

Berichte und Kommentare

In Search of the Soul in Amazonia

James Andrew Whitaker

Introduction

There is a growing anthropological literature that deals with cosmological understandings of the concepts of *soul* and *body* among Amerindian societies in South America. This article will consider and review how these concepts have been represented in the context of particular cosmological systems by sampling key texts and ideas in this literature. Four particular modes in which the relationship between *soul* and *body* has been represented will be explored. The first is the classic dualistic mode of dividing the *body* and the *soul*. The second mode views the *soul* as a type of *body*; it replaces duality with a “multinatural” framework that posits a universalized subjectivity vis-à-vis multiple “natures” that correspond with perspective-giving *bodies*. The third mode treats *soul* and *body* as perspectives and considers the multidimensional domains in which these perspectives are situated. The fourth mode posits the *soul* as a “capacity” of the *body* that is related to transformation. These four modes of representing *soul* and *body* express variations on the philosophical themes of duality and monism.¹ My goal in exploring these four modes is to clarify how

¹ Some writers, such as Rival (2002, 2005) and Taylor (1996) have represented the *soul* in more sociological and/or psychological terms. Such representations somewhat avoid the issues of duality and monism that are considered herein and properly belong to a separate analysis. However, many writers vary in their representations of *soul* and *body*; such that it is frequently impossible to posit a given writer as strictly adhering to one mode of representation. Such reduction is not the goal of this article. Nor is it implied that the claims of the various writers quoted or discussed herein are consistently applied in their other writings. Rather, the goal is to identify key modes of representation that are evinced in literature – even if individual authors may evince more than one such mode.

these terms are being used and to make suggestions regarding how this literature may resolve the considerable conceptual ambiguity that has developed.

The Duality of Body and Soul

Western cultural understandings of the *soul* are predominantly based on a dualistic division from the *body*. The exact boundaries of separation between *soul*, *spirit*, and *mind* are usually imprecisely defined and many Westerners seem to have collapsed *soul* and *spirit*² into the term *mind*. However, all of these terms, taken together or separately, are generally understood to be in structural contrast to the term *body*. Although findings in the cognitive and neural sciences generally define the mental domain in relation to the neurological *body*, the Cartesian division of *mind* and *body* is still an active part of Western discourses. In the process of ethnographically studying the cosmological worlds of non-Western societies, this duality is frequently employed as an analytical tool.

In the 1970s, Rivière (1974: 424) explicitly presented a duality of *body* and *soul* in his writing on the couvade (Vilaça 2002: 360), in which he considered ethnographic material from both the Waiwai and the Trio societies. In describing the couvade, he writes that it is “one among many diverse institutions that address themselves to the same problem, one of almost universal proportions, that of man’s duality” (Rivière 1974: 434). Rivière’s (1994, 1997) representations of the *soul* in the 1990s retained his dualistic emphasis. In 1994, he suggests that the *body* obfuscates the identity of the *soul* by “clothing” and sometimes disguising it. He writes that:

except for shamans, spirits can only reveal themselves to people by donning human or animal appearance, that is,

² The term *spirit* here refers to an inward part or aspect of a person. The similar term “spirits” here refers to cosmological entities in the world that are separate from human persons.

clothing in Trio terms. This clothing gives the spirit an outward appearance but continues to hide the true nature, which is invisible, hard and eternal (Rivière 1994: 259).

Although he is writing specifically of *spirits*, the idea that *bodies* are a clothing for the inward part of a being extends to human *souls*. This implies a view of the *soul* as the inward reality that is mediated (and sometimes disguised) through the outward appearance of the *body*. Thus, the metaphysics of the human being, composed of *body* and *soul*, are represented as a duality.³

