not lead to the sacrifice of the guinea-pigs; those are sacrificed because of the need for protein in the diet and because of the condition of the animals just before the celebration (1981, p. 305).

Archetti, Eduardo, from his book on Ecaudorian Guinea Pigs

CHAPTER FOUR

The Meat Transformed / Cooking

We have seen that the main concern of the women is to produce, first of all, a healthy and fat animal. Their knowledge and their productive practices lead them to try to strike a balance between the quantity of the guinea-pigs and the quality of the food, and between a 'pure and healthy' reproduction and 'ideal' conditions of hygiene and health. Hence health and food care require special attention and a body of knowledge and understanding which is transmitted in the family. Even if daughters are the depositaries of this knowledge, male spouses and children also help in collecting 'good food' whenever it can be found, as when they go to the fields. The production of guinea-pigs is therefore a family task.

The 'fate' of the guinea-pig is to be turned into food. It is therefore a part of the universe available for disposal, to be transformed into a source both of life and of pleasure. It is a source of life because its proteins become energy, a source of pleasure because eating guinea-pig is enjoyable. The choice of the guinea-pig as a 'meal', and its preparation, will receive particular attention in this chapter. As already mentioned, we need to ask not only why the guinea-pig becomes a food, but what the rules of transformation are – in other words, to study the 'recipe book' for guinea-pigs, as well as the contexts in which this transformation can take place. This latter idea is very simple: generally we do not eat on our own; we gather with other people to eat on particular occasions. Hence, the act of eating implies the observation of different types of protocol which must be complied with by the social actors and which have to be understood by an observer.

The guinea-pig holds a special place as an 'exceptional food' in the context of the Ecuadorean peasant culture and economy, which suffers from periodic shortages of domestic food production. This economy, therefore, requires fixed and permanent cash inputs and

the guinea-pig has a role of 'exceptional meal'. Producing guinea-pigs – which are then consumed – brings the producers merit and is associated with a certain kind of 'culinary' prestige and pride. Our informants systematically and continuously emphasize the importance of the 'taste' of the meat in the relationship between the habitat of the guinea-pig, smoke, the fire, proximity to the fireplace and the ideal 'smoked' taste. I am not overstating the matter when I point out that raising guinea-pigs involves a special contact, a kind of immersion in a 'meat' which is produced in an intimate way. Our informants know that every litter is destined to be slaughtered, its maturity depending upon proper food or healthy conditions. In this way, a fat and healthy guinea-pig – one which, in consequence, has tasty meat – tells us a great deal about the quality of care given to it by its owner; as part of her daily activity, a 'material substance' becomes crystallized as food.

The production and transformation of guinea-pigs are two distinct processes in time, both involved in the social appropriation of nature. Obviously, the slaughtering of a guinea-pig is conceived of as its logical and foreseen end. Before anything else, the guinea-pig has been and will always be food. This demands its death and ritual consumption. Guinea-pigs have no name, and are marked out only by their colour, hair, age and sex. They belong to a particular category and are an abstraction, despite their proximity to and their cohabitation with humans. In this cultural world, therefore, there is no space for being sorry for oneself or feeling any sense of guilt at having slaughtered a specific individual. I hope that the above-mentioned issues will become clearer throughout this chapter.

The Value of Guinea-pig Meat

In all our conversations and field notes, guinea-pig meat was highly prized and was always described as the 'best' meat when compared with other domestic, edible and highly regarded meat: lamb, goat, beef, pork and chickens. So why is it the best? In the first place, its 'taste' and 'flavour' are emphasized. People insist on its 'sweetness' and its smoky taste. Both Indians and mestizos agree that guinea-pig meat is 'sweeter' than other meat, and even say that it is 'sweeter than pork'. Here 'flavour' is clearly associated with the fact of being 'sweet'. In the distinction between the sweet and the salty in peasant

culture – and in Ecuadorean culture generally – the 'sweet' is always seen as more flavoursome than the salty. The idea of sweetness is also associated with the ideas of 'pleasure' and 'satisfaction', and arises when people argue about the best kinds of potatoes or which kind of maize is the 'sweeter'. So a 'sugary' taste is an ideal aspect of 'flavour' and 'taste'.[1]

The importance of smoke seems to be linked to certain conceptions which contrast dry and salty meat with smoked meat – even if the latter technique is used as much as the former. Obviously, in the case of the guinea-pig, smoke is conceived as something that transmits a certain type of taste to the meat in the process of breeding, without any actual smoking process taking place. But there is clearly another association, on the one hand, between drying and salting and, on the other, between smoking and not salting. It is common in rural Ecuador to think that smoke is not 'dry' and thus preserves the 'humidity' of the meat.

We can infer, then, a set of ideas about the 'ideal state' of meat, in other words those points in time at which it has undergone the necessary 'ripening' – when the 'flavour' has acquired its definite character. Our female informants are clear and categorical about this: guinea-pigs have to be eaten while still young, *maltones*, and not when they are old. Tasty meat is young with plenty of flesh, one informant said. We shall see later that old meat, past its best, can also be eaten, but, if so, will be used to make a stew. Young meat, though, is best roasted.

Another characteristic, not related to taste, but to a certain intrinsic, odourless and 'invisible' characteristic, is the 'heat' of the meat. In the logic of hot and cold, the guinea-pig is ranked higher than pork, lamb, beef and goat meat. The idea of 'heat' is firstly associated with the generation of energy, and secondly with other qualities; it is considered, for instance, to be 'pure' and 'nutritious'. These last two aspects become salient when guinea-pig meat is compared with other meats – especially with pork, a meat also considered very 'hot'. Pork, though 'hot', is less pure and nutritious, and is 'fatter' and 'heavier'. Consequently, a pure and nutritious food is easily assimilable and digestible.

In every community except Chismaute the guinea-pig's 'hot' quality was regarded as superior to that of pork and beef. In Chismaute, on the contrary, people believe that lamb is hotter than pork or meat from cows. One of the explanations of this difference pertains to consumption rather than just to abstract

conceptualizations. The mode of consumption – in other words, eating practices – can undoubtedly influence and condition the hierarchies we have pointed out. From empirical observation in Chismaute, people consume more lamb than in other communities. However, despite these differences, the guinea-pig does not lose its central place in the Andean classificatory system.[2]

Within this continuum, the coldest meats are chicken and rabbit, which are thought of as 'lean' and 'thin'. In conversations with informants, when we tried to point out a logical difference since these qualities were associated with 'purity' and the 'nutritive value' of the guinea-pig, they were perplexed because they recognized some discontinuity in the classificatory system. But the typical argument – that 'things are just like that, full stop' – tends to conceal one factor which is very evident to an observer: that the ceremonial role of guinea-pig meat is not only physical but also social, particularly values associated with the generation of social relations. Here I am thinking particularly of ritualized social relations. I shall come back to this aspect later in this chapter.[3]

