and authority to persuade his followers to work for the company. From the informants' remarks it becomes apparent that once backed by the power of the newly arrived white people, *Senyacshopañ* became authoritarian and begun to exceed his traditional powers. When he summoned his followers and ordered them to sit, if someone remained on his feet he would pound him with

one of his arms ('as thick as logs'), and forced him to sit down. *Senyacshopañ* (mis)used his authority to acquire up to six wives — a practice which contravenes the priestly tradition of having only one wife. When at the gatherings held at the temple he ordered one of his wives to sing, if she did not obey him immediately he sent her back to her parents, and looked for a new wife. Such authoritarian and violent behaviour undermined his legitimacy, and his followers started to desert him. At this point the facts become unclear. Some say he abandoned his temple to become a full-time employee for the Peruvian Corporation. Others say that he continued running his ceremonial centre, and that he died, still young, with only a few followers to look after him while he was sick.

### *Conclusions.*

The Amuesha discourse of love, compassion and generosity which articulates the encompassing ideology of hierarchy with the encompassed ideology of equality is meant to keep power in check. The Amuesha are not against power, as Clastres seems to suggest for the Amerindian chieftains (1977 : 34), nor do they equate power with coercion. Power is necessary for the maintenance of the social and cosmic orders. Without the life-giving powers of the divinities, the shamans or the priests, Amuesha society would not be viable. Nor are the Amuesha against the division between rulers and ruled ; such a differential distribution of political power, which Clastres following Rousseau sees as an expression of political inequality (1977 : 171-3), is not seen by the Amuesha as a threat to their egalitarian values or the maintenance of their personal autonomy. What the Amuesha are against of, as we have seen, is abusive power, coercion and institutionalized violence.

In the Amuesha case it is the encompassed egalitarian values, rather than the encompassing hierarchical ones, which are socially enacted. And as Clastres suggests, it may be said that the Amuesha — together with other Amazonian societies — make a permanent effort to maintain and preserve their social equality and their personal autonomy. This, however, should not be so surprising : it is consistent with the moral system that sustains their egalitarian values. In our societies, on the other hand, it is the encompassed hierarchical values, rather than the encompassing egalitarian ones, that find expression in social interaction and, not surprisingly, the efforts of these societies are precisely oriented towards the perpetuation of inequality. Perhaps, as Dumont suggests, the Amuesha know nothing about equality as a value, but they certainly have developed a philosophical and moral system which ensures social equality even within a hierarchical framework.

### NOTES

1. In an interesting article on the Indian caste system J. Parry also argued that Dumont's model "relies on an over-simplification which obscures some persistently egalitarian features of the Indian scheme of values, and which produces too stark a contrast between Indian and western society" (1974 : 95).

2. This should not be an obstacle to the isolation and description of egalitarian values, principles and patterns of organization, since as Dumont has admitted: "when a wide-ranging analysis emboldened me to propose hierarchy as the fundamental principle of caste society, I was not translating an Indian word, although the notion is in some manner and in one or another aspect ubiquitous in Indian ideology" (1977 : 19).

3. In a recent, though yet unpublished, article Richard Smith — who has carried out extensive fieldwork amongst the Amuesha — also points out this combination between a fundamentally egalitarian "ideology of domestic organization and material life" and a fundamentally hierarchical ideology for the "organization of social, political and religious life" (1983). As the aim of Smith's article is to attack Steward's cultural evolutionism and, more specifically, the belief "that *montaña* and western lowland societies are representative of simple egalitarian societies, lacking notions of hierarchy, ranking and other manifestations of cultural complexity", his focusing of the issue of egalitarian and hierarchical principles amongst the Amuesha leads him through different (though, I hope, complementary) analytical paths than those pursued in the present paper.

4. The Amuesha myth of creation betrays a Christian influence which has been pointed out by both Smith (1977 : 85) and myself (1986a : 135). This is manifested in, for instance, the names of the primordial powerful beings: *Yos* may very well derive from the Spanish *Dios* (God), while *Yosoper* probably derives from the Spanish (and also English) *Lucifer*. Such an influence, which probably has its origins in the close contacts with Franciscan missionaries in the xviii and xviii centuries (Santos 1980), should not lead us to regard the Amuesha conceptions of the genesis of the world and humanity as an adulterated cosmogony. There is nothing as a 'pure' cultural system, and Amuesha cosmogony should be regarded as the result of a combination of ideas of diverse origin that, having been re-elaborated according to their idiosyncratic values and paradigms, cannot be regarded but as a distinctly Amuesha product.

5. The following is an account of the Amuesha traditional political system as it must have appeared around 1900-40 when the priest/temple complex was still fully functioning. The death of the last fully established priest in 1956 marked the beginning of an era of political transition which ended up with the foundation of the Congress of Amuesha Native Communities in 1969.

6. When I first arrived to the field in 1977 with my colleague Frederica Barclay we decided to have our own garden. We asked our hosts for a small patch within their recently cleared garden. In order not to betray our extreme ignorance of gardening knowledge and based on certain very vague notions of Western agricultural practices we started working very hard on our garden. The Amuesha never interfered. When after six months our garden proved to be a complete failure and we admitted our 'defeat' only then our hosts and neighbours had a good laugh and explained us how and when did we go wrong. It was a good lesson, and one that is typically Amuesha.

7. In a recent article Leach has argued that: "every anthropological observer, no matter how well he/she has been trained, will see something that no other such observer can recognize, namely a kind of harmonic projection of the observer's own personality" (1984 : 22). I subscribe, to a large extent, to Leach's argument.

8. The mythical figure known as *Yompor Santo* corresponds to the historical figure of Juan Santos Atahualpa, a messianic rebel who led the different Amerindian societies of the Central *Montaña* in a war against the Spanish settlers. He succeeded and from 1742 up to 1847 the Central *Montaña* was rid of the presence of white people (Santos 1980 : 126-145).

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