The Soul as a Body

Viveiros de Castro (1998: 482f.), whose ethnographic work is with the Araweté society,⁴ argues, *contra* Rivière, that *bodies* are more like “equipment” than disguises. Viveiros de Castro (1998: 482) writes that “[t]he animal clothes that shamans use to travel the cosmos are not fantasies but instruments: they are akin to diving equipment, or space suits, and not to carnival masks.” The central argument in Viveiros de Castro’s (1998: 470) theory of Amerindian perspectivism is that Amazonian societies postulate difference at the level of the *body*, whereas Western societies postulate it at the level of *spirit* or *mind*. The way that a being views other beings, i.e., the “perspective” of that being, is “given by the body” and is “located in the body” (Vilaça 2002: 354; Viveiros de Castro 1998: 471, 478). In other words, humans, spirits, and some animals share the same universal subjectivity, except that it is refracted differently through the particularities of their different types of *bodies*. This implies that there are a multiplicity of “natures” that are localized in different types of *bodies*; Viveiros de Castro (1998: 472, 477) refers to this as multinaturalism, in contrast to multiculturalism. The polyvalent character which Viveiros de Castro attributes to *bodies* leads to an ambiguous treatment of the question of *body* and *soul* duality.

This ambiguity is highlighted in the definitions which he provides for these terms. He writes that “[a]s bundles of affects and sites of perspective, rather than material organisms, bodies ‘are’ souls,

just, incidentally, as souls and spirits ‘are’ bodies” (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 481). Furthermore, *bodies* affect what a being “eats, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary, and so forth” (1998: 478, 481). Thus, although the function of the *body* in determining a being’s perspective and activity is clearly defined by Viveiros de Castro, the *soul* is given a more tenuous definition. If the *soul* is a type of *body*, it would have to constitute a type of nature, i.e., the *soul* implies a perspective mediated by a particular type of *body* – the *soul-body*. This mode of representing the dichotomy between *soul* and *body*, in which the *soul* is defined as a type of *body*, reproduces the terms in relation to one another. The duality collapses, but at the expense of an imprecise definition for the *soul*. It would appear that one is merely dealing with overlapping *bodies*.

The Soul as a Perspective

Lima (1999, 2000) presents a complex perspectivist representation of the *soul* in Juruna cosmology that is somewhat similar to, yet divergent from, Viveiros de Castro’s work with the Araweté.⁵ Rivière (1997: 140) suggests a differential status for the *soul* in the respective domains of “Dream” and “Life.” Lima conceptually develops this difference. Concerning ethnographic data on the Juruna society, she writes that:

the notion of soul represents only a point of support for a specific theory of the relationship between points of view which are at one and the same time analogous and locally determined as asymmetric. And this theory expresses less a notion of a general humanity of all beings than a certain dualism (Lima 2000: 48).

Lima (2000: 48) goes on to claim that “[t]his dualism translates as the difference between Life and Dream, between the reality of the subject and the reality of its soul.” The dualism here refers to a contrast between two positions, Dream and Life, that are linked to the relationships between the *bodies* and *souls* of animals and humans.⁶

3 Rival (2005: 302) also presents a somewhat dualistic view, although her representation of the *soul* is primarily sociological and is linked to differential ontologies of gender.

4 Viveiros de Castro (1992, 2011) has used perspectivism to interpret cosmology in an Amazonian historical context, as well as in contemporary contexts. Fausto (2002) has also used perspectivism to interpret cosmology in an historical context.

5 Unlike Viveiros de Castro, Lima does not seem to reduce the *soul* to the *body*.

6 *Body* and *soul* duality is reconfigured within the domains of Life and Dream – that is, Nature and Supernature (Lima 1999). Rival (2005: 302) has made a similar suggestion in writing that Amazonian societies “conceptualise spirits and bodies as independent modes of being, which occupy different ontological planes.” The problem of *body* and *soul* duality is transposed onto a separate set of positional planes.

It is not exactly that Lima is positing a *body* and *soul* duality within a given being, although there is some residue of this; rather, she seems to be suggesting that the perspective of the animal *body* in the domain of Life holds some resemblance to the perspective of the human *soul* in the domain of Dream. Lima (2000: 49 f.) draws a partial equivalence between "... our own dream existence and the condition of animals." The perspectives of these types of beings are in dualistic contrast.