Another way of conceptualizing heat and cold – in an open-ended and perhaps hypothetical way – is to imagine possible combinations of different kinds of meat. For some of our informants, it is possible to make *secos* (stews of various kinds) by combining different types of meat, for instance, pork, lamb, guinea-pig or chicken. In no case, though, is it possible to mix guinea-pig and pork. Here, the 'logic of energy' triumphs over the 'logic of purity': there is no place for two raw, hot substances, even if one has no fat at all, as is the case with the guinea-pig meat. I conclude then, that the 'logic of energy' is in the main arbitrary, and therefore a 'cultural' product *par excellence*. However, this empirical peasant logic has correspondences with an empirical scientific logic: the protein content, gram for gram, of guinea-pig meat is higher than for any other kind of meat.[4]

The Slaughtering of the Guinea-pig

Once it is decided that a guinea-pig is going to be eaten, it has to be slaughtered. The person in charge of slaughtering the animals is the female 'head of the family', sometimes helped by her older daughters. The technique used in slaughtering guinea-pigs is said to influence the flavour and the taste of the meat. Let us examine

this more closely. Different types of slaughtering techniques are said to 'produce a quick death' or to ensure that the animal does not suffer, or 'that the meat keeps its flavour'. The most common method is death by suffocation. One of the most widespread ways it is to take the animal in one's hands, leaning it against one arm, with the other hand tightening its snout so as to prevent it from breathing. Another way is to force the head against the heart and twist it suddenly. This operation, a form of death by asphyxia, has to be done quickly and sharply; the sharp noise which results means that the neck bones have been broken.[5] Our informants agreed that these are the best ways, since the animal 'dies peacefully', and keeps its 'flavour' if bled immediately by splitting it with a knife and hanging it in the open for a few minutes. Later the entrails are removed.

Other methods of slaughter, less often used, are more violent; hitting the guinea-pig on the head with a stone, or simply smashing its nose and then its head on the floor or against a rock. Female informants were familiar with all these techniques, but none practise them, because they are regarded as too 'inhuman', 'very violent' and 'cause the little animal suffering'. All agree that these extreme ways of slaughter cause blood to be 'spilt inside the body', producing, in consequence, 'a bad taste in the meat'. Although people talk about this flavour, which obviously nobody has ever tasted, they nevertheless believe that it exists on the grounds that 'people told them that it loses its sweetness'. It would appear that the existence of these ideas and the fact that slaughtering of this kind, at the hands of someone unknown to them, has the function of differentiating between a 'good death' and a 'bad death'. Slaughtering an animal and eating it imply giving it a death that from both a human and a culinary point of view is the kindest possible. Undoubtedly, some of our informants agree to accept killing by rubbing or twisting the animal, but only when the guinea-pig is then roasted. Apparently, the taste is not damaged and can even 'improve' when the animal is roasted. However, people agree that making a broth or a soup out of guinea-pig meat that has been killed in this way is not allowed, because 'the meat is spoiled'.

Once bled and the guts removed, the animal is skinned.[6] The techniques involved are simple. Hot water is poured over the animal while it is being skinned, or it may be soaked several times in boiling water. In other cases, it is left for some time in boiling water until the skin is soft. It can then be removed very easily. 'Skinning' is an exclusively manual and female operation. Although the

Now test Archetti's point about protein-value by checking over the next page's chart in endnote 4...

2. In many communities, our informants tend to agree that the 'hottest' meat used to be wild deer, which was more available in the past. Today, however, these deer have practically disappeared in the sierra.
3. There is general agreement that fish is the coldest meat. Fish, however, is part of a wider classificatory system, since what it is compared with are 'earthy' meats.
4. See particularly Luna de la Fuente and Moreno Rojas (1969, p. 89), who demonstrate the 'quality' of guinea-pig, as compared with other meat, via a percentage analysis of its chemical composition:

	Water	Protein	Fat	Minerals
Guinea-pig	70.6	20.3	7.8	0.8
Fowl	70.2	18.5	9.3	1.0
Pork	46.8	14.5	37.3	0.7
Lamb	50.6	16.4	31.1	1.0
Beef	58.9	17.5	21.8	1.0

According to this chart, does hot meat, gpig, pork and beef, correlate with higher protein and lower fat, compared to the cold fowl? What's the pattern?

5.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Healing Meat

In previous chapters we examined guinea-pig meat from the point of view of its transformation into food, which is served at the feasts that mark every kind of special event in both individual and community life. In these cultural contexts, guinea-pigs as food are always forms of special and highly structured consumption. The intrinsic properties of hot and tasty guinea-pig meat, and its corresponding symbolic and social value, make for a greatly varied cuisine, with a marked degree of sophistication. Ecuadorean peasant culture – with its mestizo and Indian components – also includes guinea-pig meat within a field of cultural practices where it is possible to see an interplay between the hot and the cold and between cooking and health. This is inevitable, since food and cooking belong to a complex cultural sphere, in which the reproduction of the body, as part of a wider framework of reference, is fundamental both in social practice and in its cultural meanings.

Culinary practices are therefore related to ideas about health, since – as mentioned above – the majority of civilizations with long written traditions as well as many civilizations that have strong oral traditions share the belief that there are certain types of food which heat up the body – or part of it – and others which make it cooler or which are neutral. Generally speaking, this conception can be summarized according to the following principles:

1. The human body contains certain 'humours', 'qualities' or 'airs' which, since they are immaterial essences, control particular physiological processes.
2. These humours, traditionally, are the cold and the hot, the humid and the dry. In many accounts, the last two humours are unusual or play a minor role.

3. Health is maintained through a correct balance between different humours.
4. In some beliefs, specific types of combinations are associated with specific kinds of personality characteristics.
5. Elements external to the body can heat, cool, humidify or dry it: sun and warmth heat the body; water refreshes it. The majority of foods – like medicines – have these properties, the precise effects of which vary from culture to culture. However, empirical studies in different societies show that there are disagreements – in some case fundamental ones – between informants who classify meals and food in an exact way, rather than in general terms.[1]

This medical system, based on a theory of humours, has not only been found in very different cultural areas – such as Latin America, Europe and Asia – but has also been very persistent over time. As a 'popular' model it is still widely used, although advocates of modern, scientific models argue that it is incomplete and deficient, especially in relation to representations of the body and physiological processes. Let us summarize these.

The efficacy of these humoral models derives from many factors, firstly, because of their classificatory simplicity and, in many cultures, their precision;[2] secondly, as in the case of Bali, where all diseases can be classified as being either hot or cold, because of their range. Thirdly, this is due to the direct connection between the cause, the type of illness and the appropriate therapy. These therapies, besides providing quick and cheap treatment, suit the natural environment and the peasant economy. Fourthly, their efficacy derives from their capacity to engender ideal norms of behaviour which avoid excess and thus generate a feeling of responsibility, since 'having good health involves keeping the body at a balanced temperature at all times'. Fifthly, their efficacy derives from their practical significance in linking the human body to specific ways of perceiving natural elements and to seasonal and daily variations. Sixthly, it derives from its 'democratic' spread, because in urban environments, and not only in low-income ones, this type of knowledge is used fairly systematically in parallel with knowledge and practices that derive from modern medicine.

