



## The Mother: Huitoto Myth of Creation

*Huitoto People – Colombia / Peru*

The Mother existed when, and before, nothing existed. Nothing. Nothing, just her. She is air, she is water, she is knowledge. She is the mother of bubbling water, and the steam emerging from the depths was the one that she created at a given moment. This steam was to become the Creator Father.

This Mother existed before anything existed.

It was she who, quietly, gave the first sigh. From there, from that bubble, the Creator Father, Father Unámarai, would be born.

Through her, through our Mother, the Only One, creation began, because she begot the Eternal One. And this is how and why our Father Creator Unámarai came to life, because, by begetting him, he was to beget everything.

And he sits like a cloud above our Mother, supported by her, since, in turn, it is she who supports him.

She sat below, at the tip of the world. Unámarai, of his breath, of his will, of his thought, exhaled something like a thread. Through this thread he climbed and remained above the world. This is akin to a spider's web; it is the breath of the Father. And then the Mother and the Father begot their son Añiraima. □

Transcription of the words of Grandfather Enókayĩ, in the Blanca de Corredor's degree monograph (Urbina, 1994).

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## Comments

Almost nothing was known in Europe about the Huitoto People until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when rubber merchants entered the Putumayo River. This was in 1886. By 1901, there were already 22 rubber extraction colonies established by Colombian companies using Huitoto labour. Later, in 1909, the Peruvian merchant, Julio César Arana, would take control of the rubber business in the area, creating a large London-based company. The exploitation of rubber led to the exploitation of people, specifically the indigenous Huitotos. The foremen hired thugs who were in charge of intimidating the Huitoto workers, of chasing them if they escaped and preventing any uprising attempt.

Each family had to contribute 40 arrobas of rubber a month. They were whipped, mutilated or tortured if the weighing scales did not mark the agreed weight. On many occasions they were imprisoned and condemned to death from starvation, or to be eaten by the bosses' great mastiffs.

As a strategy to prevent any rebellion, the thugs hired by the rubber company proceeded to the systematic murder of the lineage chiefs, the only ones with the ability to sanction an uprising. An additional strategy was to foster rivalries and conflicts between lineages. (Perú Ecológico, 2012)

As a consequence of all these atrocities, it is estimated that, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, around 40,000 indigenous Huitotos died, from the total of around 50,000 who had lived on the banks of Putumayo before the arrival of the rubber merchants.

This has resulted in a terrible process of acculturation. It is still suffered by this native ethnic group, whose young people cannot find roots in their own traditions and culture. As Urbina (1994) points out:

It should not be forgotten that the Amazon tradition comes to our present times as extremely fragmented and drastically reduced. The trauma caused by the terror regime introduced by western

civilisation, by converting indigenous youth and adults into slave labour, and by systematically murdering the elderly Knowers –the nucleus of resistance against vassalage– caused many bodies of oral tradition lose continuity and coherence. In addition, the continued proselytism of other religions has deeply undermined these cultures. The rescue task involves the delicate and urgent process of discovering the secrets of their mythical word. (p. 89)

Therefore, we should take the Huitoto story of The Mother as one of the precious treasures that this culture has bequeathed to humanity. This is a culture that, runs the risk of being lost forever if we do not take care of it from now on. And each culture that we lose represents a tremendous loss for the rest of the human species.

### Sources

Perú Ecológico (2012). Huitoto. Available on

[https://www.peruecologico.com.pe/etnias\\_huitoto.htm](https://www.peruecologico.com.pe/etnias_huitoto.htm).

Urbina, F. (1994). El hombre sentado: Mitos, ritos y petroglifos en el río Caquetá [The Seated Man: Myths, Rites and Petroglyphs in the Caquetá River]. *Boletín Museo del Oro*, 36, pp. 89-90.

### *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Principle 11b: Promote the active participation of women in all aspects of economic, political, civil, social, and cultural life as full and equal partners, decision makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.