According to Lima (2000: 45), having a *soul* implies "having awareness of oneself and others, being able to think, [and] being a subject." She (2000: 49) writes of animals that:

being the case that it sees itself as human (and sees the Juruna as human as well), its animal side – ignored by itself – represents the supernatural aspect of its existence. In this sense, the sensible reality of humans is coextensive with the animal's supernatural aspect and vice-versa. Or, put differently, what for the Juruna comprises the function of the animal's body has for the animal the function of its soul.

Despite the *soul* being the source of the human perspective, it is opaque to the human perspective; likewise, the animal *body* is opaque to its perspective (Lima 1999: 121 f.). The opaque dimensions are termed "supernatural." While humans hunt animal *bodies*, animals capture human *souls*. The relationship between *soul* and *body* is posited as a duality; however, this duality is redefined in relation to the positions that its constituent components, *body* and *soul*, occupy as differential perspectives.

The Soul as a Capacity of the Body

Vilaça (2002, 2005), in her representations of Wari cosmology, and Fausto (1997), in his representations of Parakanã cosmology, explicitly avoid presenting a duality of *body* and *soul*. I understand Vilaça's definition of the *soul* as something like the transformational capacity of the *body* (Vilaça 2002: 361; 2005: 452). In this sense, the *soul* is not something either possessing *bodies* or possessed by *bodies* but is a capacity of *bodies*, whereby, they can transform into other *bodies*. The topic of transformation is integral to the discussion of Amazonian *souls*. However, whilst Rivière (1994) is concerned with how a *soul* migrates from one *body* to another, i.e., how it changes clothes, Vilaça (2002, 2005) is concerned with how one *body* is transformed into another *body* through the potential available to the *body* through the *soul*. The emphasis is on the change undergone by a *body*, not on the migration of a *soul*. Vilaça's

focus on the *body* is different from that of Viveiros de Castro. Although both of them seem to collapse the *soul* into the *body*, Vilaça (2002, 2005) represents the *soul* as a capacity of the *body* for transformation rather than as another *body* (Viveiros de Castro 1998: 481).

The transformational potential of a *body*, activated through a *soul*, leads to a view of *bodies* as "unstable" (Vilaça 2005). Vilaça (2002: 352) writes that "the body is a product of particular social acts which continually transform it." In the Amazon, the *bodies* of co-residents come to be viewed as consubstantial, i.e., of shared substance, through the processes of living together in commensality (Vilaça 2002; Overing 2000). Relations of kinship in many Amazonian societies are, at least partially, "produced through acts of sharing, particularly of foods ... and mutual care" (Vilaça 2002: 348). It follows that, if human kinship can be produced through practices of the *body*, kinship with nonhuman beings can also be produced through the *body* (Vilaça 2002: 354). Through certain interactions with nonhuman socialities, human beings can be transformed into animals or spirits⁷ (Vilaça 2002: 357; 2005: 450).

When one forms kin with an alter-being, one's *body* starts to become like that of a member of the new kin group, i.e., one becomes consubstantialized as an alter. Fausto (2007: 501 f.) explains how the *soul* of a human victim of nonhuman predation can become incorporated as kin into the predatory group. This implies that the *soul* makes the *body* vulnerable through the transformational capacity that it confers (Vilaça 2002, 2005). Predation directed at the *soul* can transform humans into nonhumans. Transformation of the *body* is activated through the *soul*; however, it is mediated through the behavior of the *body*. For example, various authors agree that taking on the dietary practices of an alter-being can lead to one becoming that type of being.⁸ Taking on the behavioral characteristics of alter-beings implies commensality with those beings. It ultimately results in a human being becoming consubstantial in *body* with nonhumans. The *soul* is what is represented as allowing for this transformation into another.

Conclusion

Consensus seems to be lacking on questions concerning the relationship between *body* and *soul* in

⁷ This notion is also found in Lima's (1999) writing.

⁸ Fausto (2007); Rivière (1994: 257 f.); Vilaça (2002); Willerslev (2004: 630).