All these criteria apply to the Ecuadorean case. We need, though, to clarify certain ideas about guinea-pigs before turning to our empirical findings. At this point, the eager reader will be expecting

a 'complete' presentation of all foods that have therapeutic properties. In Ecuador not all diseases can be reduced to cold and hot, even if in many cases dietary therapies advise colder or hotter food. Muñoz Bernand (1986), for instance, shows that in Ecuador the standard and accepted classification of illnesses into illnesses 'of God' and illnesses 'of the land' does not include all diseases, and that in consequence there is some confusion among experts on the subject. Following Foster's arguments, there are two systems of explanation – the 'personalistic', where illness is the result of the specific intervention of a human, animal, natural or supernatural agent, and the 'naturalistic', where illness is explained in terms of an interpersonal model and where there is appropriate ground for applying a humoral theory.[3] However, his ethnographic materials and those of other writers show that both systems coexist and that the sick person and his or her relatives can shift from one system to another without being worried about maintaining clear and precise logical boundaries. Thus the classification found in Pujilí by Muñoz Bernand (1986, pp. 196–8) allows him to distinguish various systems of 'pure' interpretation of illnesses: diseases 'of the land', 'of God', *desmando* (lack of control) and 'bad illness'. Among these four, only the *desmando* fits into the explanatory model of the theory of humours and the cold/hot opposition. This means that models of interpretation are varied and complex and that the humoral theory covers only a limited part of cultural practices connected with illness.[4] We shall examine this in greater detail later.

Desmando illnesses include colds, menstrual distress and illnesses involving 'emotion'. A sick person is usually a 'generic individual', a peasant (it is interesting to note that illnesses 'of the land' affect only 'Indians' – also spoken of as 'natives' (*naturales*)). Hence, the 'wider spectrum' of this theory relates to a cultural world that includes both Indians and mestizos, and both the rural and the urban world. The aetiology is clear: it is related to thermic action, to the consumption of opposing kinds of food and to emotional excess. Pathological conditions are due therefore to the infringement of anatomical, physiological and psychological norms, which helps set off a process of rupture of the organic and humoral equilibrium. The treatment of these sicknesses is the field of the traditional healer or of a 'practical' person – a person who has relevant abilities or experience in the family and community. The treatment consists of traditional herbal remedies, combining hot and cold plants with massages, decoctions and baths.[5] With good

insight, Muñoz Bernand points out that the Indian conception of illness involves a moral element – the necessity of maintaining personal equilibrium and, conversely, the danger of losing control. In this logic, the idea of a force that can get out of control is central. Disease tends to free this force, which is contained in humours, blood, feelings and emotions.

At the same time, the theory of the cold and the hot helps to conceptualize the dangers that exist in the environment and therefore need to be avoided. 'Losing control' is not only an individual act, since, for that to happen, there must be some external cause. I have referred to the importance of maintaining the thermic equilibrium of the body and to the idea that sudden changes tend to produce general disturbances and, consequently, colds, bronchitis and lung ailments. It is important to point out that in traditional knowledge, passing from a hot to a cold state places the body in jeopardy and that getting cold is worse than getting hot. This reflects the general idea that the body is more sensitive to cold than to heat. Likewise, it is thought that the effect of cold is sudden while the effect of heat takes longer to show itself. Thus, in the sierra it is common, in both Indian and mestizo communities, to try and heat the body and to avoid cooling it when it is too hot. This implies that the effect of cold on a heated body will be both efficacious and rapid in restoring the lost equilibrium. When the body is cold, the effect of heat will take longer to work; consequently, more heat and a longer span of time are needed to produce the results sought for. This observation suggests a certain asymmetry in the concept: treatments and therapies based on heat – which include food – will take time to take effect and therefore to result in cure. We should not forget, though, that a heated body exposed to more heat gets into a vulnerable state: consequently, the danger does not derive from cold but from an over-lengthy exposure to heat.

This reasoning clearly indicates a code of behaviour in which thermic extremes of environment can and should be avoided. People must take precautions against rain or against exposing themselves to either humidity and water for too long or to strong sun, without taking suitable precautions. However, in the sierra everybody knows that the rainy season is associated with lung diseases, while it is more likely that during dry periods 'temperature' and undefined discomforts will appear. None the less, the relationship between the body, its temperature and the time of the

day is central. In the morning, the body wakes up cold, and it takes a great part of the day to warm it up. The idea is that when the body heats up from the effect of work, sun and two meals – breakfast and lunch – the temperature of the environment begins to decrease. Dusk, which is sudden in Ecuador, since sunset is quick, coincides with a considerable decrease in temperature. At that time of day, the body is still warm and can therefore be affected by cold, which becomes more intense as night falls. The worst perils are between dusk and evening, a time of day in which peasants avoid exposing their bodies to the extremes of a harsh environment. This caution is seriously observed and shows that cold is the 'enemy', the major 'force' which people are concerned about and against which they consequently defend themselves. A paradoxical aspect is the definition of cold as something 'exceptional' or 'abnormal', even though it is actually the most common daily experience in the whole of the Ecuadorean sierra. Therefore prevention plays a leading role in personal conduct and in norms of rural behaviour.[6]

In sum, the logic of the cold and the hot belongs to the field of humoral theory, and in the Ecuadorean context is a cultural referent found both in the Indian and in the mestizo world. There is therefore a set of illnesses which have special aetiologies, treatments and therapies. In previous chapters, we saw the implications of this logic in the breeding and treatment of sick guinea-pigs. We saw how guinea-pig meat is transformed into a 'curative' meat because of its general nutritive properties. Food, as a source of energy and a 'vital reproductive force', helps maintain and re-establish the internal equilibrium of the body together with thermic and natural phenomena. *Desmando* illnesses also derive from excesses of hot or cold food, not only from the environment and from variations in daily temperature. One of the limitations of many empirical studies in Ecuador is that they separate medical anthropology from the anthropology of food and vice versa. The treatment of illness through diet is common in all varieties of popular medicine. In this respect we noted that the guinea-pig is 'hot' because of the intrinsic properties of its meat. I then went on to examine in more detail recipes and ways of cooking that are particularly recommended, as well as the relationship between food and specific types of illnesses. My point of departure is that roasting, frying or boiling guinea-pig meat shows us the different aspects of 'heat' associated with various illnesses and their therapies. In the next section I shall review some of our empirical findings.

The Consumption of Guinea-pigs and the Female Reproductive Cycle

The best way to begin this section is to introduce a food taboo: during her menstrual periods, a woman has to avoid eating guinea-pig meat since it can produce irritation and a greater loss of blood. Menstruation is not seen as a moment of 'weakness' of 'loss of strength', but as a process of 'renovation' and 'bodily cleansing', which should not be interrupted or hurried. Some female informants point out that it is better to eat guinea-pig when a woman's period has finished, 'just in case' there is a need to counterbalance excessive losses that are difficult to control. In the communities we have studied, there is no clear evidence that this advice is converted into common practice.

