

ABSTRACT

Memory, Remembering and Recollection in an Amazonian Village
Oral history of Ocaina people in a Native Community Nueva Esperanza in
Peruvian Amazon

The Ocainas are not a very numerous tribe (their population is no more than 300 persons) in the Amazonian region of Peru and Colombia. Since the time of the first contacts in the 80's, they were forced to work as rubber pickers, falling prey to the peon system of being gradually indebted. They were gradually enslaved and murdered by the employees of the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company which became the self-proclaimed ruler of the Putumayo region, the Ocainas' original home. Following the discovery and investigation of the genocide (later known as the Putumayo scandal) and the territorial conflicts between Peru and Colombia, the Ocainas and the culturally related Huitotos, Boras and Andoques, were all forced by their patrons to move to the Peruvian territory. During the multiple transfers in the years to come, many died of hunger, exhaustion and as a result of epidemics of imported diseases, mostly measles and varicella.

My aim was to find out how the Ocainas remember their past and what it tells of their relation to it. It is not surprising that they are not particularly interested in it. I have not encountered the cases in which the memory would be made part of rituals and other practices, nor the effort to politicize their past in the ways reported by numerous anthropologists in other non-literate societies. The Ocainas were not even able to write their memory into the landscape as they had been taken away from it. What I have found is that the older generation's synonym of their past are their myths. The mythical history still plays a much greater role than the real one. The question is what will the young generation that relates to neither of the two pasts be left with.

Key words

Amazon, genocide, non-literate societies, Ocaina, oral history, Putumayo, rubber fever, Scandal of Putumayo, social memory