Amazonian cosmologies. For example, disagreement exists as to whether the transformation of a being into another type of being involves the migration of a *soul* across *bodies*, which might imply a duality of *body* and *soul*, or whether it is only the transformation of one type of *body* into another type, which might imply that the *soul* is a capacity of the *body*. Disagreement also exists even among those who argue for a non-dualistic relationship between *body* and *soul*. Viveiros de Castro (1998: 481) presents one method of disrupting the duality by conceptualizing the *soul* as a type of *body* and the *body* as a type of *soul*. Vilaça and Fausto present another method by representing the *soul* as a capacity of the *body*. Lima complicates the duality entirely by repositioning it in terms of Dream and Life. Each writer seems to have his own somewhat specialized usage for the terms. Rival (2005: 302) writes that our “knowledge of bodies, souls and spirits in Amazonia is incipient.” However, this literature is rapidly growing atop concepts of *soul* and *body* that remain remarkably imprecise.

Differences in the representations of *soul* and *body* could be attributed to the different ethnographic contexts that inform the texts in the literature. However, there is a potential problem here because there is considerable divergence in the literature over whether the representations are intended as particular to one society, to a regional set of societies, or to all human societies.⁹ Both Rivière (1974) and Viveiros de Castro (1998) make what appear to be universal, yet mutually exclusive, claims regarding the relationship between *bodies* and *souls*. These claims are rooted in analyses of individual societies, but they are presented as applicable representations beyond the boundaries of these societies. Fausto’s (2007: 498, 500) generalizations are mostly limited to Amerindian societies (Whitaker n. d.: 6). The claims of other writers are mostly somewhere between particularism and regionalism. The literature at present tends to possess an ambiguity regarding exactly what scope of applicability is being claimed for the representations that are produced.

Four modes in which the terms *soul* and *body* are represented have been analyzed in order to iden-

tify and clarify some of the ways that these terms are used in the anthropological literature on Amazonian cosmologies. I have identified a considerable amount of variation and ambiguity within this literature. Such variation arises, in part, out of differences in the societies from which the ethnographic data is drawn. However, it also arises from varying scopes of applicability and from highly divergent uses of the key concepts, i.e., *body* and *soul*, into which Amazonian terms are ethnographically translated.¹⁰ I do not mean to imply that the four modes that are discussed represent the totality of the approaches taken in the literature. Nor do I mean to imply that these are hard and determined positions that are the mutual reserve of one or more authors. However, the current state of the literature evinces an identifiable set of interrelated though distinct modes of representing the Amazonian *soul* that use the same terms in very different ways.

The lack of a clear and shared set of definitions for terms like *body* and *soul* leads to great ambiguity in this literature. A lack of definitional clarity is somewhat unavoidable because such terms do not translate well into many Amazonian languages and cosmologies. However, too much individual nuance in usage makes ethnological comparison very difficult and hinders the comparative purpose of using shared terminology. It may be the case that by using such terms we necessarily introduce too much Western conceptual baggage into our ethnographic texts. Rivière (1997: 139f.) has written that the *soul* is “a complex concept which defies definition even within the English-speaking world.” However, such terms can be invaluable for expressing complex cultural concepts that are otherwise difficult to express in Western formats of text. The need is for a greater clarification of what these terms mean within specific texts, what they mean within a comparative framework, and how far these meanings can be extended into societies other than those from which they are derived. Without considerable effort to clarify the meaning of, as well as the relationship between, the terms *body* and *soul*, these terms may be limited in their use as analytical tools for understanding Amazonian cosmologies.

9 In her acerbic critique of the perspectivist paradigm, Ramos (2012: 481) writes that “[t]he [perspectivist] model’s generality has resulted in a remarkable similarity of ethnographic interpretations, giving the false impression that the Amazon is a homogeneous culture area.” Ramos (2002) decries the generalization that she sees in the perspectivist literature. Ramos (2012) also has criticized the use of the term “cosmologies” to describe indigenous systems of knowledge because she claims that they suggest a qualitative difference between Western knowledge and non-knowledge.

10 In some Amazonian languages there is not only no exact translation of the term *soul* but also no clearly equivalent concept (Fausto 2012: 211–213). The Parakanã have ideas regarding impregnation and posthumous being that somewhat resemble the concept of “soul” – but the translation is very inexact (Fausto 2012: 211–213; Whitaker 2012: 71f.).