On the contrary, when the period does not come and a woman is pregnant, the ideal is to eat *locro* or a broth of guinea-pig 'very soon'. The idea is that this dish helps to ease the nausea of the first few months and gives 'energy' – 'much energy' – to the mother and the foetus. One of the constant concerns of our informants is not to 'lose strength', but to 'supply strength' during the pregnancy period. It is recommended that the guinea-pigs should be one year old, in other words fully 'mature' and 'hotter', and preferably cooked in soup. Pregnancy is obviously a crucial period in the reproductive cycle and it is therefore important to maintain energy equilibrium and the 'strength' of the body. Eating guinea-pig – the hottest meat – is compensated by a diet that also includes fresh food every day. However, during the period shortly before delivery, women are advised to stop eating guinea-pig meat. None the less, particularly in Indian communities, people believe that the consumption of the guinea-pig's stools – in very small quantity and mixed with eggs and water – helps women during delivery. Another 'magical' remedy consists in taking the fur off the female guinea-pig's buttocks, putting it onto a tin plate or any other cooking-vessel, roasting it first, and letting it boil. This infusion helps to ease delivery.

In Indian communities, the first food recommended to a mother after birth is a thick broth of guinea-pig. In Chismaute Telán, people particularly recommend using all the 'blood' of the guinea-pig for this broth so as to make it a stronger dish. Here there is a clear attempt to restore lost energy. After an interval of two or three days, the mother may be given chicken soup, although during this

period she will still be fed with guinea-pig broth. However, this is not the 'ideal' practice as defined by our mestizo female informants. They advise starting with a broth of fresh meat, such as chicken or rabbit – if available – followed by beef and then by a *locro* of guinea-pig. Here the logic of providing 'easy digestion' and avoiding 'stomach irritations' is considered to be more important than the rapid replacement of energy lost in labour. In Chirinche, for instance, we found a very precise model which involves a series of *locros*: the first food might be a cool *locro* of chicken, then a less cool though still not hot *locro* of meat such as rabbit; then a hotter *locro* of lamb; then beef or pork; and finally a good broth of guinea-pig. People are recommended to repeat this weekly sequence for a month, and, if possible, to extend it for another two. The idea is that after 'so much effort' the replacement of lost equilibrium should not be done too suddenly, as this may cause a whole series of upsets in a weakened body. The passage from cold to hot needs to be handled slowly; a weekly diet of *locro* allows this to be reached.

In the period after birth, two weeks after delivery a woman can take up housework again as well as farming duties, such as helping in the house and taking an active part in sowing and weeding. The concept of a period after birth recognizes a set of complications, such as vaginal infections, cervicitis or salpingitis, which are common during the forty days after delivery. Muñoz Bernand (1986, pp. 196–8) classifies different forms of the period after birth as 'illnesses of God', in other words, of 'microbes' which can be treated with modern medicine. The idea is that the body of the parturient is still 'soft' and has only partially recovered, and is therefore exposed to further illnesses and 'relapses'. In some cases, 'temperatures', together with vaginal infections, bleeding and aches, can cause women to 'go mad'. When this is the case, as we found in Palmira Dávalo, it is important to immediately eat a simple soup of guinea-pig, fortified with milk, eggs and marrow. This diet has to be repeated at least three times in a row, and the diet may be extended for longer. In the mind of our informants, the efficacy of this 'diet of broths', mainly preventive, is unquestioned.

Let us conclude with a reflection about the 'debility' of women in general. Up to this point, I have developed the theme of loss of strength in the context of pregnancy and labour, where such loss really does take place. However, I believe that there is an underlying idea that a woman is more sensitive to cold than a man and that she is consequently more exposed to illnesses that derive from a

loss of organic equilibrium caused by cold. Therefore, it is common to take special care to prevent women from eating cold food. The consumption of guinea-pig therefore guarantees an adequate dietary balance.

The idea of prevention is clearly embedded in the logic of a postnatal diet, since this period is crucial for the mother and the child because of breast-feeding. People believe that guinea-pig soup helps the mother to produce plenty of milk. There is a consensus about this in both mestizo and Indian communities: in order to produce more milk, women need to eat mainly hot food.

Finally, when the reproductive life cycle is over, with the onset of the menopause, we find again a *locro* diet where soup or the *locro* of guinea-pig is central. People also recommend preparing this dish without bleeding the animal and without washing it inside, as this makes for the transfer of more energy. Likewise, people advise eating stewed guinea-pig.

We have already seen several times that guinea-pig meat is considered to be hot, and consequently to have the property of transmitting heat to the person who consumes it. In the logic of humours and of hot/cold foods, excesses need to be avoided. Hence roasted guinea-pig is always served with potatoes, which are cool. Fried guinea-pig is even hotter, since oil and fat transmit more heat. The *locros* or soups, and stews, are boiled and are therefore less hot and heavy than the other dishes. Moreover, they are not served with the heavy and fatty sauces I described in the previous chapter. The underlying logic, here, is that the longer food is put in contact with water the cooler it becomes. Our female informants, when confronted with this problem, affirm that the longer a food is left to boil, the cooler it becomes. However, soups are eaten warm and are therefore never 'cold'. In the spectrum ranging from hotter to cooler foods, boiled food is obviously cooler than fried or roasted. Therefore, since people are searching for the transmission of energy and heat but good digestion is also a concern, in order to prevent diarrhoea or heaviness of the stomach soups, *locros* and broths normally constitute not only an ideal 'democratic', peasant food, but also fulfil therapeutic functions of considerable importance.[7] This can be seen clearly in the close relationship between guinea-pig broth and a woman's reproductive cycle, which I discussed above. I shall now develop further analysis of the broth or *locro* of the guinea-pig as 'ideally' curative.

Guinea-pig Meat and Illness: General Remarks

Guinea-pig broth is recommended for all types of disease. In this way, the guinea-pig is a part of therapy, but not the sole element, since people also use herbal treatments, as well as medicines bought in local chemist's shops. My main objective is to identify the role of the guinea-pig as a meat that has curative properties, rather than to analyse in detail the therapies and the agents who take part in them.

In the introduction to this chapter, we observed that the theory of humours is related to illnesses that have their origin in *desmando* (lack of control) and from lack of precautions in the face of natural phenomena. We should not be surprised, then, that guinea-pig broth is one of the best remedies for cold and the discomforts that come with it – temperature, general weakness, sweating and subsequent dryness. This is because it is immediately efficacious, since it is possible to 'sweat temperature' by taking a good quantity of very hot guinea-pig broth. In contrast to the logic of cooling – which derives from both variations of temperature and the cold winds of the sierra, and which is also the cause of many colds, throat infections and lung illnesses – there is a simple logic of heat. In this respect, other meats are recommended as well as that of the guinea-pig, such as pork and beef, as well as different types of herbs, which are used to prepare infusions. Estrella (1978, p. 78) mentions, among different herbs, *tipu*, *malico*, borage and scented mallow. It is also very common to be advised to take alcoholic drinks, such as *chicha* mixed with alcohol, lemon and salt.

By the same logic, guinea-pig meat should not be eaten when a sick person suffers from diseases that are caused by excessive heat moving from the outside to the inside of the body. Among these illnesses are malaria and yellow fever. But tuberculosis (TB) – normally identified as an illness caused both by microbes, by hard living conditions and by conditions of poverty – can be cured by rest, plenty of warm clothes and nourishing food such as guinea-pig broth (Estrella, 1978, p. 165). All these sicknesses are defined as sicknesses 'of God'.

In the light of these empirical findings, we can also observe a logic of opposites: a belief than when there are deep wounds that take time to heal guinea-pig meat should not be eaten. The logic is that there is a risk of infection because of raised skin temperature; consequently, the body reacts against everything that

tends to 'irritate' it. Hot foods, among them guinea-pig meat, are considered to be particularly irritating and therefore highly counter-productive in treating wounds. Many of our female informants frequently pointed out that guinea-pig broth is recommended when someone suffers from acute and continuous headaches. However, there are disagreements, since headaches in themselves are not something that needs to be cured. Treatment is given only if other symptoms appear, such as neuralgia, vomiting and diarrhoea. In Indian communities in particular, it is thought that guinea-pig broth holds back vomit and prevents dizziness, so that it is advisable to take a good cup of the liquid before beginning a bus or lorry trip. The same is true of infantile diarrhoea, although there are also disagreements about this: on the one hand, people argue that liquid has to be taken to avoid the body drying out; on the other, people think there is a risk of irritating the stomach because the liquid is hot. We have also observed a variant of this broth where the final result, after a good deal of cooking, is not a soup but a sort of jelly of guinea-pig meat mixed with potatoes, which is given to a child affected by diarrhoea. There are two aspects: it is a dish which cures and feeds at the same time. We also find guinea-pig broth in almost every case of 'anaemia' or 'lack of blood', especially after bleeding from a wound haemorrhage and for women during the postnatal period. Acero Coral (1985, p. 32) points out that there are two versions of this soup: a normal recipe for adults, and boiled guinea-pig in cow's milk for children.

We have seen, then, that the guinea-pig broth, with variations, is a type of food that is central to almost all the treatments of illnesses of *desmando*. It is thus important to link food therapy to a wider logic of the humours, as I indicated in the introduction to this chapter. However, we have also seen that in the case of 'illnesses of God' guinea-pig becomes a curative meat. Therefore, the common element in these two logics is the need to produce and restore a balance of energy, since the disease has triggered off physiological processes that need to be brought under control. Likewise, in any case, it is important to remember that the guinea-pig, as a therapeutic food, is only one part of the whole treatment, which includes different types of herbs, modern medicines, rest and physical isolation. Since we are not writing a book on general medical anthropology, we have attempted a systematic presentation of those therapies only.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the illnesses 'of the country', which would mean leaving food and entering the world of 'ritual cleansing' and *sobada* (healing massage), I would like to mention the case of the *chuchaquis* – upset produced by excessive intake of alcohol. Peasant popular therapy includes guinea-pig as an ideal food for rebalancing the organism after a night of binges, heavy drinking and vomiting. In such cases, traditional guinea-pig broth is accompanied by roast guinea-pig with a traditional peanut sauce. This latter form is preferred, since people both acknowledge its therapeutic properties and consider it to be a finishing touch to the previous day's party. We should remember that roast guinea-pig is the 'dish of kings' in the sierra.

The Body of the Guinea-pig: Illnesses 'of the Country' and the *Sobadas*

As we have previously pointed out, illnesses 'of the country' are opposed to illnesses 'of God' in one major way: they only strike Indian people. Illnesses 'of God' are modern diseases, generated by 'microbes', and therefore attack everybody. This has secondary implications, which are important, since guinea-pig meat is used as a therapeutic food by both mestizos and Indians and in both rural and urban worlds. This 'therapeutic food' – if I may be allowed the metaphor – is only a small part of the knowledge and cultural practices that constitute the vast field of Ecuadorean popular medicine. On the contrary, *limpiadas*, *limpias*, *sobadas* and *sobas* using guinea-pigs are still much practised among Indian people, but only in exceptional cases among mestizos. Let us analyse this in greater detail.

The guinea-pig as a food is connected to the logic of humours. During the *sobada*, the whole body of the live animal is used at the beginning of the ceremony, as an instrument which makes it possible to read the illnesses that affect a specific patient. The guinea-pig is not only a meat, but meat and 'spirit' at the same time. Therefore it is a tool for investigation, which, in the hands of an expert, permits an early diagnosis of a disease. This is because of the idea that a certain mimesis exists between the patient and the animal, since the animal has a set of qualities that allows the transfer of symptoms. Before beginning a general analysis of illness, though, we need to examine a *sobada*.[8]

Sobadores (healing masseurs) can be either men or women and can treat a small clientele – their family, relatives and members of the community – or patients who come from further away because of their good reputation. Their prestige is mainly related to their experience and years of practice. The cost of a *sobada* varies accordingly to their status. Generally speaking, people prefer to do a *soba* with an experienced *sobador* who is not a relative of the sick person. Aguiló (1987, p. 172) has remarked on the belief that the result of the cure depends on the fee of the *sobador*, which has been agreed on beforehand. The *soba* is normally given in the patient's home, but can also take place in the house of the *sobador*. There is widespread agreement that Tuesdays and Fridays are the ideal days for this practice, since they are considered particularly auspicious. On those days, people believe that the *sobador* will receive particularly 'strong' help not only from saints and the Virgin, but also from the mountains.

The practices of the *soba* differ in some respects, which, from one point of view, may appear to be very minor. For instance, there is no agreement as to the size, the sex, the age or the colour of the guinea-pig that is to be used. Some informants say that it is better to use small guinea-pigs (between three weeks and one month) and of mixed colours. When people refer to colours, they usually consider no more than three, others only two. Yet others prefer guinea-pigs of one colour only – preferably black and fairly big. This is because the black animals 'suck' the disease out better. However, Aguiló (1987, pp. 171–2) explicitly points out that in the Chimborazo area the favoured kind of guinea-pig is the *malton*, not too young or too old, and with a white coat. Apparently white allows a better 'reading' of illnesses that have external manifestations. Sometime the size of the guinea-pig is associated with the age of the patient; in the case of children, small guinea-pigs are preferred; in the case of adults, bigger guinea-pigs are better. Gender is also taken into consideration, since some of our informants insist that a woman needs to undergo a *sobada* by using a female guinea-pig, a man via a male animal. In some cases, particularly with *maltones*, people say that the gender of the guinea-pig should be different from that of the patient. A guinea-pig of the same gender as the patient is recommended when the animal is younger than one month. These small variations, though, do not contradict a high degree of consensus in relation to the origin of the guinea-pig: it has to come from the patient's home. The proximity, the closeness

and the mimesis, once again, guarantee that the *sobador* will be able to accomplish his/her task more safely and with greater efficacy. When the patient travels to the house of *sobador*, he/she is advised to bring with him/her the guinea-pig that is to be rubbed on to his/her body. Only in extreme cases can the *sobador* use his/her own guinea-pigs or, as a last chance, the animal can be purchased, either in the market or from a neighbour.