References Cited

Castro, Eduardo B. Viveiros de

- 1992 From the Enemy's Point of View. Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society. (Transl. by C. V. Howard.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1998 Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4: 469–488.
- 2011 The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul. The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in 16th-Century Brazil. (Transl. by G. Duff Morton.) Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

Fausto, Carlos

- 1997 A dialética da predação e familiarização entre os Parkanã da Amazônia oriental. PhD Thesis. Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Federal.
- 2002 The Bones Affair. Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Contact Situations Seen from an Amazonian Case. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8: 669–690.
- 2007 Feasting on People. Eating Animals and Humans in Amazonia. *Current Anthropology* 48: 497–530.
- 2012 Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia. (Transl. by D. Rodgers.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Cambridge Latin American Studies, 96)

Lima, Tânia Stolze

- 1999 The Two and Its Many. Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tupi Cosmology. *Ethnos* 64: 107–131.
- 2000 Towards an Ethnographic Theory of the Nature/Culture Distinction in Juruna Cosmology. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 1: 43–52.

Overing, Joanna, and Alan Passes (eds.)

- 2000 The Anthropology of Love and Anger. The Aesthetics of Conviviality in Native Amazonia. London: Routledge.

Ramos, Alcida Rita

- 2002 Pacificando o branco: Cosmologias do contato no Norte Amazônico. São Paulo: Editora da UNESP.
- 2012 The Politics of Perspectivism. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41: 481–494.

Rival, Laura M.

- 2002 Trekking through History. The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 2005 The Attachment of the Soul to the Body among the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador. *Ethnos* 70: 285–310.

Rivière, Peter G.

- 1974 The Couvade. A Problem Reborn. *Man* (N. S.) 9: 423–435.
- 1994 WYSINWYG in Amazonia. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 25: 255–262.
- 1997 Carib Soul Matters – Since Fock. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 28: 139–148.

Taylor, Anne Christine

- 1996 The Soul's Body and Its States. An Amazonian Perspective on the Nature of Being Human. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2: 201–215.

Vilça, Aparecida

- 2002 Making Kin out of Others in Amazonia. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8: 347–365.
- 2005 Chronically Unstable Bodies. Reflections on Amazonian Corporalities. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11: 445–464.

Whitaker, James Andrew

- 2012 Warfare and Shamanism in Amazonia. Review. *Tipiti – Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 10/1: 71–73.
- n. d. The Landscape Imagination. Incorporating Amerindian Perspectivism into an Historical Ecology of Knowledge. <http://stonecenter.tulane.edu/uploads/Whitaker,_Andrew_The_Landscape_Imagination_WebVersion-1366225741.pdf> [20. 10. 2015]

Willerslev, Rane

- 2004 Not Animal, Not *Not*-Animal. Hunting, Imitation, and Empathetic Knowledge among the Siberian Yukaghirs. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10: 629–652.

Social Welfare Functions of the Shrine of Bari Imam

How the Shrine Nationalization Policy Backfired

M. Azam Chaudhary

Introduction

This article will discuss the state occupation of shrines in Pakistan, the special focus being its impact upon the pilgrims in the light of the saints' religious thought. The shrine of Bari Imam has been selected as a case study. In a nutshell, my argument views the changes at the shrine after state control as working against Bari Imam's original thoughts and as adversely affecting his "clients," especially those who belong to minority and marginal groups. I further argue that in fact, if not in pronouncement, the very concept of nationalization (constructing mosques, building schools, libraries, or research centers at the shrine compounds) had targeted the educated urban middle class population and not the poor, the illiterate rural people and particularly not those belonging to the marginal and minority groups (prostitutes, transvestites, *malangs* etc., or even women in general). These poorest of the poor had been the "real" clients of many shrines, such as those of Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, Lal Shahbaz, and of course the shrine of Bari Imam, all of which were taken into state custody. I would like to go a step further and argue that the way "formal Islam" is propagated and interpreted by the state and reflected in its shrine reforms leaves little space and relevance for the above mentioned marginal groups. In many