Secondly, there is disagreement about the best time for a *sobada*. Normally it takes place during the day, because the examination of the animal's organs is done better in daylight. However, for other informants, especially in Palmira Dávalo and Chismaute Telán, the best hour is at dusk – at six o'clock, just before sunset. Likewise, some informants told us, when the patient is very 'weak' or is thought to be affected by *cuychi*, it is better to do the cleansing at midnight. In serious cases, *sobadas* can or should be repeated several times, possibly at different times of the day or night. It seems, though, that both the relatives of the patient and the *sobador* are thinking of an auspicious time rather than simply a moment in the day when there is more light and better visibility. Finally, all these disagreements show variations in strategies and practices because people are really seeking for great precision in the diagnostic process. The *sobador* who has accumulated a lot of experience decides what steps to take in relation to the age of the patient and the type of illness for which he/she is consulted.

One or more close relatives of the patient are normally present at the *sobada*, especially when the patient is a child. The *sobada* is a ritual of diagnosis, which simply consists in rubbing the body of the patient with a live guinea-pig until the animal dies. The technique of rubbing varies: some *sobadores* prefer to do it with circular movements, others with vertical ones, some rub 'hard' from the beginning, others just at the end, when the guinea-pig does not whine any more. *Sobadores* allow themselves to be guided by the patient, who indicates, as precisely as possible (if his/her condition permits this), which parts of the body are in major pain. The *sobador* has to stop for a few seconds more to create a longer contact between the aching part and the guinea-pig. The patient may be clothed or naked, but it is always better to have direct contact between the guinea-pig and the parts attacked by the disease. The *sobada* is always performed with tobacco and alcohol. The *sobador* drinks and smokes, and then blows the smoke of the cigarette and the fumes of the alcohol continuously on the body

of the patient. It is believed that tobacco and alcohol help the disease to 'leave' and 'pass on' to the guinea-pig. In many cases the process begins before the ceremony, since the *sobador* talks about the illness with the relatives and with the sick person, in order to elicit the origin of the symptoms, their duration, the length of time during which the patient has been affected and the treatment that has been given. During these talks, the *sobador* begins to smoke and drink unrestrainedly. When this happens in the hut, rather than outside, at the moment of the *sobada* the room will be impregnated with smoke and the smell of brandy. Some *sobadores* carry out the rubbing of the guinea-pig with a bunch of herbs, including rue, Santa Maria, mallow, artemisia and rosemary. At the moment of the cleansing, too, some experts prefer to stay in the room with only a relative or the person in charge of the patient. At the moment of rubbing, the *sobador* is helped by praying uninterruptedly, asking God and, eventually, saints and the Virgin for help.[9]

When the guinea-pig dies from asphyxia, the rubbing is over. Our impression is that the expert decides the time that it takes for the animal to die. Generally speaking this process lasts between fifteen minutes and a long half-hour. Obviously, at the beginning, the animal whimpers and grunts, but only for a few minutes. Then, once it has passed away, the process of diagnosis begins. The guinea-pig is normally cut into halves, and after taking out the entrails, a careful examination of the organs takes place, which aims at identifying the disease. It is important to remember that the *sobador* reads, sees and observes certain signs, some of which are ambiguous. Therefore the animal is nothing more than an instrument, an 'aid' in the process of interpretation and diagnosis. Moreover, we should remember that the *sobador* is in possession of a set of data which were given to him/her, in many cases, by the sick people themselves or by their relatives. The guinea-pig consequently enables people to 'objectify' a set of hypotheses that the expert has gathered beforehand. For these reasons, the *sobada* may be considered to be a sort of 'primitive X-ray'. However, the *sobador* is consulted only for certain types of illnesses. A disease, then, may be categorized in the first place by the relatives of the patient and by the patient himself. The question which then arises is the 'fit' between this initial interpretation and the authoritative 'voice' of the expert. The social process that is triggered off highlights a sequence of ideas and practices that belong to the same

semantic and culturally codified field. This allows a certain degree of juxtaposition of diagnoses, since the *sobador* confirms or refutes an intuition that exists in the mind of the relatives and some of the patients.

This reasoning leads us to our central theme – which diseases are treated with *sobadas*? Aguiló (1987, p. 172) points to cases where the disease is mainly caused by *huayra* (illness of the wind), which call for a consultation with a *sobador*. Muñoz Bernand (1986, pp. 196–8) regards 'cleansing' as a central part of the treatment in the case of illnesses 'of the country', and also of 'bad' illnesses – in other words, where there is a suspicion of evil eye or of wrong-doing. Barahona (1982, p. 146) gives a list that includes both the diseases 'of the country' – those which are engendered by evil eye – and also certain diseases 'of God' such as measles and flu. Acero Coral (1985, pp. 16–24) also mentions the *huairashca* (*mal aire* or *mal herido*). Estrella (1978) differentiates between the illnesses 'of God' and 'of the country' and only introduces 'cleansing with the guinea-pig' as part of the diagnostic process for the following diseases: 'fright' (*susto* or *huashashungo*); *mal viento* (sickness of the wind), *mal de aire* ('air sickness') or *huayrascha*; *mal blanco* (the white disease), *mal de caballo* ('disease of the horse') or *brujeado*; and finally the disease of the 'rainbow' or *mal del cuichi* or *cuichig-unguy*. Balladelli (1988, pp. 231–7) points out certain symptoms that refer to both diseases 'of the country' and diseases 'of God'. None the less, 'cleansing' with the guinea-pig appears to be particularly important in the diagnosis of *mal viento*, *susto* and *mal de calle* (sickness of the street) – prototypes of diseases 'of the country' – and in the *colerin*, which is a disease 'of God' produced by emotional disequilibrium. McKee (1988, pp. 222–3) has found that 'cleansing' by guinea-pigs is done when people think that a child with diarrhoea is suffering from 'illness of the wind'. Aguirre Palma (1987, p. 85) links 'illness of the wind' to illnesses such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, 'fright', headache and vomiting, which can be cured through cleansing with a guinea-pig.

Our findings confirm this: the *sobada* mainly takes place when the relatives of the patients or the patients themselves think that they have been attacked by the illness 'of the country'. None the less, this practice is declining in mestizo communities. The *sobada*, like diseases 'of the country' is seen as a hangover from 'backwardness' and 'primitivism'. The conceptual world of mestizo people is still be found, to a certain extent, even in the epoch of

'modern' medicine. People still believe in the magical effects of particular supernatural phenomena and have a very practical knowledge of traditional herbal medicine. We can observe a similar process in the impact of evangelical religion in Palmira Daválos. One of our informants spelled this out rather frankly: 'today there are doctors, nurses, we go to hospitals, and nowhere else'.

In Indian communities, where the *sobada* is still carried out and where *sobadores* are available at both local and regional levels, we have found a strong predominance, in cases of 'cleansing', of the illnesses 'of the country'. Although there are no longer traditional healers in Chismaute Telán, it is customary to consult them on the day of the market at Guamote. On this day there are at least eight traditional healers; many of these follow their clients closely and some are able 'to do the cleansing' in order to diagnose diseases. Muñoz Bernand, enquiring about the common attributes of illnesses 'of the country', writes as follows:

> normally we think that these are caused by the 'illness of the wind', but this term is found also in other contexts . . . the air of these illnesses is not the cold wind of *desmando*, but corresponds more to steam or to an imperceptible smell, which is why it represents a danger . . . This general idea of hazardous exhalations is not separated from concrete experience since some symptoms are attributed to 'antinomies', such as diminishing eyesight, trembling and skin rashes that are really associated with mephitic and mineral exhalations . . . The antinomies are fumes, gas or exhalations, not only in the strict sense of air which is taken in, but also in a metaphorical sense, which includes, flashes and thunders, lightning and rumbles. (1986, pp. 138–9)

Natural phenomena such as the 'rainbow' or *cuichig*, the *mal aire* or *huayrashca*, therefore, belong to this conceptual world and are particularly emphasized by our informants. The 'rainbow' is not only thought of as a concrete phenomenon but also has properties 'concealed' in specific places in the mountains, in still water or in particular ravines, all of which should always be avoided. Other informants pointed out the importance of avoiding some places at particular times of the day, such as dawn, midday, dusk or midnight. These attacks produce diffuse muscular aches, serious depression, passivity and the appearance of pimples and malignant growths. When it strikes women, it can make them pregnant, or, in the case of young women already pregnant, can cause their death or the malformation of the child. The *sobada* provides an accurate

diagnosis, and when used promptly can prevent an illness from developing. For many people, *huayrashca* is very serious and even fatal. Some informants say that the *cuichig* is like a 'spiritual' and sexual force, since it is particularly attracted by young women who wear bright clothes. Faced with the prospect of an attack, the *sobador* will look on the guinea-pig's back for a gleam 'like water on oil', which is an indication of an attack of the 'rainbow'. This has to be done before beginning to rub. When there are strong suspicions, midnight is the best hour for carrying out the ceremony. Another important sign is when the guinea-pig takes a long time to die, even if it is rubbed hard. Since this is a generalized disease, which attacks the nerves, the *sobador* will try to carefully inspect the organs of the animal in order to find out which have been affected. Particular attention is paid to its size, to the colour and to the presence of blood. Lastly, the presence of yellowish 'swellings' on the neck is also a clear sign of the attack of *cuichig*. Once the diagnosis is done, the healing process begins, through the use of herbs and the cleansing of pimples. Moreover, the *sobada* is a *limpia*, a process of bodily purification. The guinea-pig, then, enables people to verify a diagnosis, but, since it also 'sucks' the disease, it therefore helps the sick person to recover. Some informants mentioned to us that, under these circumstances, it is better to repeat the 'cleansing' two or three times during the two weeks that follow the first treatment by the *sobador*.

The *mal aire* or *huayrashca*, is caused by the noxious exhalations I mentioned above. They are present in nature and are found in marshes, ravines, wells and particular mountains. Mountains have a special significance in Ecuadorean Indian culture: the admiration and adoration of mountains is mixed with a deep fear of malevolent forces, which set off diseases and even death (Moya, 1981, pp. 58–61). However, some informants do not associate 'illness of the wind' with mountains and ravines, but with very concrete phenomena, such as strong and sudden winds, storms and hurricanes. Aguiló has observed that in Chimborazo people attribute the *huayra* with all the characteristics of live and autonomous beings. He writes:

> The *huayra*, though not the antithesis of the Pachamama, but rather a secondary and inferior being, is seen as the incarnation of an evil spirit, the *supay* (devil), which is a malignant deity for Quichuas and Aymarás. It is for this reason that its presence automatically induces terror and dreadful anguish . . . people who have been caught by whirlwinds are inexorably affected by the *huayra-unguy* (sickness of the air), which requires the intervention of the traditional healer to get rid of it. (1987, p. 19)

This illness produces a thermic imbalance – a strong internal, cold feeling. This physical condition normally entails acute headache, abnormal temperature, internal infection, vomiting and diarrhoea. Likewise, the ill person becomes depressed, 'keeps silent' and feels 'fear and anguish'. The *sobada* helps in diagnosis and in purification. 'Cleansing with an egg' is similarly widely employed. Some of our informants believe that its efficacy is the same as that of the guinea-pig, while others argue that the guinea-pig is more effective and appropriate. In order to diagnose *mal aire*, the *sobador* uses as an indicator the span of time that the animal takes to die: if the animal dies quickly, it is thought that illness is present. When the animal is dissected and many of its organs seem to be affected and swollen – with strange coloration and with a lot of blood or spots on the heart – it means that the animal has been struck by an 'attack of *mal aire*'. Even in this case, the *limpia* is seen as a process that begins the process of healing and consequently has to be repeated several times in the week following the first treatment. *Mal aire* is an illness that strikes indiscriminately and is particularly dangerous for children, as they die more easily. If the curing process is not successful after the first *limpias*, people advise taking the patient to the doctor or to the nearest health centre.

Another illness 'of the country' is *espanto* – a sudden fright which induces emotional upsets that stimulate the development of the disease. The signs of this disease are, as in the previous one, neuralgia, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhoea. 'Fright' particularly strikes those children and adults who, for one reason or another, are very weak. The *sobador* takes part in the diagnosis, but can only heal if he/she is an experienced *curandero*. The cure of 'fright' requires a set of rituals that are carried out after the diagnosis, although I shall not discuss them in detail here. The diagnosis of 'fright' is particularly difficult, and different signs are used to detect it: the guinea-pig has to die quickly; the entrails must be carefully observed to see whether there are any spots; the heart has to be examined to see whether it, too, is spotty (particularly white spots); last, but not least, the nervous system of the animal has to be checked before a *sobada* of an animal that is very excited before the beginning of the ritual – a clear sign that it is probably a case

of 'fright'. Balladelli (1988, pp. 324–5) reports two signs in particular: the presence of a membrane in the large intestine which, when dipped into water, reflects light like a mirror; and, after the *limpia*, when the animal is skinned and immersed in water its body and legs still tremble.

When people are suspected of evil eye, because they are envious of neighbours or relatives, the option of consulting the *sobador* is available, but, in the opinion of our informants, it is better to go to a very experienced *curandero*. However, some informants refer to 'sickness of the street', 'sickness of the horse' or 'white sickness' as typical cases of spirit possession. Therefore, they normally advise 'cleansing' the body, which includes the use of the guinea-pig as one option – though not the one most commonly recommended.

In any case, once the *sobador* has defined the illness, he/she has to create a distance from the animal that has been used. The idea is that the animal, since it has sucked out the disease, can be contagious and therefore has to be carefully put on one side. The *sobador* normally throws it away in a particularly well-hidden spot and comes back to the *sobador*'s house without turning back. If he/she does otherwise, he/she is in danger of catching the illness that has just been extirpated. Likewise, once the ceremony has finished, the expert has to return home using a different path, possibly being taken there by a guide. The function of the guide is to warn him or her if they are likely to meet anybody on their way. If this happens, the guide has to whistle or make an agreed sign, so that the *sobador* can hide. It is believed that, if somebody sees the *sobador*, the process of curing which has recently started could 'get lockjaw'. Where this belief is strong, we found a parallel idea that the best moment to perform the ceremony is at midnight, since at that time the chances of the *sobador*'s being seen are much less.

Minor Curative Properties of the Guinea-pig

The curative properties of the guinea-pig go beyond food and the *sobada*. One set of beliefs concerns the properties of the faeces, blood, urine and bile of the guinea-pig. Most of them are 'beliefs of the past', which are not frequently put into practice today. This obsolescence is due, in part, to the penetration of modern medicine and, in part, simply to the fact that they have not been transmitted to the younger generation. However, our ethnographic

data show that guinea-pig fat, produced when the animal is fried, is used in easing the extraction of thorns, in helping to heal particularly serious wounds and for rubbing parts of the body affected by rheumatism.

We also found a set of therapeutic practices for animals, in which the guinea-pig plays a major role. It is customary in some Indian communities to prepare guinea-pig broth to relieve fatigue and weakness among horses and cattle (when the animals are said to be 'becalmed'). A whole guinea-pig is boiled – without extracting the entrails – in a casserole, using onions, plenty of garlic and some pepper. When the guinea-pig is completely reduced, a thick broth is obtained; this is then allowed to cool down. The sick animal is then made to drink this broth. Initially, we were told, 'in the time of our elders', people used to mix the blood of a guinea-pig with roasted barley, to which salt was added, and this was given to the animals. In both of these practices the idea is that the guinea-pig gives 'strength' and 'helps the animal to recover'.

Conclusion: the Curative Use of the Guinea-pig as a Social Process

The diagnostic process and the initial stage of cure in traditional Indian medicine do not rely exclusively upon the guinea-pig. The use of the guinea-pig and the cultural practices associated with this animal cover a wide spectrum, but are not necessarily predominant. The *sobada* is undoubtedly a ritual instrument of great importance. Its survival depends not only on the transmission of relatively complex ideas, but also on the real possibility that the illnesses 'of the country' can recur many times. Moreover, we should not forget that the illnesses 'of God' point both to contact between Indian and mestizo worlds and to the influence of modern medicine in conceptualizing the process of illness and health. Modern medicine already exists as an available alternative throughout the sierra, and in many areas overlaps with a wider system of knowledge and practices where different aspects coexist.

The results of the *sobada*, as of all traditional medicine, depend upon the existence of an interconnection between the 'knowledge of the expert' and the 'knowledge of the layman'. Our data have been gathered from a layman's perspective and not from the perspective of an expert. In other words, our findings are clear

evidence of a shared understanding that is accepted by different social actors in the 'informal' health system. In the case of *sobada*, it is obviously important to have patients and relatives who firmly believe in its efficacy, since the logic of the classificatory system of the diseases 'of the country' is part of a cosmology ruled by the importance of natural phenomena. These may set off uncontrolled processes, accidents in people's lives, which, consequently, have to be counterbalanced. Moreover, the *sobada* is carried out in the context of a dialogue between the *sobador* and the people present at the ceremony. It is usual that the *sobador* gives the results of his/her analysis, but that others present can also express their comments and opinions. The diagnosis, then, is nearly always the product of an agreement between experts and laymen.

We have pointed out that many illnesses 'of the country' are the result of real 'accidents' or arise from imprudence, since they could have been avoided if people followed strict norms of conduct. The cycle of health–illness–health, in this context, is mainly a social process. *Sobadores*, like *curanderos* – who are able to treat 'evil eye' – begin the process whereby the attempt is made to re-establish social and cultural normality and to bring about the recovery of the patient.[10]

Likewise, there are cultural variations according to ethnic and religious boundaries. The difference between Indian and mestizo cultures relates to the shift from using the guinea-pig as a therapeutic food to using it as an instrument for diagnosis and purification. I have tried to demonstrate that this is linked to different ideas and systems of interpretation of illness and of various kinds of physical and psychological damage. In the case of illnesses 'of the country' – in other words, quintessentially Indian sicknesses – the guinea-pig is seen not merely as food, but as possessing a set of magical and instrumental qualities, which partly relate to the animal's proximity to the patient. This proximity is undoubtedly central to an understanding of the practical and symbolic efficacy of the *sobada*. Mimesis derives not only from contact, but also from the special properties of guinea-pig, since the *limpia* is not done with any animal, after all. These are some of the comments: 'it is a special animal'; 'it lives in the house'; 'it has been living with people for long time'; 'it is a very well-known animal'; and 'it is a favoured animal'. Without these ideas, the 'cleansing' of the body could not take place.[11]

In parallel, diseases 'of the country' imply a cosmology in which

aires, exhalations, 'smells', *fulgores* (lightning) and *ruidos* (thunder) are forces that cannot be controlled, and which therefore need to be respected, because they are part of a shared world. Mestizo peasants show particular respect for these phenomena, but the potential danger caused by them is interpreted through a strict logic of hot and cold. Indians use these elements within a much wider system of interpretation, which includes their historical past, the weight of tradition and the contemporary social context. In their relationship to these natural elements, they infer a behavioural logic which seeks to avoid excesses that derive – as we showed earlier – from extreme ambition, from envy, from 'engagement without limits' and from receiving without being able to give in return.

Finally, the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism also entails a shift in perceptions of health and disease. Our informants in Palmira Dávalo show particular pride in stressing the difference between 'primitive' times and modern, current times. Evangelical influence is also evident, since they regard illnesses 'of the country' as belonging to a world that is ruled by the Devil and by black magic. However, nowadays there are 'pills, X-rays, injections and syrups'. A shift from 'deception' to 'light' has taken place.[12]

Notes

1. See especially Anderson (1980). There is no systematic study of Ecuador that accounts for existing variations in the system of classification. Fuentealba (1985), Heras *et al.* (1985) and Balladelli (1988) suggest a list of foods classified as cold and hot in different places in the Ecuadorean sierra. Generally speaking, there is most consensus about meat and such major products as potatoes and different kinds of maize. To illustrate disagreements, as well as local and regional variations, between these studies, a few examples will suffice: Fuentealba (1985, p. 184) finds that the sweet potato is hot, while Heras *et al.* (1985, p. 211) classify it as cool. The same happens with beans: Fuentealba (1985, p. 185) reports that they are cool; Heras *et al.* (1985, p. 212) say that soft beans are temperate and dry beans cool; Balladelli (1988, p. 456), on the other hand, says that soft, cooked beans are temperate, while dry cooked beans are hot and